THE CHALLENGES OF EVALUATING STATE FAMILY SUPPORT AND EDUCATION INITIATIVES: AN EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

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I. INTRODUCTION

Multi-generational family support and education programs are receiving widespread attention among policymakers at all levels of government because they show some promise of contributing to the prevention or amelioration of an array of pressing social problems from child abuse and neglect to school failure and adult welfare dependency. The evidence from the few relevant past evaluations of family-oriented programs allows one to argue for the promise of these programs only while acknowledging that their effectiveness, particularly in relation to reducing the incidence of the complex social problems described above, is not yet proven (Halpern and Weiss, 1989; Weiss and Jacobs, 1988). Until more systematic evaluations are conducted, those who make a case for public investment in these programs are overly dependent on a few short-term evaluations of single-site demonstration programs. There is as yet insufficient evidence to address the primary question posed by policymakers: Can these programs, with the principles of service delivery which distinguish them, be successfully brought to scale and effectively accomplish their various objectives when they are sponsored by large state agencies?

As a result of this state of our knowledge, policymakers, researchers, and program planners are in a situation akin to that of the creators of Head Start 25 years ago (Weiss, 1988). Then, as now, the political climate was ripe for major initiatives for

children and families, and there were those who argued that the research base was insufficient to warrant such initiatives. Then, as now, a tension existed between those who wanted to go ahead and those who wanted more information about program effectiveness before proceeding. Today, this tension is reduced by the realization that a substantial body of program experience and of evaluation-based information has accumulated that can help craft a new round of programs, by some promising program evaluation results, and by the recognition that evaluations can be developed that will help to create strong state programs. (Schorr, 1988; Weiss and Jacobs, 1988). So it is prudent to seize the opportunities presented by widespread interest in helping children and families and to proceed with state initiatives while recognizing that there are some limitations in our current knowledge about program effectiveness and about how to move ideas from successful programs into large public systems.

There are two reasons to recognize these limits. They are to avoid overpromising about what these programs can achieve while at the same time trying to learn what they can. It is our view that states should move ahead in the family support and education arena with carefully crafted evaluations to help them at each step. This view is based on the belief that systematic program evaluation can play a substantial and beneficial role in state development and assessment of their family support and education initiatives despite the difficult challenges that these programs pose for evaluators.

To promote this view, we present a framework for states to use in thinking about how to evaluate their initiatives in this paper. We present a framework, not a recipe, because we believe that planning and implementing an evaluation is not akin to finding a recipe for the perfect research design and then following it. Rather, as Chelimsky (1987) has noted, twenty years of social program evaluation has taught that in planning and evaluation "there is not a perfect evaluation design...rather, evaluations must try to achieve a balance involving timing, methodological strength and cost." (pg 31) We will add other factors to balance in the course of this paper--including considerations of what kinds of information are needed at different stages of program growth and are required by different stakeholders. Implementing an evaluation is not like following a pre-set recipe either. Rather, "[It] is like navigation at sea, which relies heavily on repeated readings with a sextant to approximate position and chart a reasonable course" (Bond and Halpern, 1988, pg. 220). Finally, we present a framework, not a recipe, because it will be the job of those responsible for a state's initiative to work out an individualized evaluation strategy that is appropriate for their circumstances and programs.

Our framework draws from the broader literature on social program evaluation (Weiss and Halpern, 1988; C. Weiss, 1987; Cronbach, 1980), the experiences of

ourselves and others in evaluating earlier family support and education programs (Weiss and Jacobs, 1988; Bond and Halpern, 1988; Powell, 1987), and from the evaluation strategies developed by the states that have pioneering state initiatives in this program and policy area. Our framework is still preliminary; we are continuing to work on it and welcome feedback that will enhance its utility for those charged with evaluating state initiatives.

A Roadmap of the Paper

In order to illustrate some of the challenges, issues, and benefits that states will encounter in evaluating their initiatives and to show some of the building blocks of our framework, we begin in section II with short descriptions and discussion of the different evaluation strategies that have been crafted by four pioneering states. [1] The substantial variability among state family support and education programs means that no one specific evaluation strategy, research design or set of measures is uniformly appropriate for all such state initiatives. Nonetheless, these states did face many common problems and the evaluation strategies they have developed contain useful ideas for other states. Section III is a discussion of the problems and constraints these states have faced in designing and implementing their evaluation strategies. Their strategies evolved amidst a set of realities and resource, methodological and practical constraints and trade-offs

[1]These states are participants in the Harvard Family Research Project's case study research examination of innovative family support and education initiatives.

which we have subsequently factored into our evaluation framework because others will most likely face them also.

Section IV lays out the three-part framework, beginning with a set of diagnostic questions useful in understanding how program and contextual factors will influence the evaluation strategy. We then present five guiding principles for designing an evaluation of a state family support and education initiative. A state's answers to the latter are critical in planning a state's specific evaluation strategy. This section then provides a brief description of our specific multi-stage evaluation strategy. This strategy is designed to address what we regard as the critical questions in building and assessing a state system of family support and education programs. **First, is it possible to get local programs developed and delivering services to those to whom it is supposed to deliver them? Second, is it possible to build a growing system of programs which meet the quality criteria specified by the state for service delivery? Third, are local programs effective in reaching the initiative's goals? And finally, is it possible to evolve a large state system of effective programs which will achieve the public policy objectives outlined by the state? In states with the necessary resources, there is a fifth set of questions which could usefully be addressed with a subset of programs: if the program is successful, what kinds of causal processes underlie that effectiveness and what programs work best for particular types of families?**

II. EVALUATION OF STATE FAMILY SUPPORT AND EDUCATION INITIATIVES: FOUR STATES' STRATEGIES

When the state staff involved in the pioneering program initiatives described below planned their evaluation strategies, they encountered a set of realities that still pertain today for new state initiatives. First, the state staff typically found themselves dividing their already scarce time and resources between the substantial demands of mounting a new type of program, on the one hand, and the demands of crafting a successful evaluation strategy, on the other. Moreover, it was usually evident that the local programs that they had funded initially had their hands full just getting the program in place, so there was also uncertainty about when and what evaluation demands could realistically be made of them.

Whether they hired an inside or outside evaluator or delved into writings about the evaluation of family support and education programs themselves, it quickly became clear that evaluating the outcomes of child and family programs involved substantial methodological uncertainties; precedents for the evaluation of state-initiated and multi-site child and family programs were largely lacking; and that not that many evaluators were available who were trained in the necessary design and interpersonal skills to conceptualize and implement studies of these programs. The methodology for conducting an implementation or process study was not completely clear-cut either. It

thus became apparent that program development was somewhat ahead of program evaluation in the family support and education area (Weiss & Jacobs, 1988). This was not and is not an area where a cut-and-dried set of questions and methodologies can easily be applied to generate evaluation results. As a result, state staff realized that evaluation would require a substantial investment of time and energy and that it would reverberate throughout the entire state program.

The four states examined here include two that have initiated family support and education programs through the state department of education (Minnesota's Early Childhood Family Education Program and Missouri's Parents As Teachers), and two that have initiated programs under the auspices of the department of social services (Maryland's Family Support Centers and Connecticut's Parent Education and Support Centers). As Table 1 (page 9) shows, these state programs vary on several of dimensions, including: populations served; targeted or universal program access; the core services included in the program model; the amount of variability in the program across local sites; the program's age; and the level and source of funding.

TABLE 1: STATE PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS

	MINNESOTA	MISSOURI	MARYLAND	CONNECTICUT
Program	Early Childhood Family Education program	Parents As Teachers	Family Support Centers	Parent Education Support Centers
State agency sponsor	State Department of Education	State Department of Education	State Department of Human Resources through Friends of the Family	State Department of Children and Youth Services
Date initiatives began	1975	1981	1985	1987
Number of local programs (1988)	Programs in 380 of 435 school districts (1988)	Programs in all 543 districts in the state	Eight (1988)	Ten (1988)
Program budget (1988)	$18.42 million	$11.4 million	$1,336,000	$502,000 (1988)
Core components of local programs	No core services are specified in legislation but most common service is center-based program with parent-child activities and parent discussion groups concurrent with the early childhood program.	Home visits, monthly parent meetings, and periodic screening.	Drop-in centers providing health care and family planning, diagnostic and assessment services for parents and child, temporary child care, peer support activities, educational opportunities including GED, job preparation, and skill development.	Parent education, parent support services, information and coordination of services, and technical assistance and consultation for other agencies.
Participant specifications	Open to all families with children 0-6	Open to all families with children 0-3	Teenage parents and their mates and relatives	All parents with children 0-17 with priority to underserved groups, including first time parents, teen and single parents, parents of children in critical transitions, low-income parents, minority parents, two-worker families, and families with limited English proficiency.
Program goals	The major goal is to strengthen families by supporting parents in their efforts in raising children, offering child development information and alternative parenting techniques, fostering effective communication between parents and their children, supplementing the discovery and learning experiences of children, and promoting positive parental attitudes throughout their children's school.	In line with the philosophy that parents are the child's primary teachers, the program provides information and educational guidance to enhance the child's physical, social, and intellectual development, and attempts to reduce stress and enhance the pleasures of parenting, as well as to reduce the need for remediation and special education services.	To develop community-based support services that 1) prevent unwanted pregnancies among adolescents; 2)assist adolescent parents to become better parents; 3) assure the healthy growth and development of children of adolescent parents; 4) help adolescent parents remain in the mainstream by completing school and preparing for employment.	To support families and strengthen family processes. The effort is designed to promote positive child and adolescent development, increase community-based prevention resources to assist parents, increase community linkages to link parents to local resources, and to increase technical assistance and training to schools and other agencies working with parents.

