

# Bush, in Pennsylvania, touts early childhood education [US] <sup>[1]</sup>

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### EXCERPTS:

PHILADELPHIA -- Maintaining a business-as-usual attitude despite the turmoil in the Middle East, President Bush traveled to Pennsylvania on Tuesday to promote early-childhood education and to help raise \$1 million for the Republican gubernatorial candidate.

"It is important for our nation to remember we have other important responsibilities," Bush told an audience of several hundred at Penn State University's Delaware County campus. Early-childhood education is "an incredibly important issue."

Despite the war on terrorism and the quest for world peace, he added: "My administration will not be distracted from these goals. As we fight for freedom, I also understand that freedom means no child in America will be left behind."

Before his address, Bush met privately with a dozen early-childhood education experts. At the end of that session, reporters were ushered into the conference room, where they pelted the president with questions about the Middle East--none of which he answered.

From the campus in suburban Philadelphia, the president drove into center-city Philadelphia to attend a fund-raiser for Republican Atty. Gen. Mike Fisher, who is running for governor. The event was expected to raise \$1 million.

The president's latest initiative is a follow-up to a commitment he made during his State of the Union address three months ago, in which he stressed the need to prepare young children for school through Head Start and other development programs.

"We've got to make sure that every child starts at the same point. If we expect achievement from every child, all our children need to begin school with an equal chance at achievement," Bush said Tuesday. "Every child must have an equal place at the starting line. . . . That is the national goal."

Head Start, which aids low-income families, provides a range of social and emotional development programs at an average cost of \$6,800 per child--an amount that has tripled over the last decade, according to Margaret Spellings, the president's domestic policy advisor.

But many of the estimated 900,000 children enrolled in Head Start are not benefiting fully, she said. Some states do not coordinate what children do before entering school with what is expected of them in the classroom, she noted. In addition, many programs insufficiently assess how they prepare students for school, and some of the program's nearly 50,000 teachers are inadequately trained.

To strengthen Head Start, Bush is directing the Department of Health and Human Services to implement an accountability system to ensure that every Head Start center assesses standards of learning in early literacy, language and numerical skills. This would not involve testing children.

The department also is to develop a training project to help teachers improve their techniques in teaching pre-reading and language skills.

The president further is asking states to better "align" preschool activities with K-12 standards.

Finally, Bush is seeking \$45 million in new funding for research into effective early-literacy programs and teaching techniques.

The themes that the president laid out here built upon Laura Bush's Summit on Early Childhood Cognitive Development last July.

The president said that his wife, a former school librarian, would soon release a series of booklets containing information on child development that government agencies will make widely available.

The president also is scheduled to promote early-childhood education, focusing public awareness on Head Start in a speech today in the East Room of the White House.

In Washington, Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) hailed Bush for promoting the issue, calling early-childhood education "the next great frontier" in education reform. But he criticized the president for not providing more money for the effort.

"Without new resources, this important initiative is a hollow gesture. It is wrong for the president to ask states to accept this great new responsibility within their existing budgets. We cannot require states to do more for our children with less,"

Kennedy said. "Children and parents deserve real results and not just rhetoric." Kennedy is developing legislation, along with Sen. George

Voinovich (R-Ohio), among others, to provide at least \$1 billion to states to improve early-childhood education.

"To make a real difference for our youngest children, we must add flesh to the bones of the president's commitment," said Kennedy, who worked closely with Bush on the sweeping education reform legislation that the president signed in January.

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**Region:** United States <sup>[2]</sup>

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