the evaluation exchange

A PERIODICAL ON EMERGING STRATEGIES IN EVALUATING CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

from the director's desk

Today we know much more about how young children develop and about how early childhood programs can make a difference than ever before. We know this in large part because of lessons learned from over 40 years of collecting data. While this issue of *The Evaluation Exchange* reinforces the fact that we have this knowledge, it also challenges us to think about why we have not come farther in helping to improve many children's lives and increase their chances for success. Too many young children are impacted by an achievement gap, particularly children of color who live in poverty. But why does the achievement gap persist to such an extent when we have data that tell us how it can be decreased?

In this issue of *The Evaluation Exchange,* we shine a spotlight on early childhood studies and the achievement gap in a time of increasing accountability. Authors contributing to this issue offer divergent perspectives; appreciating and addressing these differences may help us better understand what we know, how we came to know it, what else we need to know, and what we should do to address one of the key policy questions of the day: Are we leaving any children behind?

Leading us in this inquiry is our guest editor for this issue, Lisa Klein. Lisa, a well-known colleague in the early childhood community, graciously accepted our invitation to provide guidance and expertise in the development of this issue. We thank her for her considerable effort and for what we believe to be an outstanding collection of articles.

The complexities of how children learn and grow are matched by the complexities of designing measures and methods for evaluating their progress. Early childhood evaluation must extend beyond understanding child outcomes to understanding the multiple factors that contribute to those outcomes. Contributors urge us to understand early childhood as a comprehensive system of supports for children and families.

Articles describe evaluations used as learning tools for program improvement and rigorous experimental and control research designs used for ultimate impact analyses. Again we address the challenge of how to make data relevant and useful to those who influence programs and policies for young children and families.

Taken together, the articles in this issue emphasize that children's development is impacted by the context in which they live—their families, educational settings, communities, and broader society. Education in early learning settings is part of a continuum that includes schools and out-of-school time programs as well; and achievement hinges on this entire spectrum of supports.

Experts in early childhood are united in the desire to close the achievement gap and prepare young children for success in school. They do, however, have different ideas about the available evidence and the evidence still needed to make decisions for program or policy action. With this installment of *The Evaluation Exchange*, we hope to provide food for thought as the early childhood field continues to grapple with these difficult issues. As always, we welcome your thoughts and contributions.

Heather

Heather B. Weiss, Ed.D.
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Heather Weiss

in this issue

Early Childhood Programs and Evaluation

> from the guest editor

The Current State of Early Childhood Education

Lisa Klein, principal at Hestia Advising, is the guest editor of this issue of The Evaluation Exchange *on early childhood education. With 20 years of experience in the nonprofit sector and at the Kauffman Foundation, she currently provides consultation services to early childhood and family support programs on their development, design, and evaluation.*

The field of early childhood is entering middle age. Its infancy began in 1965 with the country's first and only federally funded program—Head Start. The premise for supporting programs, research, and policies for young children, both then and now, is that intervention in the early years prepares children for later success. This means all our children—including those living in poverty and those in the working and middle classes. Now, nearly a half century later, where are we in reaching that goal?

Depending on what is being assessed, anywhere from 25%–60% of our young children are not ready to be successful when they begin kindergarten. Of the children who drop out of high school, half were behind before they even entered a kindergarten classroom. And half of *those* children will never make up their achievement gap.

Why is it that this gap remains when we know from over 40 years of research and program evaluation that high quality programs in the earliest years result in cognitive, social, and emotional gains in children, particularly low-income children of color? Why do we tolerate the gap when recent studies by economists examining the cost-benefit ratio of early intervention show tremendous payoffs?

Despite these findings we continue to debate whether the science is good enough and the results valid enough to believe. There are ongoing discussions about the economic cost and the value of providing the high quality interventions needed to produce positive results. In fact, we continue to spend both public and private sector money to repeatedly address many of the same questions only to get the same answers. What sense is there in doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results?

