



Friendly Fire

Dear Reader,

Exchange just had the opportunity to attend the “Economic Summit on Early Childhood Investment” in Telluride, Colorado, organized by the Partnership for America’s Economic Success, Pew Charitable Trusts, and the Telluride Foundation. Among the 100 attendees were three governors, two mayors, business leaders, foundation representatives, economists, and early childhood professionals. In the rarefied mountain air, among this high octane audience, talk of investing in children was at a fever pitch.

And, after that the World Forum Foundation, working with Economic Opportunities Institute, led a delegation of business people, politicians, and educators from the state of Washington on a Gates Foundation-funded study tour to the United Kingdom and Finland to inform the development of an exciting state initiative to improve early childhood education.

Events such as these give one hope that we may finally turn the corner and, as a nation, devote the necessary resources for assuring promising futures for all children. The early childhood field now has friends in high places — places of governance, commerce, research, and philanthropy.

Our friends are helping bring significant new money into our field — money for bold state Pre-K initiatives. The movers and shakers behind these initiatives are indeed good people with only the best intentions for children and families.

But their efforts sometimes fail to move us forward. At times it feels like our field is being consumed by friendly fire. Our new friends are creating programs and policies that sometimes undermine the good work already being done by the long-standing early childhood community.

Pre-K programs that fund four- and five-year-old children in public school settings leave community programs faced with making ends meet serving primarily infants and toddlers — an untenable situation. Highly touted new initiatives that concentrate on building academic skills earlier and earlier, take attention and respect away from centers and family child care homes offering the more appropriate play-oriented curricula.

There are no enemies in this scenario. We are all good people; we all have good motives. But unless we can learn to work together, just as we teach the children in our programs to work together, we will continue to fail all of America’s children.