While these four state programs clearly differ in important ways and hence so do their evaluation needs, they also share several characteristics which present common challenges for the type, timing and goals of their various evaluation strategies. These common characteristics include the fact that each state initiative began with a small set of pilot programs which struggled to develop a relatively new type of service for families. Specifically, this meant that each one worked to build a strong program model(s) which could attract families, maintain participation and offer consistent and hence measurable services. As a result, in the early stage of program development, they shared a need for initial information to guide program development and growth. Further, they shared a need, given the newness of the programs, to avoid premature outcome evaluations and thereby give these new programs a "fair chance" to develop before being stringently assessed. This point is especially important because multiple community-based programs, as opposed to single-site research and demonstration ones, may require more time to get established because they are done in partnership with the community.

These programs also share the goal of building new programs that provide sustained support to families with young children. The support provided by these programs has the objective of promoting the family conditions and parental competencies and behaviors that will in turn promote parenting knowledge and skills, and healthy child -- and perhaps adult -- development. As a result of this, all of these

states, in framing outcome evaluations, had to grapple with the complex conceptual and measurement problems involved in trying to translate their goals into measures or behavioral indicators which would allow them to assess whether parent and family-focused interventions create meaningful changes for children and/or in parenting attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors; in parents' personal development; in family functioning, and in familial social support.

Table 2 (pages 13 and 14) summarizes information about the funding, timing and types of evaluations done in these states.[2] The table shows that all four of these states have, from the beginning of program operations, attempted to get some kind of systematic information to help with program development and, in a few cases, information on program outcomes to assess program effectiveness. This is especially noteworthy because, as several of the state program directors indicated, no one, including their legislatures, has demanded that they conduct any type of evaluation. Rather, evaluations were initiated by the state program staff themselves; state and local staff thus have been the primary stake holders in the evaluations. In fact, several of the state directors indicated that their legislatures in the past have been only interested in information about program participation and constituent satisfaction rather than in

[2]Appendix 1 provides more detailed information about each states' evaluation. For example, it lists the sources of evaluation funding and the particular measures that each state has employed to assess program outcomes.

systematic information about program implementation or effects.

The table also shows that the funding for the states' evaluations frequently comes from state sources and is often in modest amounts. Two states, Maryland and Missouri, have been able to expand their evaluation efforts in important ways by virtue of foundation grants for evaluation activities. Such public/private/partnerships are especially important because they have provided the resources necessary to mount broad-scale assessments of the effectiveness of the state program system.

Finally, examination of the column labeled "Evaluation Components" shows that the four states have chosen different evaluation strategies and that the evaluations of the state initiatives rarely span more than a year or two, no doubt due to resource constraints.. We describe their evaluations in some detail below, because taken together, these states' strategies illustrate most of the building blocks for our overall evaluation framework.

Table 2--Overview of Four States' Evaluations

State	Study Year: Program Budget	Study Year: Number of Programs	Participant Specifications: Universal	Participant Specifications: Targetted	Number of Evaluated Sites	Evaluation Funding	Source of Evaluation Funding: State Agency	Source of Evaluation Funding: Foundation	Source of Evaluation Funding: Other	Evaluator: Internal	Evaluator: External	Evaluation Components: Implementation	Evaluation Components: Parent Satisfaction	Evaluation Components: Quality Review	Evaluation Components: Management Audit	Evaluation Components: Child Outcome	Evaluation Components: Parent Outcome	Evaluation Components: Participant Case Study	Evaluation Components: Other	Statewide Enrollment and Participation Data: Available	Statewide Enrollment and Participation Data: In Process	Statewide Enrollment and Participation Data: Unavailable	Outcome Evaluation Design: Quasi-experimental	Outcome Evaluation Design: Pre-post	Outcome Evaluation Design: Status Change on Behavioral indicators	Outcome Evaluation Design: One-time Ratings with Comparison	Duration (Years)	Follow-up Study
Minnesota																												
Study 1 (1975)	$230,953	6	✔		6	Under $10K	✔				✔	✔	✔														1	
Study 2 (1976)	$420,475	12	✔		12	Under $10K	✔				✔	✔	✔														1	
Study 3 (1977)	$570,920	13	✔		13	Under $10K	✔				✔		✔	✔		✔	✔									✔	1	
Study 4 (1978)	$712,127	21	✔		21	Under $10K	✔				✔						✔							✔			1	
Study 5 (1979)	$906,667	22	✔		20	Under $10K	✔				✔					✔	✔									✔	1	
Study 6 (1980)	1,668,602	36	✔		2	$ 5,000	✔				✔			✔													1	
Study 7 (1981)	1,740,192	36	✔		13	$ 8,000	✔				✔							✔			✔						1	
Study 8 (1981)	1,740,192	36	✔		3	$ 6,000	✔				✔																1	
Study 9 (1987-88)	15,887,920	310	✔		164	$ 7,000	✔			✔	✔																1.5	

State	Study Year: Program Budget	Study Year: Number of Programs	Participant Specifications: Universal	Participant Specifications: Targetted	Number of Evaluated Sites	Evaluation Funding	Source of Evaluation Funding: State Agency	Source of Evaluation Funding: Foundation	Source of Evaluation Funding: Other	Evaluator: Internal	Evaluator: External	Evaluation Components: Implementation	Evaluation Components: Parent Satisfaction	Evaluation Components: Quality Review	Evaluation Components: Management Audit	Evaluation Components: Child Outcome	Evaluation Components: Parent Outcome	Evaluation Components: Participant Case Study	Evaluation Components: Other	Statewide Enrollment and Participation Data: Available	Statewide Enrollment and Participation Data: In Process	Statewide Enrollment and Participation Data: Unavailable	Outcome Evaluation Design: Quasi-experimental	Outcome Evaluation Design: Pre-post	Outcome Evaluation Design: Status Change on Behavioral indicators	Outcome Evaluation Design: One-time Ratings with Comparison	Duration (YEARS)	Follow-up Study
Missouri																												
Study 1 (1983-84	$120,000	4		✓	4	$40,000	✓				✓		✓			✓	✓			✓			✓				1	yes
Study 2 (1989-90	$11.4mil	4		✓	4	$3,000	✓		✓	✓						✓	✓			✓			✓				1	(of study 1)
Study 3	$11.4mil	37	✓		37	$105,100	✓	✓			✓		✓			✓	✓			✓							1	
Maryland																												
Study 1 (1986-88	$754,225	8		✓	8	$84,000	✓				✓	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓					✓		2	
Study 2 (1987-88	1,336,000	8		✓	3	$10,000		✓			✓																1	
Connecticut																												
Study 1 (1987-90	$502,000 (1988-89)	1	✓		11	$98,977	✓				✓		✓		✓		✓				✓			✓			3	

Minnesota's Early Childhood Family Education Program

Minnesota's Early Childhood Family Education Program (ECFE), the oldest of the initiatives, began with six pilot programs in 1975. As Table 2 suggests, during the program's nine year pilot phase, Minnesota initially pursued a strategy of formative studies of program implementation and quality review, and then subsequently conducted exploratory outcome studies at a few program sites.

Beginning with the very first year of program operations, external evaluators, largely chosen through an RFP process, conducted a variety of process and implementation studies. Then in conjunction with a team put together by Michael Patton from the University of Minnesota, ECFE began a long-term quality review process designed to assess new waves of pilot programs as the state initiative expanded. They began by conducting an extensive quality review assessment of the 22 programs that were operating in 1978 and 1979. In this process, Patton worked with the program's state sponsor, the Council on Quality Education, and local program staff and participants to develop detailed quality assessment instruments. An independent team of site visitors conducted the quality assessment study. During the later pilot period in the early 1980s, the quality assessment tool was revised and used to assess second-year programs that had been added to the ECFE roster. Finally in 1984, after legislation expanding the program to a statewide basis passed, the quality assessment instrument was revised again in accord with the legislation and proposed Board of Education

Program rules. The instrument now is used both by state staff and for program self-assessment. It has four dimensions: community outreach and input, parent education, child-centered activities, and program operations.

These various formative and quality assessment studies provided a substantial amount of continuing feedback about areas of program strengths and weaknesses (Minnesota Department of Education Report to the Legislature, 1986). State staff used the information to guide staff training and in-service activities, to reinforce local staff, to create a buddy system pairing older and newer programs, and to set future program goals. The quality assessment helped to make sure new programs were meeting program guidelines and to pinpoint areas where programs needed further development (such as more outreach to broaden participation, and solving problems with transportation and inappropriate space and facilities). These various evaluations were especially useful because they helped maintain program quality while the initiative was growing.

In the later pilot phase, exploration of ways to assess effectiveness began. The Council on Quality Education contracted with several evaluators to conduct small scale outcome evaluations with selected ECFE programs. These evaluations were designed to understand the range of possible program effects on children and parents and to explore how to assess outcomes across a diverse set of local programs. During this time Patton (1980) field-tested a pre-post parent questionnaire but concluded that it

was not useful for documenting changes as a result of the program. List, Reiner and La Freniere (1981) did intensive case studies of families chosen from three ECFE programs in an effort to explore the types of changes in parents and parent-child relationships and interactions that might be expected as a result of participation in ECFE. Their work pinpointed a number of potential types of outcomes useful to consider in subsequent larger-scale evaluations. Anderson and Berdie (1981) did a detailed assessment of two of the oldest programs, a rural and a suburban site, and compared participants and non-participants on a number of dimensions. They did not find many significant differences between the two groups but this evaluation helped to highlight some of the difficulties with outcome evaluations of family support and education programs which ECFE would need to handle in a larger-scale outcome evaluation.

These problems involve research design, measurement, and evaluation logistics and include: problems tracking participants due to geographic mobility, especially with urban participants; problems of attributing changes in children or parents to the program without random assignment or the location of an adequate comparison group; problems locating or developing appropriate parenting and child development measures; and problems with the sensitivity of existing rating scales and other measures of parent and child behaviors especially for application with universal programs.

