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November 10, 2024

In Memoriam: Barbara Taylor Bowman (1928-2024)
Visionary Leader and Voice on the Power of Early Childhood Education

We are deeply saddened by the death of Barbara Taylor Bowman on November 4, 2024 at age 96. Barbara was a dear friend and long-time collaborator with us at HCRC. There is no doubt that Barbara was the foremost expert and wisest voice on early childhood education in the nation. Throughout her distinguished career as an early childhood leader, visionary, scholar, and educator, Professor Bowman was a trailblazer who brought attention to the importance of early childhood development in education and family life, for promoting health and well-being, and for advancing social progress.

She championed the great need and strong benefits of high-quality early childhood education for all, and especially for children growing up in poverty and experiencing adversity. The essential elements of high quality and transformative early education she worked so tirelessly on included excellent teacher preparation and workforce development; a child-centered teaching philosophy; emphasis on exploration, language development and social interaction in many contexts; parental involvement in all its dimensions; alignment of curriculum and instruction into the elementary grades; and regular monitoring and evaluation. It was her belief, based on considerable evidence, that all these elements must be present and at all times. Being a preschool teacher early in her career most certainly helped reinforce these beliefs.

As co-founder of the Erikson Institute in Chicago in 1966, Ms. Bowman knew before anyone else the unique value of an independent, specialized graduate school and training center for early childhood education, research, and community outreach. She served as president for many years and was professor at Erikson for her entire career spanning nearly six decades. In addition to her great scholarship and advocacy on behalf of young children, Barbara served on many local, state, and national organizations and advisory groups to advance early childhood education, development, and research.

Barbara took on high-profile and challenging positions such as Chief Early Childhood Officer of the Chicago Public School District and advisor to U. S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan in the Obama Administration. With Suzanne Donovan and Susan Burns, Barbara co-edited and contributed heavily to one of the very best books on the key ingredients of high-quality early childhood education, “Eager to Learn: Educating our Preschoolers” (National Research Council, 2001; National Academy Press). We remember vividly her reflections on this book at our HCRC conference in 2014 on sustaining early childhood learning gains. We also worked side-by-side with her in the Child-Parent Center preschool-to-3rd grade expansion project in Chicago and

several Midwest school districts. This effort was consistent with her belief in the transformative power of the first decade of children's lives.

Apart from her many contributions to education and child development, Barbara was a truly special person. She was incredibly kind and generous with her time. She had a forthright honesty about education, what we know and don't know, and about life in general that was refreshing. Being a worldwide traveler her whole life certainly helped. There was that rare wisdom about the learning needs of children and the importance of being persistent in social reforms and school improvement efforts. She greatly valued research and social experiments and was always open to new ideas.

But it was her love of children and always wanting what was best for them, no matter what the changing trends of the times were, is what we'll remember most, and will never forget.

Martin Luther King Jr. once stated that not everyone can be famous, but everyone can be great because greatness is determined by service. Barbara was that rare person who was both, a legend in early childhood education and in constant service to society to make a better world. We miss her dearly but know her guiding light will always be with us as we go forward in building a better future for our youngest learners.