In this time of intense scrutiny and accountability, let's be clear: For at least a decade we have known the kinds of interventions we need and the kinds of results to expect from them. Don't get me wrong—we have more detailed questions to answer and we must address them with the most rigor that science has to offer. However, we should ask ourselves two disturbing questions: Why do we continue to tolerate the achievement gap when we could remedy the problem? Will we still be in the same situation as we approach the end of the 21st century?

I wonder if the heart of the issue comes down to the very bedrock on which our country was established. I believe that individual responsibility should be cherished and protected. However, I do not believe this value means that parents must raise their children completely on their own. A lack of supports for families that would choose them is a recipe for failure for too many of our young children. As the field of early childhood enters its golden years, I hope the success of our youngest citizens will be the legacy of our oldest citizens and the key to a bright future for us all.

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Evaluating Early Childhood Services:
What's Really Behind the Curtain

Jack Shonkoff, from the Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University, reflects on the difficulties created by the highly politicized environment of program evaluation.

Early childhood programs have been a part of the nation's social policy landscape for decades. Beginning with the establishment of Head Start and the Handicapped Children's Early Education Program in the 1960s and extending into the debates over early care and education in the 2000s, the call for public investment has been impassioned and the demand for accountability has been persistent.

A Historical Perspective

Looking back over the past 40 years, it might be useful to think about the early childhood evaluation enterprise as a succession of three stages. The first could be named "Don't just stand there, do something!" as the compelling nature of the needs focused on the urgency for action rather than the value of research.

The second stage could be labeled "Don't just do something, stand there!" During this period, thoughtful leadership began to focus on the need to step back and reflect on a core set of important questions about why programs do what they do and what they are trying to accomplish. When they were done well, these efforts resulted in the construction, testing, and ongoing refinement of highly useful theories of change.[1]

In 2000 a comprehensive report was released by the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences entitled *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. Based on a critical analysis of extensive research, the committee identified the essential features of effective programs. These include:

- Individualized service delivery
- High quality program implementation
- Appropriate knowledge and skills of service providers
- Positive relationships between parents and professionals

The report concluded the following:

> The general question of whether early childhood programs can make a difference has been asked and answered in the affirmative innumerable times. This generic query is no longer worthy of further investigation. The central research priority for the early childhood field is to address more important sets of questions about how different types of

[1]A program's theory of change explicitly articulates how the activities provided lead to the desired results by linking service receipt to intermediate changes (such as changes in attitudes or in-program behaviors to short- and longer-term outcomes in participants.

When program evaluation is conducted in a high-stakes political environment, reflective thinking is minimized, the status quo is reinforced, and critical thinking is stifled.

interventions influence specific outcomes for children and families who face differential opportunities and vulnerabilities. (p. 379)

This agenda defines the parameters of the third stage in the evolution of early childhood evaluation: "How do we know what's really making a difference?" This is where the rubber truly needs to hit the road. This is the time to ask and answer the tough questions about what kinds of services have what kinds of impacts, on what kinds of children, in what kinds of families, under what kinds of circumstances, and at what cost.

The Current Challenge

Currently we should be well into the third stage. The problem is that many of the most important questions are very hard to answer. Much has been written about the difficulties of evaluating early childhood programs. The limitations of non-experimental and quasi-experimental designs have been well described; the imperative of randomized, controlled studies to answer causal questions has been hammered home again and again. The logistical and financial barriers that must be scaled to successfully conduct high quality longitudinal studies are legendary. The ethical concerns about random assignment of vulnerable children and their families to "no treatment" control groups have been debated endlessly. When all is said and done, however, the most vexing obstacles to truly informative evaluation research may well be less a matter of science and more a matter of politics.