During the pilot phase ECFE also did surveys and polled participants about

their thoughts with respect to legislative funding for the program. For example, they asked parents and kindergarten teachers whether funding should get high, medium or low priority; the vast majority indicated high priority. Such surveys may have been helpful in building a constituency for the program as well as in providing feedback about the program's value to different groups.

Since the legislature passed the bill for setting up ECFE on a statewide basis, state staff have requested money for program evaluation but none has been appropriated by the legislature. In order to get uniform data on participants and to enable longitudinal follow-up, if funding becomes available, the state has designed an enrollment form and an anonymous participant demographic survey. ECFE is currently seeking private foundation support to plan and conduct an outcome evaluation.

Missouri's Parents As Teachers

Missouri began its four New Parents As Teachers pilot programs in 1981, and its evaluation strategy was to allow the pilot programs to get established for several years and then to do a short-term outcome study. Burton White's theoretical framework describing the relationship between aspects of parenting and early child development which guided the design of the intervention also helped to orient the program's evaluation and choice of short-term outcome measures. Short-term positive evaluation

results from this study with respect to aspects of child development were helpful in convincing the legislature to move the program from pilot to statewide implementation and in attracting national attention to the program (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 1985). This one-year study was conducted by an outside evaluator chosen through an RFP process in the third year of pilot program operation. The study employed a quasi-experimental design and focused on child outcomes, changes in parent knowledge of child development, parent satisfaction with the program, and parents' perceptions of the school district.

Missouri, like the other three states, found very high parent satisfaction with the program and some of their results in this regard may have been helpful in building a parent and a school constituency for program expansion. Their study's inclusion of questions about parents' perceptions of the school districts' responsiveness to their children's needs (53% of NPAT parents rated their district as "very responsive," versus 29% of the comparison group parents) generated data that also may have eased the transition to statewide school district implementation of PAT. This is because this information appears to have convinced some superintendents that the program could help the school district's image as well as to prepare children for success in the public school's K-12 program.

The Missouri legislature voted to expand Parents As Teachers to a statewide basis in 1985 and the program has continued to plan and carry out outcome

evaluations. In order to examine the effectiveness of the expanded program, PAT, with support from several private foundations, is conducting a study of short-term effects on participants from 137 diverse school districts, using many of the same measures that they employed in the initial study of the four pilot programs. PAT is also conducting a follow-up study of the participants and comparison group from their initial study, in order to assess longer term effects on aspects of the children's subsequent adjustment to school. At this point, Missouri is the only one of the four states to conduct both a short-term outcome and subsequent follow-up study of program participants, and the only state to employ a quasi-experimental research design to do so.

The state staff have developed a tool for parent educators themselves as well as the local PAT coordinator to use in the assessment of the quality of the parent educator's services to families. This tool is used in staff development, to monitor program quality, and to obtain measures of program quality to use in the outcome evaluation.

Maryland's Family Support Centers

The strategy for evaluating the family support centers developed by Friends of the Family in Maryland has involved a combined study of implementation and parent satisfaction, and the creation of a management information system designed to track changes in participant status over the course of program involvement. The resulting

information has been useful in both program development and growth. (Regional Center for Infants and Young Children, 1988; Friends of the Family, 1988). Maryland's emerging management information system illustrates how such a system can be used to track participant changes on policy relevant behavioral indicators and thereby to provide ongoing indications of program effectiveness.

Maryland worked from the onset of the initiative with an outside evaluator to develop and implement the study of its eight programs over a two-year period. The resulting descriptive analysis of participant characteristics and service utilization patterns provided insight into who the program was -- and was not -- reaching, and consequent suggestions for outreach strategies. It also provided useful information about inter-site variability in program service and utilization.

The management information system, developed to assess changes in participant status, focused on a set of behavioral indicators. They were chosen in part because they have immediate face validity for policy makers who are interested in programs targeted on low-income, pregnant, and parenting teens. These indicators included changes in parents' educational and employment status, rate of repeat pregnancy, use of AFDC and WIC. They used similar types of indicators of changes in children's status. The relevant information was collected as part of the client intake and monitoring process. Data about positive changes in the teens' status on these dimensions, especially repeat pregnancy, have been useful in discussing future program funding and expansion with

the legislature.

Maryland's evaluation experience also highlighted the importance of working intensively with local program staff to develop manageable forms and other means of data collection so that staff can accommodate the demands of both evaluation and service delivery. With this in mind, Friends of the Family itself is currently designing and field-testing revised intake, participant update, and service utilization forms that will allow them to continue to track changes in participant status and patterns of service utilization. They have equipped the centers with personal computers to facilitate prompt data entry and management, which in turn facilitates state monitoring and feedback to the local programs.

Finally, to explore the programs' impact on aspects of family development (for example on knowledge of child development, parenting behaviors, and progress toward self-sufficiency), Friends of the Family is currently planning an in-depth evaluation of several programs. Several private foundations have provided grants to help with this and other evaluation activities. They tentatively plan to examine established programs in one large geographical area where there are enough young families to attain program and comparison groups of sufficient size. Overall, Friends of the Family has staged the development of its evaluation strategy so that the initial process study provided feedback for program development, behavioral indicators useful for charting client progress, and information indicating when these new types of programs are

sufficiently well-established for an impact study.

Connecticut's Parent Support and Education Centers

The Department of Children and Youth Services' strategy for evaluating the Connecticut Parent Education Support Centers has involved contracting with an outside evaluator to develop a set of site-specific evaluation plans for each of its eleven local programs. Connecticut's program initiative encourages inter-site program variation in accord with local needs and resources. This poses a major challenge insofar as uniform outcome measures across sites would be insufficient to capture all the effects of these diverse programs. Therefore the evaluation strategy that the evaluators from the Human Services Development Institute at the University of Southern Maine settled upon involves working with the eleven programs over a three-year period to develop a decentralized and site-specific approach to outcome assessment.

The Connecticut initiative began in 1987, and the evaluation commenced within the first year of program operations. The evaluators, selected through an RFP process, have a strong commitment to client self-design and to collaboration with local programs to identify outcomes and indicators of success as determined by each local site. In the first year, they worked with two sites to assess evaluability, which resulted in site specification of a variety of specific and measurable indicators of program success. These included changes in parenting attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors, and in aspects

of parent-child interaction. These indicators were then translated into a set of pre-post questionnaires to examine attainment of program goals in these areas. These site-specific assessment areas also are consonant with the state's overall emphasis on strengthening families in five areas: child and family management; parental awareness of the consequences of familial attitudes and behaviors; family awareness of and access to community support services; bonding of parent and child to family; and parents' realization of parenting as a lifelong learning process; and parents' recognition of the need to think systematically about parenting.

This evaluation strategy builds the evaluation skills of the local programs and permits maximum local input into the determination of specific program objectives and measures. The intensive process of working with the local sites on evaluability assessment -- two in the first year and four in the current year -- along with the management audit described below, has helped local programs to think through how their allocation of resources relates to program goals. Intensive evaluability assessment thus can provide formative feedback for program development on the way to outcome assessment.

In order to get a management information system under way for the state staff, the evaluators have also designed and field-tested a client enrollment form and an anonymous demographic survey to collect background information on participants' reasons for participation and to get addresses for subsequent longitudinal follow-up.

The evaluators have also been conducting management audits of each program. These are designed to provide the diverse community agencies sponsoring the Parent Education and Support Centers with information about how the Center fits within the sponsoring agency's overall structure and functions. The audit process, for example, showed one agency that also offered child care and a program for adoptive families how to merge parallel activities with those of the Center to increase the Parent Education and Support Center's overall impact. The audit information is shared only with the local agency and is a service the evaluators offer in return for the agency's cooperation with the Center evaluation.

Evaluation Principles from the States' Experiences

The different strategies that these states have employed reflect some underlying principles which apply more generally to other new state-sponsored family support and education initiatives and therefore they are also principles guiding our evaluation framework. First, the experiences of several of these states suggest the benefits of devoting evaluation resources early on to gathering information useful for program development and growth. The kinds of questions that should be addressed include: what kinds of families are and are not being reached; what kinds of problems are staff having in delivering the services; and what are the issues in serving particular types of families. Minnesota's experience shows the benefits of coupling formative evaluation with quality assessment procedures to help guide program expansion.

Second, each of the states has developed a management information system to provide information about participants, participation and service provision. Developing these systems was not easy but they provide information useful in program monitoring and legislative reporting. In the early stages, when the programs were being established, it was especially important to track participation. Maryland has shown the additional utility of such a system in tracking changes in clients' behaviors in order to get short-term information on policy relevant behaviors.

Third, given the newness of these programs, each state avoided premature outcome evaluations. All have begun or are planning to conduct short-term outcome assessments but they did not conduct them in the first year of program operation. Outcome evaluations which test program effectiveness can be critically important in program expansion, as Missouri's experience suggests, but they need to be timed in such a way that they allow a fair test of the program model(s).

Fourth, the states' strategies show how important it is to develop sensitive evaluation strategies which provide information useful for both local pilot programs and for the state staff responsible for monitoring and supporting them. Insofar as the state initiatives have emphasized community-based and responsive programs, their strategies have tried to emphasize partnerships with local programs rather than top-down imposition of an evaluation plan. The Connecticut evaluators' strategy illustrates one way of achieving this when a program is small and can manage site-tailored evaluation

plans and technical assistance.

