



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi
Statement as Prepared for Delivery
Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute
Early Education Summit
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Thank you for that introduction, Norma. It is a real pleasure to be here today.

I would like to start by asking the current CHCI fellows, interns and alumni in the room to please stand. Don't be shy. Because of the support of our generous summit sponsors, Target and the American Federation of Teachers, CHCI can bring these talented young Latinos from across the country to Washington, D.C. to experience firsthand how our government works or, in some cases, fails to work! We thank these sponsors for helping CHCI develop the next generation of Latino leaders, and we thank those who are standing for their hard work and determination. We are proud of you. Please be seated.

As we begin our discussion on the critical issue of early childhood education, I want to offer just a few introductory remarks to help frame the conversation.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are over 20 million children age 5 and under living in America today, and more than a quarter of them are Hispanic. That is a remarkable statistic. The opportunities, resources and support that we make available to these young boys and girls today will have serious long-term implications, not only for them personally, but also for the global competitiveness of our nation.

When it comes to providing these children with the educational support they need to succeed, we must confront the challenges we face with courage and candor. Nearly half of all Hispanics under age 18 in this country live below the federal poverty line. As *New York Times* columnist Gail Collins has put it: “We have no bigger crisis as a nation than the class barrier.” A child born to low-income parents must overcome great obstacles to obtain a quality education, to get a good and fulfilling job, and to climb the ladder into the middle class. These challenges are not insurmountable, and many of the CHCI fellows and alumni in this room emphatically prove that point. But we should recognize the reality that those who come from humble beginnings must work extra hard to surmount the challenges they face.

The social science evidence confirms what we all understand, intuitively, to be true, namely that a child’s early years have a profound impact on his or her lifelong development. Those who develop language, reasoning and other skills at a young age are far more likely to succeed than those who do not. That is why it is so important for parents to read to their child; to talk to their child (ideally, in both English *and* Spanish, by the way); and to take a personal interest in their child’s cognitive development.

And that is also why it is so critical for Members of Congress and other policymakers to provide robust funding for proven programs like Head Start and Early Head Start, and to support proposals like Preschool for All, which President Obama unveiled during his State of the Union Address in February. We should also be open to innovative proposals, including those that will be put forward by members of our panel today, if they can achieve positive results.

In the final analysis, I believe that investing in early childhood education is one of the most important and cost-effective ways to expand opportunities for Latino and other youth, and to improve our nation's economic standing in the world. I look forward to hearing from our panel about the strategies that they propose to promote Latino achievement and how we can all work together to support a better early childhood education system in America.

It is now my pleasure to introduce my colleague and co-chair for today's Summit Congressman Albio Sires from New Jersey.