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## U.S. Government Creates Board for Early Learning

August 11, 2010 by Irene Sege



Kathleen Sebelius

U.S. Secretary of Education [Arne Duncan](#) and Secretary of Health and Human Services [Kathleen Sebelius](#) last week announced the creation of the Early Learning Interagency Policy Board designed, according to a Department of Education [news release](#), “to improve the quality of early learning programs and



Arne Duncan

outcomes for young children; increase the coordination of research, technical assistance and data systems; and advance the effectiveness of the early learning workforce among the major federally funded early learning programs across the two departments.”

Said Secretary Sebelius: “Providing strong support for this country’s children during their earliest years is one of the most important investments we can make. This effort will rely on strong federal partnerships, integrated policy development, and continued innovation from our partners in the early learning field.”

The federal departments already each have staff focused on early learning and interagency cooperation. At the U.S. Department of Education, [Jacqueline Jones](#), former assistant commissioner for early education in New Jersey, is Duncan’s senior advisor for early learning. At the U.S. Department of Human Services, Deputy Assistant Secretary [Joan Lombardi](#), who was founding chair of the [Birth to Five Policy Alliance](#), is the interdepartmental liaison for early childhood development. In the spring, Jones and Lombardi traveled the country on a [listening tour](#) about early learning. Creation of the new federal Early Learning Interagency Policy Board was announced at the recent Early Childhood 2010 meeting in Washington, D.C.

“This marks an important step in our effort to help eliminate silos at the federal level,” said Secretary Duncan. “We want to ensure that collaboration at the federal level mirrors the integration you’re striving to achieve at the state and local levels.”

Here in Massachusetts, we took an important step toward breaking down silos by merging the state’s early education and child care bureaucracies in 2005 to create the country’s first consolidated [Department of Early Education and Care](#). Effective governance is a critical component of building a statewide system of high-quality early education and care – and efficiently delivering services to children and families. It looks like the feds may be learning the same lessons.



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[Irene Sege](#) is communications director for [Strategies for Children](#). Prior to joining SFC in 2009, Irene spent more than 25 years at The Boston Globe, where, among other things, she covered education, demographics and urban affairs and often wrote about children and families.



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Here is Massachusetts we have a long history of trying to do this. Our current structure gives DEEC the status of a Department, i.e. power equal to state DOE. It's not clear how we exert our legal authority over policy for pre-kindergarten children, but it may be important to do so. Over the years our Legislature struggled for years to create an agency that would have that ability, and I hope that both legislators and advocates will remember those struggles. We have created many early childhood agencies prior to DEEC. The first was in 1972, the Office for Children. That was not a Department, but the legislature gave it the power to license all private early childhood programs, a mandate for child advocacy, and for a statewide system of local councils, and (if I remember right) they were to create a Children's Budget. Over the years, there were many legislative changes trying to get Education and the state agency of children to protect young children's interests against the difficulty in uniting Ed. with ECE policies that followed. This federal action may reduce struggles that relate to federal funding policies. Let's hope.

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