Finally, these states have grappled with the realities, the constraints, and the trade-offs common to most other program developers who craft evaluations of new multi-site programs. Like most others, these states did not plan their evaluations in the best of all possible worlds -- that is, one rich in resources, where new programs are immediately fine-tuned and working perfectly, where the relevant human development research specialists and evaluators have perfected all the necessary measures and developed research designs that are easy to implement and provide unequivocal evidence, and one in which local programs are wildly enthusiastic about adding the many tasks of evaluation to the already demanding ones of program development and service delivery. Instead, like most programs, particularly those that were not primarily set up for research and demonstration purposes, state family support and education programs confront a variety of difficult and interconnected choices, constraints, and trade-offs in planning evaluations. The evaluation experiences of these four states also illustrate some of the complex issues and challenges others will also confront in planning and implementing their evaluations. We discuss some of the most important choices and trade-offs below.

III. CHOICES AND TRADEOFFS IN THE MIDST OF CONSTRAINTS

The choices discussed here include interrelated decisions about how to use scarce evaluation resources; decisions about evaluation strategies, including their type, scale, and design; the particularly difficult decisions about appropriate and policy relevant measures to assess the effectiveness of these complex child and family programs; and the decisions involved in the actual implementation of evaluations with the staff of multiple community-based programs. In discussing these areas, we point out some of the trade-offs that these states have made, not to criticize but to emphasize that difficult choices, decisions and trade-offs are inevitable in designing evaluations of these complex, multi-site initiatives.

Resource Constraints

As noted previously, Table 2 (pages 11 and 12), showing the amount and source of funding for the state evaluations 2 indicates, the financial resources available for evaluation vary among the four states, but none of them has enormous, some would argue even sufficient resources, especially in relation to the number of local programs to be evaluated. Many single-site research and demonstration programs have more money for program evaluation than these states have for multiple complex programs. Moreover, these resources are also often unpredictable from year to year, and this

makes it difficult to develop a longer-term evaluation plan. Despite resource limits and unpredictability, state staff try to keep the door open to the possibility of longer-term evaluation, should funding become available. For example, on their initial intake form, several states request information which would help them locate families years hence should longer-term follow-up become possible.

The amounts that have been available for evaluation are often insufficient to add an evaluator to the state staff or to contract with an outside evaluator to carry out a very large-scale and/or complex evaluation. In effect, this also means that the state staff must frequently add the responsibility of supervising the evaluation to their already substantial program responsibilities. Delegating the evaluation to an external evaluator, as all states have done at some point, has both advantages and disadvantages. The advantages include having someone else who is an "expert" worry about the evaluation and the fact that an external evaluator can minimize any biases that an internal evaluator might bring. The disadvantages can be that the evaluator may not design an evaluation that meets the program's needs or that he or she may not work successfully with local programs. Most state directors note that a substantial amount of time needs to go into choosing an evaluator and then into working with the evaluator throughout the evaluation process.

Because the state programs have worked hard to get the maximum benefit from their limited evaluation resources, not infrequently, they find themselves in a frustrating

situation in which they have collected useful data but do not have the resources to analyze it. For example, more than one state developed a statewide participant enrollment form and did not then have immediate resources to code and analyze the information in order to address questions about whether the programs were reaching those they were set up to serve.

It is also noteworthy that resources have rarely been available for the states to conduct longitudinal evaluations. This may be an especially important problem because of past concern and skepticism about the duration of program effects in family support and education programs (Bronfenbrenner, 1974) and because of indications that the types of changes these programs cause may only be evident over the long term.

There are some indications that foundation interest in state-sponsored family support and education initiatives is growing and that some might be willing to contribute funds to examine the success of efforts to "scale-up" family support and education initiatives. Missouri and Maryland have solicited foundation grants and developed pooled public and private funds in order to bring in more resources to conduct substantial multi-state evaluations. It therefore may be an opportune time for other states to try to form such evaluation partnerships. To do so, it will be important to identify the questions that state and that foundation stakeholders want addressed and to see if they can be put together to inform a more comprehensive, multi-stage evaluation. Pursuit of these partnerships is especially important because more

comprehensive evaluations of these state programs offer the opportunity to test the critical question of whether family support and education programs can be brought to scale and be effective as part of large state public systems. So fa,r no state has had the resources to do evaluations which cover enough sites in enough depth to address this question.

Financial resource constraints are not the only ones that the states have had to confront. Perhaps equally important has been the problem of locating evaluators who can combine the following: knowledge of child, parenting, and family development; strong research design skills; and the practical and interpersonal skills necessary to work with multiple service-oriented, community-based programs to implement an evaluation.

It is likely that new states mounting these initiatives in the future will also face serious resource constraints. While this may help prevent premature outcome evaluation, resource constraints obviously impact on almost every other aspect of evaluation planning, design and implementation. For our purposes, this means that our evaluation framework has to take resource limitations very seriously (while arguing for sufficiency) and be responsive to concerns about what types of information would be most useful at different stages of program growth to different stakeholders.

Questions of Scale

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Each state has confronted questions about the scale of its evaluation and the responses have in turn been shaped by resource constraints. Because all of the states began with a relatively small number of pilots, they typically developed initial evaluation efforts that examined activities (and sometimes effects) for all their local programs. However, as the number of programs grew, the choice arose of whether to examine all programs, participants selected from all programs, or alternatively, to select some subset of programs or participants. As Table 2 and the more detailed description of the states' evaluation strategies in the Appendix show, when the number of programs grows substantially, as in Minnesota and Missouri, practical resource considerations have dictated the examination of either a subset of programs or of participants for their outcome studies.

Given limited resources, Minnesota did a multi-measure outcome study at two sites; this gave them the opportunity to test a variety of measures and to get a sense of the range of possible outcomes. They used their very limited resources to get in-depth information useful in planning a larger, multi-site evaluation rather than to cover more sites in less depth. They themselves note that it is not possible to generalize the findings beyond those programs studied. Missouri is trying another alternative to deal with the problem of scale and generalizability, given resource constraints. They are selecting 400 participants from 37 districts in a current evaluation to try to examine the effects of the statewide program. This strategy covers a wide range of programs and

may permit them to generalize more broadly but it also may inhibit examination of some aspects of local program-participant interaction.

For our purposes, the state's experiences suggest that an evaluation framework should consider the trade-off of breadth verses depth of evaluation information in relation to the stage of the program's development. As the number of programs in the state system grows, the question of whether these programs can successfully be brought to scale and develop into an effective set of programs becomes paramount. Given resource constraints, what evaluation strategies later in the development of the initiative can address questions about the effectiveness of the overall statewide system, rather than just that of a few local programs?

Formative or Summative?

Another early choice involves the question of what type of evaluation to do -- formative, summative, or some combination thereof. Three of the four states have begun their evaluation of pilot programs with some form of formative evaluation to generate information that would contribute to program development. Again, given limited resources, and the need for feedback as a state develops a new type of program, the emphasis on initial, systematic formative information and on collection of participant characteristics is well placed. Further, none of the states has attempted to conduct an outcome evaluation in the first year of program operation, wisely

recognizing that a program needs some time to get established, and heeding Campbell's (1987) dictum to Evaluate No Program Until It Is Proud. Each state has also systematically assessed parent satisfaction with the program early on, and sometimes periodically thereafter. The resulting information is primarily useful for program development and, because satisfaction is usually high, for mention in fund raising and lobbying efforts.

All of the states have either carried out some type of outcome evaluation or are planning to do so in the near future. None of them, however, has yet used an experimental research design with random assignment to treatment and controls, the most incontrovertible design insofar as it is less subject to question about whether the program produced whatever changes may be found. Several of the state directors have pointed out that it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for them to employ random assignment in a publicly sponsored, community-based program. In the pilot phase Missouri implemented a quasi-experimental design with a comparison group drawn from non-participating but eligible families in the programs' communities. The other states' outcome studies employ some type of pre-post design or measurement of status change over the course of program participation.

Missouri's experience suggests that it may be easier to implement a quasi-experimental (or experimental) research design when the state initiative involves a limited number of pilot programs than it is when substantially more pilot programs are

involved or the program is available on a statewide basis. In the latter cases, it is almost impossible to find a comparison group within the state because all families are eligible to participate; a comparison group drawn from non-participants may contaminate the comparison. In fact, in their new study of the state-wide Parents As Teachers Program, Missouri finally gave up trying to locate a comparison group and has chosen instead to look at program effects on various subgroups.

Again, for purposes of our framework, these states' experiences reinforce the practicality and utility of a staged approach wherein in the early stages the emphasis is on evaluations designed to yield information for program development, growth, and documentation. As Carol Weiss (1987), an observer of social program evaluation for over twenty years has noted, if program evaluations are to be useful to policy makers, and we would add to future program developers, they should devote a larger share of resources to understanding what programs actually do. But again, information about program outcomes and about the overall effectiveness of the state program system will also be important so the evaluation framework must factor that in as well.

Measurement Choices and Trade-Offs in Answering Outcomes

All of the four states have confronted, or are confronting, particularly difficult

choices about what types of possible program outcomes to assess, and then, what measures or instruments to use to assess them. By virtue of the nature of family support and education programs, their outcome evaluation efforts will probably necessarily involve assessment of some combination of changes in the following areas: child development; parent development and behavior as a parent and as an adult; and aspects of parent-child interaction and family functioning. Right now, the state-of-the-art of measurement, particularly in the areas of children's social development and social competence, of parenting knowledge, attitudes and behaviors, and of family functioning, is not very advanced and this means choices about what to measure are especially hard in this program area (Weiss and Jacobs, 1988). Further, state staff are faced with choices about whether to measure micro indicators closely in line with program objectives (for ex. changes in parenting attitudes, knowledge or behaviors) or more perhaps policy relevant macro indicators (for ex. movement from welfare to self-sufficiency or the child's subsequent adjustment to school).