The Politicized Context of Program Evaluation

In order to understand the complex politics of early childhood evaluation research, it is necessary to recognize the difference between two very different pursuits of knowledge: *knowledge for understanding* and *knowledge for advocacy.*

Knowledge for understanding is typically referred to as scholarship or science. Its primary purpose in the early childhood arena is to disentangle the complicated dynamics of human development and elucidate the multiple influences on selected outcomes. Generally speaking, this type of research is a fascinating but relatively low-stakes enterprise that is engaged in an impartial search for "truth." In its purest form, it is cautious, conservative, and focused on what we *don't know.*

Knowledge for advocacy is what some people call lobbying. Its primary aim is to use data to influence the formulation of a particular policy or the delivery of a specific service. In most circumstances, this type of pursuit is a challenging and relatively high-stakes enterprise that is engaged in a dedicated campaign to prove a point. In its most common form, it is bold, assertive, and focused on how much we *do know.*

The difference between these two agendas strikes at the heart of the dilemma facing the early childhood arena. In theory, objective and independent knowledge for understanding would be the lifeblood of the field. In the best of all worlds, it would be welcomed by providers, recipients, and funders of services as a major source of new ideas about how to promote the healthy development of young children. Toward this end, the field would move beyond documenting success and would direct attention toward interventions that appear to be least effective in order to generate alternative strategies that can be tried, assessed, and refined continuously over time.

In reality, a great deal of evaluation research seeks knowledge for advocacy. This is encountered most commonly when evaluation is linked directly to decisions about core program funding, particularly when the results are used to determine whether or not a program should continue to exist. Under such circumstances, the rational strategy for any service provider is to assure that data are generated and presented in a way that demonstrates a program's success rather than questions its impact. Conversely, the agenda for an opponent of the program is to demonstrate its failure.

When program evaluation is conducted in a high-stakes political environment, reflective thinking is minimized, the status quo is reinforced, and critical thinking is stifled. Studies that demonstrate positive impacts are more likely to be disseminated, those that show nonsignificant effects frequently end up in a file drawer, and honest attempts to generate constructive criticism in the service of improving quality are seriously undermined. A field that shines a bright light on its failures and searches for lessons to be learned is more likely to remain healthy and grow. A field that focuses exclusively on its accomplishments and buries its shortcomings has a less promising future.

Stated simply, there must be a fundamental change in the culture of program evaluation that creates a safe environment for honest investigation and redefines what we mean by "positive" and "negative" findings. In a better world, a positive result would be defined as an insight or conclusion that advances our knowledge, not a finding that simply affirms what we are already doing. In a similar spirit, a negative result of an evaluation would be less about exposing failure and more about the disappointment of not learning anything new.

The primary responsibility for overcoming this political burden should not be placed on the backs of service providers and their research partners. These individuals are simply responding to the pragmatic pressures coming from their funders. The ultimate solution to this dilemma lies squarely in the laps of those who link core funding decisions explicitly to the production of positive evaluation results rather than reward serious self-criticism in the service of continuous improvement.

Creating a True Learning Environment

As for children, the healthy development of the early childhood field requires a safe and nurturing environment that provides opportunities for exploration, builds on previous experiences, promotes judicious risk taking, and learns from mistakes. This kind of environment would promote a spirit of collaboration and partnership among parents, service providers, evaluators, and funders. And it would lead to broad-based agreement about the need for unbiased and honest investigation to learn as much as possible about how to get the highest achievable return on the investment of finite resources in high quality programs that are well implemented by skilled providers.

Finally, it is essential that the dissemination of research be viewed as a science unto itself. Simply publishing findings is not sufficient to influence policymaking, service delivery, and the continuing growth of the early childhood field. New knowledge must be framed strategically to be accessible to its intended target audiences, particularly if the goal is to communicate with multiple and diverse stakeholders.

In 2003 a multidisciplinary group of leading scientists in neurobiology, early childhood development, and communications research established the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (www.developingchild.net) to address this challenge. Its mission is to serve as a credible knowledge broker for multiple audiences by bringing sound and accurate science to bear on public decision making that affects the health and development of young children.