Measurement decisions then must be made while trying to balance several sometimes conflicting factors. To wit: What measures can assess program objectives in regard to children, parents and families; can be practically and consistently implemented in (sometimes multiple and varied) community-based service programs; will stand up to psychometric scrutiny; and will provide evidence that, if the program is effective, will prove compelling to policy makers and other stakeholders? The choices

include one or a combination of the following: 1) using standardized measures with established psychometric properties, which may or may not directly measure program objectives; 2) using new measures with unknown psychometric properties; 3) creating one's own measures; and 4) using gross more macro behavioral indicators relevant to program goals (e.g., employment, retention in grade). The approaches to outcome measurement that the four states have employed are described briefly below to illustrate different approaches to these problems.

In several studies of Minnesota's ECFE programs, evaluators have both created measures and used existing standardized ones. In the process, they have learned a great deal both about the limitations of existing measures; and about the problems of creating new ones that are valid and reliable, can be administered to many people, but that are still sensitive enough to detect meaningful changes. Minnesota's experience suggests the utility of using a combination of standard measures along with newer ones and those created for the ECFE program. It also illustrated the challenges involved in evaluating a universal program insofar as many parents "topped out" or scored at the top of measures of parenting knowledge, for example, at the start of the program. This meant there was no chance to show program effects on these measures. Suffice it to say here that universal access programs involve their own special evaluation challenges.

The evaluators involved in Missouri's initial outcome study of PAT employed standard child measures of children's cognitive and language development, adapted

existing scales to assess children's social development, and created their own survey instrument to assess parent knowledge. Their measures have proven relatively easy to administer and interpret; in their follow-up study, they will be experimenting with teacher ratings of children and parents and with a parent questionnaire. The latter measures may provide more of a sense than their initial parent knowledge measure of the breadth and depth of program impacts on parents and on parent-child interaction and thus of how these mediate children's school adjustment. Missouri, like some of the other states, has tried to find measures that can be practically administered at multiple sites but that still provide meaningful information about short- and long-term program effects.

The initial evaluation of Maryland's Family Support Centers for teenage parents relied on gross, relatively easily done measurement of changes in the teenager's and their children's status at 6-month intervals over the course of program involvement. State staff and the evaluators chose a set of relatively straightforward behavioral indicators that have considerable face validity for policy makers. Their revised intake and update forms allow them to continue to track these indicators beyond the initial two-year evaluation period. Friends of the Family is currently planning an outcome evaluation that would include two or three Centers and focus on the more methodologically difficult questions of how program involvement affects parenting behavior and parents' personal development.

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Starting from the point that variation among the services provided by the eleven Parent Education and Support Centers is both deliberate and substantial, Connecticut's evaluators have pursued a site-specific approach to outcome evaluation and measurement. Initially, the evaluators work with the local program to do a type of evaluability assessment (Wholey, 1977) that leads to specification of objectives and the creation of measures to assess them. This approach trades off strictly uniform objectives and measures across sites and the use of standardized measures for greater attention to specific assessment of local program objectives. In addition to providing feedback to each program on whether or not it is achieving its objectives, this approach has value for program development insofar as initially it helps each program spell out its specific objectives and then better match services and resources to them.

The states' disparate choices -- measure what you can with standardized measures -- create your own -- experiment with risky newér measures -- avoid psychometrically uncertain measures in favor of more straightforward behavioral indicators -- in part reflect the nascent state of many of the relevant measures, and indicate again what a problematic and risk-laden area measurement can be for family support and education programs.

Choices of which measures to employ involve consideration of resource constraints, the preferred scale and depth of the evaluation, and of the types of outcomes relevant for different stakeholders in the program. There are many trade-offs

to be made in the process of integrating these considerations with measurement choices. But from our point of view, if we are to understand both the policy relevance and causal mechanisms underlying these programs, it is important to develop an evaluation framework which includes both macro behavioral indicators and more finely-tuned micro measures. While we need to determine what these programs can contribute to social problem solving, if they are effective, we also need to know why (Weiss and Halpern, 1988). While addressing the latter question may seem unduly burdensome for state initiatives with scarce evaluation resources, perhaps more in-depth evaluations which measure a variety of mediating as well as outcome variables could be done with one or two of the state's strongest programs as a later stage of evaluation. This is in fact not unlike what Maryland may do in the evaluation of its Family Support Program.

Enlisting the Cooperation of Local Programs

Whatever their evaluation strategies, all of these states emphasized the importance of working continuously and closely with local programs both in planning and throughout the course of carrying out evaluation activities. Getting them to "buy in" to the evaluation so that they will help with data collection or facilitate the job for others is both critical and difficult to achieve. One way to do this is to make sure the evaluation strategy is designed to include local program involvement in evaluation

planning and to make sure some information will be collected that is useful for local program development.

The reality, especially in the early years of a new initiative, is that local program staff, many of whom are part-time workers, are already overworked trying to develop and establish the program and meet service demands, never mind meeting the additional responsibilities related to evaluation. Recognizing this, several of the states have spent considerable time working continuously with local programs around such issues as the development, field-testing and revision of forms to collect data about participants and participation. This process allows local staff to reliably and comfortably collect their data without feeling that they are neglecting service responsibilities or turning participants off with too many forms and personal questions. Others have worked with local programs to get their input on what outcomes should be assessed, provided financial incentives for the program's participation in evaluation activities, or provided feedback useful to the local program's development or status within the local community. Whatever the incentives or 'carrots', the states' experiences underscore the importance of providing them, as well as of monitoring to assure that local programs are complying with, but are not undone by, evaluation requirements.

Again, from the point of view of developing an evaluation framework, the injunction to actively and continuously involve local programs in the evaluation may

seem straightforward, but it is both difficult to do and can be challenging given the canons of evaluation practice and the sometimes different information priorities of different stakeholders. So a key question for a framework to address is how and when to involve local programs so the evaluation can fit into the overall partnership between the state and the local community-based programs. Specifically, some types of involvement may be questionable (having program staff administer assessments) while others are very appropriate (having program staff help determine relevant indicators of program objectives). So the framework has to allow for substantial and appropriate local input into the development of an evaluational strategy.

Limitations and Future Challenges

Collectively, these states, pioneers in taking family support and education concepts developed largely at the local level into large public systems, have considerable experience with both the difficulties and benefits of program evaluation. In the face of the many constraints and trade-offs described above, they have crafted evaluations that have been useful in their efforts to build strong programs. Their formative evaluation information has been helpful for program development and growth, and their summative data have provided indicators of possible short-term program impacts.

As yet, however, only Missouri, with its quasi-experimental research design, can

respond to critics who question whether any changes detected in parents or children can in fact be attributed to their program participation and not to some other factors. Missouri's follow-up study of the participants in their initial pilot projects will also allow them to address questions about whether short-term effects are maintained when children enter school. Some of the other state programs are now "proud" and are preparing to conduct outcome evaluations that meet stringent research design criteria. Their work is especially important because, in making the case for state development of family support and education initiatives, advocates who cite evaluation evidence are now overly dependent on the positive results of a few, mostly single-site, 'flagship' research and demonstration projects until more states (and others) can design and conduct outcome evaluations with stringent research designs (Weiss and Halpern, 1988).

Finally, as noted at the paper's outset and as will be apparent in section IV, taken together, the evaluation strategies these states have developed contain all the elements we feel are necessary in a realistic framework to guide evaluation of state family support and education initiatives.

IV. A THREE-PART FRAMEWORK FOR EVALUATION

Our framework for thinking about evaluating new state family support and education initiatives has three parts--a set of diagnostic questions, a set of guiding

principles, and a specific multi-stage evaluation strategy. The diagnostic questions come first because they help to illuminate how the state program's context, the needs of different stakeholders, program goals, and other factors need to be taken into account in formulating an evaluation strategy. The diagnostic questions center around questions about who wants to know what about whom, how, why, when and where. A state's answers to these diagnostic questions should also be useful in judging the applicability or adaptability of our multi-stage framework to their particular needs.

Our specific multi-stage evaluation strategy is based on five guiding principles which we believe need to undergird efforts to evaluate state-sponsored systems of family support and education programs. We have tried to operationalize these principles in both the diagnostic questions and then in the multi-stage strategy.

Diagnostic Questions

The diagnostic questions in chart 1 below can be employed as a pre-evaluation worksheet for use in planning a state's evaluation strategy. For our purposes in this paper, a more cursory examination is sufficient to indicate what contextual as well as programmatic factors should be considered in planning a state evaluation.

CHART 1

PRE-EVALUATION PLANNING QUESTIONS

1. Impetus and Implications

A. What is the impetus for the evaluation, and where does it come from?

B. If there is pressure to conduct an evaluation, where does it come from, and how strong is it?

C. Is the pressure internal (from those involved with the state initiative), or external?

D. Is there the requisite internal support for evaluation from those involved in the program at both the state and local level?

E. Is there pressure for any particular type of evaluation (i.e., formative, summative, or outcome?)

2. Stakeholders

A. Who are the future and current stakeholders and potential audiences for the evaluation? (Possibilities include: legislators, the governor, the host administrative agency, state program staff, local program,staff, the local host agency, participating parents, similar programs around the country, and federal policy makers.)

B. Whose interests take priority?

C. What information (for example, about program processes and outcomes) do these different stakeholders want?

D. If and how is it possible/feasible to design evaluations that will meet the needs of multiple stakeholders?

E. What are different stakeholders expectations in regard to research design issues? (Will particular stakeholders only attend to results from certain types of evaluations (for example, those with experimental research designs) and not others?)

3. Resources

A. What resources are available for evaluation?

B. What financial and in kind resources are available, and are they at least minimally sufficient to do any kind of evaluation at all?

C. What constraints do the evaluation resources impose on the scale and type of evaluations that are possible (for example, do resources dictate that initial evaluations examine a limited number of outcomes or of program sites, or do they allow broader examination of outcomes and sites?)

D. What time resources are available? (From state and local program staff, program participants, data collectors, etc.)?

E. What researchers or program evaluators with the requisite knowledge and skills are available and accessible to conduct or otherwise assist with the evaluation?

F. Are there resources--financial and otherwise--that will ease the burden of evaluation on local program staff?

4. Time Frame and Evaluation Purposes

A. What is the projected time frame for program development and growth, and for evaluation in relation to it? How much should the evaluation plan focus on providing specific information (formative or outcome) to strengthen local

programs, on providing information on the overall effectiveness of the whole system of state programs, or on addressing more differentiated policy and program development questions about what types of programs work for what types of families, how, when, where, and why?

B. Is systematic information about implementation and participation helpful or necessary for program development or any of the relevant stake holders? Does the model need to be documented?

C. How much pressure is there to test program effectiveness and how soon must it be addressed?

D. How stable and fully developed are the programs?

E. Is there relationship between time and resources such that it is possible to plan a multi-year evaluation strategy or will an evolving year-by-year approach be necessary? If the latter, is it possible to set up data collection procedures which will facilitate later outcome evaluations if resources become available?

F. How "evaluable" are the state system of programs? (i.e., are there statements of measurable program objectives, commitment to evaluation, etc.)?

5. State and Local Evaluation Relations and Purposes

A. What is the administrative and decision making relationship between the state agency and local programs, and how will the plan for evaluation fit with it?

B. What is the span of control of the state program? Are local programs organized into a communication and interpersonal support network? What state/local feedback loops are in place?

C. How much input into research questions, evaluation design, analysis, or interpretation of results is desirable or feasible for local programs?

D. What arrangements can be made so that evaluations parallel or do not undermine other aspects of state and local relationships?

E. Are or will resources be available to assist local programs with self evaluation, perhaps independent of the state's own overall evaluation efforts?

F. How much is the evaluation oriented to building local or centralized evaluation capacity?

G. Are mechanisms for the state to monitor and insure local program quality necessary?

6. Interaction of Local Program Services and Evaluation Considerations

A. How will the nature of the services provided by local programs condition the evaluation?

B. How much variability is there across programs with respect to services provided?

C. How much variability is there within local programs--how much individualization in service provision?

D. Are there program characteristics (i.e. drop in center with idiosyncratic participation), which pose particular problems for the evaluation?

E. How much variability is there in the local programs' contexts -- for example in local populations, community characteristics, and sponsoring agencies:

F. What are the implications of this variation for the uniformity and site specificity of evaluation research designs?

7. Research Design Choices

A. If the state program is sufficiently developed and there are adequate resources, what is the most stringent research design that can be implemented to assess the effectiveness of either the enter state's system of programs or selected, and presumably representative, local programs?

B. Is it possible to implement an experimental research design with random assignment to treatment and control groups? (either statewide, or with a sample of programs or participants)

C. If not, is it possible to locate satisfactory comparison groups for a quasi-experimental research design?

D. If not, what other research designs could be implemented and still satisfy the

requirements of relevant stakeholders?

8. Measurement Choices

A. Given program goals, what kinds of indicators of program success are appropriate for relevant stakeholders?

B. What kinds of assessments are appropriate for purposes of legislative oversight and accountability?

C. What kinds of outcomes will prove compelling to public policy makers concerned about preventing or ameliorating public problems?

D. What types of outcomes will provide evidence useful for local program development?

E. Are the local programs substantially different from one another and if so, is there a feasible set of cross-site measures?

Guiding Principles

Our proposed four-part strategy is not a radical departure from those that states described previously have employed, partly because the principles conditioning the strategy are drawn in part from their experiences, as well as from evaluation practice more generally. These principles are: First, these initiatives need different types of information at different points in their development and this calls for a staged approach to their evaluation. Moreover, new state family support and education initiatives are likely, as they have in the past, to start small and grow by adding more

and more local programs. States, therefore, will need and find it useful to do formative evaluation in order to build strong programs, to do short term outcome evaluations, and in some cases to do longer term assessments of effectiveness to see if the gains from the program are maintained over time.

The second principle follows from the fact that it is likely, almost inevitable, that there will be some important intersite variability among the programs within a state because of efforts to tailor them in accord with the needs and resources of local communities, families, and agencies. This variation will have to be dealt with as part of the evaluation strategy. Specifically, it will be important to balance the need for an overall sense of the state system's effectiveness with the need to recognize and examine the characteristics and effectiveness of local programs. Just as there is no average program participant, there is no average local program.

Third, state evaluation strategies should take into account the reality that resources for evaluation are likely both to be limited and to become available in spurts which makes evaluation planning especially difficult. So the evaluation strategy should be able to be implemented incrementally but still provide critical information from the outset to relevant stakeholders. It is also very important that evaluation resources be sufficient to systematically collect and analyze credible data and that resources be adequate for the type of evaluation planned.

The fourth principle is that evaluation strategies will need to be sensitive to the

terms of the relationship between the state and local programs. Just as the administrative relationship between the state and local programs is neither "top down nor bottom up," the evaluation will need to take into account both state and local input, needs and constraints.

Fifth, the state initiatives and hence their evaluations operate in a political context and this has to be factored in through such things as consideration of what information is needed by and compelling to different stake holders. Insofar as these initiatives are publicly supported programs designed to address public problems, it will be important that the evaluation designs and the particular types of assessments and outcomes chosen are clearly relevant for the state's public policy makers.

The overall strategy presented below is in accord with these principles and it has the potential, sequentially, to address the critical questions about state-sponsored systems of family support and education programs, which we noted in the paper's introduction. To wit: Is it possible to get local programs developed and delivering services to those to whom it is supposed to deliver them? Second, is it possible to build a growing system of programs which meet the quality criteria specified by the state for service delivery? Third, are local programs effective in reaching the initiative's goals? And, finally, is it possible to evolve a large state system of effective programs which will achieve the public policy objectives outlined by the state? In states with the necessary resources, there is a fifth set of questions which could usefully be addressed

with a subset of programs: if the program is successful, what kinds of causal processes underlie that effectiveness? As also noted in the paper's introduction, we are continuing to work on the strategy below and welcome comments about it.

A FOUR-PART EVALUATION STRATEGY

Part 1. A Management Information System

As the pilot program begins, people both at the state and at the local level are trying to evolve a model which is able to reach and serve the designated families. If it is a universal program, is it reaching a cross section of the population? If it is targeted, is it reaching the appropriate families? Therefore, it is appropriate from the outset to develop a management information system which contains information on participants, their participation, and on available program services. Depending upon what information is included in the system, it may be possible to use it to build tools for quality assurance and for feedback on outreach and participation patterns to programs. It may also be possible to design the MIS system so that it has data on status indicators, which, if tracked over time, would allow the state program to chart participants' progress over time. The evaluation of Maryland's Family support Centers employs such a strategy.

Developing a management information system will require the state to develop

in-take and periodic update forms to be used in the collection of information by local programs. This information would be returned to the state for processing and analysis. The MIS should include information about: 1) basic social and demographic characteristics of participants; 2) indications of key aspects of participant status which relate to program goals, for example, educational and employment status, use of other services; 3) the amount of participation in discrete program services; 4) the timing of participation, including when the participants enter and leave the program, and indications of why they terminate their participation; 5) indications of other services used outside the program; 6) program made referrals and the results of these referrals; 7) information about how and why the participant entered the program, and 8) names and addresses of friends or relatives that could help in locating the participant in subsequent years. Follow up information should be collected periodically to track any changes in social and demographic characteristics or on indicators of status on factors relevant to the program. This management information system should be supplemented by provider logs which give a sense of how much time is spent on individual program activities by providers.

Part 2. Process Documentation and Implementation Studies

A second part of the evaluation strategy involves systematic process or implementation studies, which provide feedback both to the local program and to the

state about the development and quality of local program services. The process or implementation study should focus on the nature of the helping relationships, programmatic issues such as the amount and focus of supervision, and questions about such basic program development issues as what kind of caseload can be managed by the service delivery staff. Overall, the process and implementation study should provide good, systematic, descriptive data about how the program works. They should address questions about whether or not the program is being implemented as planned; they document some of the difficulties involved in developing the service strategy; and they describe the problem solving strategies that the program has employed. The information gathered from these studies is primarily useful in program development, in developing quality indicators which can be used by both the state and the local program in quality assurance activities, and in documenting what the program model(s) are. Data from process studies can sometimes also be used later to help explain the pattern of outcomes if an outcome study is conducted. Minnesota's evaluation of ECFE includes good examples of process and program documentation studies.

Part 3. Small-Scale, Short-Term Outcome Studies

The third part of our evaluation strategy involves two alternatives. The first is to conduct small outcome studies of either all or selected local programs to determine if the program is achieving its short term goals. Preferably these studies would employ an experimental or quasi-experimental research design or have some credible

comparison standards against which one could judge the program's effectiveness. If they do, they would allow inference about program generated effects at least for a subset of programs. Such a study should examine a limited set of outcomes and ideally employ outside assessors. The information from it should help set up the final part of the strategy, large-scale examination of the effectiveness of the state program system.

The second choice involves scrutiny of changes in client status or behavior which can be derived from the management information system. The first might involve studies of changes in some aspect of child or parent development, while the second (perhaps more relevant for programs targeted to particular populations such as teen parents), might involve analysis of clients over time to see if there is change on key program relevant indicators such as seeking further education or employment, or the like.

Part 4. The Effectiveness of the State Program System

The final part of the strategy involves development of a larger scale outcome study across the entire state system. Such a study, after the statewide system is proud and established, should be designed to look at the overall effectiveness of the program system. Again, resource constraints may dictate the use of information from the management information system and, if possible, comparisons with indicators on comparable groups. Or, it may be possible to design a study sampling participants

from all sites and assessing them with a limited and carefully chosen set of measures. This larger outcome study, especially if supplemented by a few more in-depth studies at carefully selected sites, will allow one to study inferences about the treatment, look at program processes and mediating variables as they condition program outcomes, and it would allow a basic understanding of the populations which can and cannot be served effectively by the intervention.

Growing Demands for Evaluation

In conclusion, state staff in the pioneering states as well as in some considering development of their own family support and education programs have indicated to us that the demand for systematic evaluation evidence on the part of legislative and other stakeholders may be increasing. This shift in demand, or in the expectation that programs will conduct systematic outcome evaluations, is probably precipitated by at least two factors. The first is the recent broad dissemination of compelling evaluation evidence from several high-quality studies of early childhood programs that documented their long-term and policy-relevant effects. This has spurred evaluations because legislators ask if investments in other early interventions can produce similar results and because it showed programs how powerful well-done evaluations can sometimes be in the policy arena. The second factor driving the demand is the increasing difficulty legislators and others have in allocating scarcer and scarcer resources for social and

educational programs. If indeed the demand for evidence of program effectiveness is increasing, it may mean that in the future, new types of social programs will need evidence of effectiveness to get beyond pilot status or, if they do, to command any additional resources.

This increased interest, especially in outcome evaluations, brings with it some danger of unrealistic expectations, as the following anecdote illustrates. One very powerful legislative group, convinced of the need for comprehensive and intensive family support and education programs in their state, postulated that the programs could be developed in 6 months and then evaluated for effects on participants in the remaining 6 months of the year. It took substantially more than a year to develop, implement, and evaluate the programs that they found compelling enough to warrant their view, and this would be the case even if the state decided to replicate or adapt an existing program model instead of creating a new one.

This anecdote suggests several very salient points for those embarking on state-sponsored family support and education initiatives. First, it is very important to educate all of the stakeholders involved not only about what new program development and implementation entail, but also about the costs and time involved in different types of evaluation strategies. In particular, the social experiments of the past twenty years have taught the wisdom of avoiding premature evaluation of new programs. A look at the budgets of the major short-term impact and influential longitudinal evaluations

conducted during this period also shows that credible evaluations of program effectiveness are not cheap. Second, it will be very important for states to respond to this demand for evaluation with a commitment to developing carefully crafted evaluation strategies that initially provide formative information to help build strong programs because the service "technology" and applicability of different family support and education program models are just being worked out. Third, it is more and more important to get summative or outcome evidence to indicate whether a state's sponsorship and proliferation of these programs is a wise public investment. Finally, in order for the commitment to evaluation to have meaning, there cannot be a requirement to evaluate without the allocation of sufficient resources to fulfill it.

APPENDIX

Detailed Descriptions of States' Evaluations

Minnesota

Missouri

Maryland

Connecticut

State Program: Minnesota Early Childhood Family Education Program (1)

Background Information

* **State agency sponsor:**

Council on Quality Education, Department of Education

* **Total program budget:**

Study 1 (1975): $230,953

Study 2 (1976): $420,475

Study 3 (1977): $570,920

Study 4 (1978): $712,127

* **Number of local programs:**

(1975) 6

(1976) 12

(1977) 13

(1978) 21

* **Date initiative began:**

1975 (all)

* **Core components of local programs:**

No core services are specified in legislation but most common service is center-based program with parent-child activities and parent discussion groups concurrent with the early childhood program.

* **Participant specifications:**

Universal for families with children 0-6

Evaluation Overview

* **Number of evaluated sites:**

(Study 1--1975) 6

(Study 2--1976) 12

(Study 3--1977) 13

(Study 4--1978 & 79) 21

* **Participant characteristics:**

(Study 1) No specific types of participants specified for inclusion in evaluation

(Study 2) No specific types of participants specified for inclusion in evaluation

(Study 3) No specific types of participants specified for inclusion in evaluation

(Study 4) No specific types of participants specified for inclusion in evaluation

* **Evaluation funding amount:**

(Study 1) $10,000

(Study 2) under $10,000

(Study 3) under $10,000

(Study 4) under $10,000

* **Evaluation funding source:**

(Study 1) Council on Quality Education earmarked money from program's legislative appropriation for evaluation purposes

(Study 2) Council on Quality Education earmarked money from program's legislative appropriation for evaluation purposes

(Study 3) Council on Quality Education earmarked money from program's legislative appropriation for evaluation purposes

(Study 4) Council on Quality Education earmarked money from program's legislative appropriation for evaluation purposes

* **Evaluation client:**

(Study 1)	Council on Quality Education
(Study 2)	Council on Quality Education
(Study 3)	Council on Quality Education
(Study 4)	Council on Quality Education

* **Evaluator:**

(Study 1)	Johnson (external) -- chosen through RFP process
(Study 2)	Oberaigner; Minnesota Center for Social Research (participant telephone survey) (external) -- chosen through RFP process
(Study 3)	Michael Patton, Minnesota Center for Social Research (external)
(Study 4)	Michael Patton, Minnesota Center for Social Research (external)

* **Evaluation philosophy:**

Involve local sites in the planning and development of the evaluation

* **Evaluation components:**

(Study 1)	Process/implementation study
(Study 2)	Process/implementation study Participant satisfaction
(Study 3)	Process/implementation study Participant satisfaction
(Study 4)	Participant satisfaction On-site quality review implementation study Teacher perceptions of ECFE children compared to children in general, and of ECFE's effects on parents

* **Statewide information about participant characteristics and participation:**

Attendance records and participant counts kept from program's outset and available to state.

* **Outcome evaluation design:**

(Study 4)	Teacher comparisons of ECFE parents and children against kindergartners and their parents in general

* **Measures:**

(Study 1)	Observations and interviews
(Study 2)	Program questionnaire Site-visits Participant telephone survey
(Study 3)	Interprofessional Team site visits for interviews and observations Participant telephone survey
(Study 4)	Participant telephone survey On-site quality review with assessment instrument developed by evaluator in conjunction with CQE and state and local staff Mail survey of kindergarten teachers in 22 districts with programs

* **Duration of evaluation:**

(Study 1)	1 year
(Study 2)	1 year
(Study 3)	1 year
(Study 4)	1 year

State Program: Minnesota, ECFE (2)

Background Information

* **State agency sponsor:**

Council on Quality Education, Dept. of Education

* **Total program budget**

(1980) $1,668,602

(1981) $1,740,192

(1987) $15,887,920

* **Number of local programs:**

(1980-81) 36

(1987) 310 school districts provide programs

* **Date initiative began:**

1975

* **Core components of local programs:**

No core services are specified in legislation but most common service is center based program with parent-child activities and parent discussion groups concurrent with the early childhood program.

* **Participant specifications:**

Universal for families with children 0-6

Evaluation Overview

* **Number of evaluated sites:**

(Study 5--1979-1980) 20 established programs in Patton study of pre-post parent questionnaire

(Study 6--1980-1981) 2 established programs in 6th or 7th year of operation in Anderson and Berdie outcome study (one rural and one suburban)

(Study 7--1980-1981) 13 Second-year programs

(Study 8--1980-1981) 13 families participating in 3 local programs

(Study 9--1987-1988) 164 sites examined

* **Participant characteristics:**

(Study 5) No specification of particular participant characteristics

(Study 6) Rural and urban participants

(Study 7) No specification

(Study 8) 13 participating families drawn from Duluth, Fairmont, and Minneapolis programs.

(Study 9) No specification

* **Evaluation funding amount:**

(Study 5) under $10,000

(Study 6) $5,000

(Study 7) $8,000

(Study 8) $6,000

(Study 9) $7,000

* **Evaluation funding source:**

(Study 5) Council on Quality Education earmarked money from program's Legislative appropriation for evaluation purposes.

(Study 6) Council on Quality Education earmarked money from program's Legislative appropriation for evaluation purposes.

(Study 7) Council on Quality Education earmarked money from program's Legislative appropriation for evaluation purposes.

(Study 8) Council on Quality Education earmarked money from program's Legislative appropriation for evaluation purposes.

(Study 9) Minnesota Department of Education

* **Evaluation client:**

Council on Quality Education, Department of Education

(Study 9) Minnesota Department of Education

* **Evaluator:**

(Study 5) Patton and Minnesota Center for Social Research

(Study 6) Anderson and Berdie Associates

(Study 7) Hess and Bowers (now Innovative Programming Systems, Inc.)

(Study 8) List, Reiner, and La Freniere

(Study 9) Minnesota Department of Education

* **Evaluation philosophy:**

Involve local sites in the planning and development of the evaluation

* **Evaluation components:**

(Study 5) Pre-post parent self-assessment questionnaire field tested by 2240 parents

(Study 6) Outcome study

(Study 7) On-site quality review implementation study

(Study 8) Exploratory case studies with multiple measures

(Study 9) One-time questionnaire soliciting information about program activities

* **Statewide information about participant characteristics and participation:**

In 1987, the state developed an enrollment form and a demographic survey form; providing demographic information, household composition, and other data for use across the state and submission to the ECFE state office.

* **Outcome evaluation design:**

(Study 6) One time comparisons of participating and non-participating parents and children

* **Measures:**

(Study 5) Pre-post parent self-assessment questionnaire developed by evaluator

(Study 6) Telephone interview of eligible parent participants and non-participants
Kindergarten teacher ratings
Independent observer ratings of children in classrooms (same rating scheme as used by teachers)

(Study 7) Revised quality assessment tool developed by Patton
On-site observations
Parent and advisory council interviews

(Study 8) Case studies based on semi-structured interviews;
Naturalistic observations in home and center;
Videotaping parent-child interaction;
Questionnaires and other assessment instruments.

(Study 9) Questionnaire for coordinators soliciting information about their program including: strategies used to reach a cross-section of the population, outreach activities, overall resource allocation, advisory council composition and roles, extent of coordination with other agencies, curriculum choices and evaluation efforts.

* **Duration of evaluation:**

(Study 5)	1 year
(Study 6)	1 year
(Study 7)	1 year
(Study 8)	1 year
(Study 9)	1.5 years

State Program: Missouri, Parents As Teachers

Background Information

* **State agency sponsor:**

  Department of Education

* **Total program budget:**

  (1983-84) $120,000

  (1988) $11.4 million

* **Number of local programs:**

  4 in original evaluation; since 1985 PAT has been phased in as a statewide program

* **Date initiative began:**

  1981-1982

* **Core components of local programs:**

  Home visits, monthly parent meetings and periodic screening

* **Participant specifications:**

  Universal for parents with children under three

Evaluation Overview

* **Number of evaluated sites:**

  (Study 1) 1983-84: participants chosen from 4 programs in their third year of operation (suburban, urban, rural)

  (Study 2) 1989-90: Follow-up of 150 participants in Study 1; children now in kindergarten and first grade

  (Study 3) 1989-90: 400 PAT participants chosen through a stratified random sampling process from 37 diverse school districts (150 of these 400 included in parent outcome substudy)

* **Participant characteristics:**

(Study 1) First time parents; 75 PAT participants and 75 non-participants for comparison group

(Study 2) Follow-up with those in Study 1

(Study 3) Families with children younger than 8 months who enrolled in the 1986-87 school year

* **Evaluation funding amount:**

(Study 1) $40,000

(Study 2) $3000 (figure for study 2 does not reflect in-kind contribution of staff time for data collection, costs for telephoning families, or for on-site meetings with PAT national center school administrators and teachers)

(Study 3) $65,500 (figure does not reflect in kind contribution of PAT national center staff; funds are being sought to cover costs of data entry and report writing)

* **Evaluation funding source:**

(Study 1) State Department of Education

(Study 2) Money from Award of Ford Innovations in state and local government Prize and in-kind support from State Department of Education (thrugh their contributions to Parents As Teachers National Center)

(Study 3) Ford Foundation, State Department of Education (see Study 2 above) and Mailman Foundation (substudy of parent outcomes)

* **Evaluation client:**

Department of Education

* **Evaluator:**

(Study 1) Pfannenstiel and Seltzer, Research and Training Associates (external)

(Study 2) Parents As Teachers National Center (internal)

(Study 3) Research and Training Associates (external)

* **Evaluation philosophy:**

Collaboration with local programs on evaluation design and implementation issues

* **Evaluation components:**

(Study 1) Child Outcome study
Parent perception of school district and satisfaction with program
Parent knowledge of child development

(Study 2) Child Outcome Study
Parent development in school and home learning

(Study 3) Child Outcome Study
Parent perception of school district and satisfaction with program
Parent knowledge of child development
Parent outcome substudy

* **Statewide information about participant characteristics and participation:**

State has designed an enrollment form and forms for information on program participation; data is collected by districts but available to state

* **Outcome evaluation design:**

(Study 1) Quasi-experimental design with post tests of child development

(Study 2) Quasi-experimental design with post tests of child developemtn

(Study 3) Analysis of program effects by participant subgroups

* **Measures:**

(Study 1) Child outcomes: Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children
Zimmerman Language Scale
Observations of child in testing situation and parents' assessment of aspects of child's social development (from Batelle Developmental Inventory)

Parent knowledge: Parent Knowledge Survey Instrument develped by program

Child screening: Whisper test of hearing
Mail questionnaire of parent perceptions and satisfaction

(Study 2) School records of pupil attendance

Questionnaire for children's teachers eliciting screening information at kindergarten entry, standardized test results, report card information, teacher rating of behavioral and school adjustment and of parents'involvement with school and home learning

Questionnaire for parents eliciting their assessment of child's school performance and of the child's and parents' feelings about child's school experience; parents' report of their school involvement (both school and parent initiated) and parents reports of parents' shared experiences with the child

(Study 3) Measures are the same as these used in Study 1 except that parent education observational assessments of child will be included, the observation instrument has been slightly revised and the Whisper test eliminated. This study will also include measures of program quantity and quality and of the quantity and quality of parents' participation. The forms will involve a system the state has developed for self and coordinator assessment of parent educators and the latter will involve parent educator ratings. The substudy of parent outcomes (with 150 families) will employ the Caldwell HOME and rating of parent-child interaction based on three minute interaction around a toy.

* **Duration of evaluation:**

(Study 1) One year

(Study 2) One year

(Study 3) One year

State Program: Maryland

Background Information

* **State agency sponsor:**

Department of Human Resources

* **Total program budget**

(1986-87) $754,225

(1987-88) $1,336,000

* **Number of local programs:**

8

* **Date initiative began:**

1986

* **Core components of local programs:**

Drop-in centers providing health care and family planning, diagnostic and assessment services for parent and child, temporary child care, peer support activities, educational opportunities including GED, job preparation and skill development.

* **Participant specifications:**

Teen parents (one site open to all parents with preschool children)

Evaluation Overview

* **Number of evaluated sites:**

(Study 1--1986-88) 8

(Study 2--1987-88) 3

* **Participant characteristics:**

(Study 1) Teen parents

(Study 2) Non-pregnant and non-parenting teens and preteens

* **Evaluation funding amount:**

(Study 1) $84,000

(Study 2) $10,000

* **Evaluation funding source:**

(Study 1) Department of Human Resources

(Study 2) Public Welfare Foundation

* **Evaluation client:**

Friends of the Family and Department of Human Resources

* **Evaluator:**

(Study 1) Regional Center for Infants and Young Children (external)

(Study 2) Dr. Laurie Zabin, Johns Hopkins University (external)

* **Evaluation philosophy:**

Work with local programs to receive and incorporate their views about research questions, indicators, data collection procedures and to expand or modify the evaluation as needed.

* **Evaluation components:**

(Study 1)
- Descriptive analysis of participant characteristics
- Implementation study
- Parent satisfaction substudy
- Outcome assessment of changes in participant status (e.g. parents'educational and employment status, repeat pregnancy, FDC and WIC utilization, living situation) and children's status, (e.g. health care utilization, developmental difficulties, living situation, protective service involvement and family preservation.)
- Substudy comparing participants and dropouts

(Study 2) Program implementation for a participant subgroup

* **Statewide information about participant characteristics and participation:**

The evaluation intake and update forms provide statewide data on participant characteristics; monthly summaries of the number of participants utilizing different services were also collected. Friends of the Family is currently designing and field testing revised intake, update and utilization forms which will enable subanalyses of different groups including nonpregnant and nonparenting teens and fathers.

* **Outcome evaluation design:**

(Study 1) Assessment of participant changes on selected dimensions and selected comparisons with data from other studies (e.g. repeat pregnancy rate)

* **Measures:**

Intake forms with 6 month updates
Monthly overall program utilization data forms
Substudy with parent satisfaction ratings
Individual goal assessment forms
Parent/child profiles

* **Duration of evaluation:**

(Study 1) Two years

(Study 2) One year

State Program: Connecticut Parent Education Support Centers

Background Information

* **State agency program sponsor:**

Department Of Children And Youth Services

* **Total program budget:**

(1987) $300,000

(1988-89) $502,000.

* **Number of local programs:**

Eleven in diverse agencies

* **Date initiative began:**

1987

* **Core components of local programs:**

Four: parent education; parent support services; information and coordination services; and technical assistance and consultation for other agencies

* **Participant specifications:**

Parents of children 0-17 with priority to the undeserved (teen and single parents, first time parents, low-income parents, parents of children in critical transition periods, two-worker families, minority parents, and parents with limited English proficiency)

Evaluation Overview

* **Number of evaluated sites:**

Year 1 (1987-88) Two in design and field test phase

Year 2 (1988-89) Four additional

Year 3 (1989-90) Five additional

* **Evaluation participant characteristics:**

No specific types of participants specified for inclusion in evaluation

* **Evaluation funding:**

Year 1 (13 months)	$36,250 plus $5,000 stipend for each site
Year 2 (12 months)	$27,402 with no site stipends
Year 3 (12 months)	$25,325 with no site stipends

* **Evaluation funding source:**

Federal Juvenile Office of Justice and Delinquency Prevention Funds allocated by State Office Of Policy And Management

* **Evaluation client:**

Division of Children and Youth Services

* **Evaluator: (external)**

National Child Welfare Resource Center
Human Services Development Institute
University of Southern Maine (chosen by RFP process)

* **Evaluation philosophy:**

Commitment to "client self-design" and intensive and extensive collaboration with state and local program staff to identify outcomes, indicators of success and target populations for each local program.

* **Evaluation components:**

Parent satisfaction questionnaires
Management audit
Pre-post study to cover all 11 sites by end of 3 years (evaluators will have worked with local staff of each program to develop a site-specific list of parenting behavior and knowledge indicators and instruments to assess changes in them)

* **Statewide information about participant characteristics and participation:**

Local programs sent DCYS their client enrollment forms and demographic surveys with demographic and household membership information, participation in other programs, source of contact for 5-10 year follow-up, reasons for participation and attendance tracking logs (all sites will be included by year three) Programs provide quarterly reports on program participation to DCYS.

* **Outcome evaluation design:**

Site-specific pre-post questionnaire on parenting skills, activities with other parents and use of other community services

* **Measures:**

Pre-post questionnaire developed for each center to collect information about 1) child and family management; 2) parental awareness of the consequences of familial attitudes and behaviors; 3) family awareness of and access to community support services; 4) bonding of parent and child to family; and 5) parents realization of parenting as a lifelong learning process and need to think systematically about parenting

* **Duration of evaluation:**

Three years

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