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Reference

Shonkoff, J. P., & Phillips, D. A. (Eds.). (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development.* Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Related Resource

Research Connections, a collaboration between the National Center for Children in Poverty, the Child Care Bureau, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, promotes high quality research in child care and early education and the use of that research to inform policymaking. The collaboration serves as a medium for connecting child care and early education, offering research, data sets, and syntheses from multiple disciplines to integrate the early childhood field, and making evidence available and easy for policymakers to access. www.childcareresarch.org

Transitioning to School:
Policy, Practice, and Reality

Robert Pianta, from the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education, shares some ideas for improving the competencies of young children during the transition from preschool to kindergarten and into the early years of grade school.

This commentary draws on my involvement in several large-scale research and intervention efforts related to schooling and young children, work conducted in partnership with schools and school systems. This approach to supporting effective transitions has been implemented in at least three states, and our efforts have been supported by two major studies: the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development (NICHD SECCYD) and the National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL). The study approach used in these efforts is guided by a developmental systems theory model of early schooling.[1] The model underscores the premise that children's competence in the early years of schooling is fundamentally intertwined with properties of the contexts and settings in which these competencies are fostered.

Assessing School Readiness

Central to any focus on early education is the goal of fostering the child's emerging social and academic competencies. Parents often wonder whether their child is ready for school as they face the prospect of registration for kindergarten; teachers focus on how best to assess, judge, or predict whether a child or group of children is ready for school; and communities deliberate how to marshal and deploy resources to improve children's readiness. Underlying all these questions is an assumption that readiness is best understood in terms of aspects of a child's performance that can be assessed, and that such assessments will result in information that can be used to predict how well a child will adapt in school.

We conducted NCEDL-sponsored surveys of kindergarten teachers on the readiness of children to adapt to the demands of the classroom environment. Specifically, we asked a nationwide sample of more than 3,500 kindergarten teachers to identify the attributes that contributed most to children's failure to adjust well in the early months of kindergarten. Among a large number of identified attributes, the most frequently listed had to do with following directions, preacademic skills, getting along with peers, and cooperation—a cluster of skills that reflect "teachability." These teachers estimated that 16% of their current classroom had substantial difficulty and that another 30% had problems in these areas. In sum, survey responses suggested that almost half

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[1] Developmental systems theory provides a framework to examine how multiple elements (biological, psychological, behavioral, and environmental) interact and shape a person's life.

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the children who entered kindergarten had difficulty during the transition period.

As noted above, "readiness" connotes assumptions about the stability of children's skills and the extent to which assessment can predict the need for additional help or intervention. To explore this issue, we conducted a comprehensive analysis of all available published studies that reported information on the stability of children's social/behavioral and cognitive/academic competence over the transition from preschool to kindergarten.

Our analysis of over 70 published studies has shown significant instability in the way children perform on formal assessments of academic and social skills during the transition period. This low level of stability across time raises serious concerns about how accurately formal assessments of children's academic, cognitive, or social skills conducted prior to school can forecast performance at kindergarten entry.

Variation in the Nature and Quality of Early Education Classrooms

The NICHD SECCYD and NCEDL research programs also conducted extensive observation-based descriptions of classroom environments in prekindergarten, kindergarten, and first-grade settings. Observations were scheduled on the days and times teachers identified as being the most academic; they describe classroom settings, teacher practices and behaviors, and social and instructional quality in more than 1,500 classrooms in the pre-K to first-grade period.

Overwhelmingly, data show exceptional variability in experiences offered to children. Although for the most part children were involved in whole-group experiences throughout much of the day, in many rooms there were no occasions in which the child was taught in a whole group. Literacy instruction was the predominant activity, but in a substantial number of rooms there were no literacy activities at all. In fact, over 20% of first-grade classrooms were rated "poor" on the amount and quality of literacy experience offered to children. There was little to no evidence of consistency in children's experiences, nor was it evident that children had access to high quality experiences.

In general, the picture that emerges of the modal (i.e., typical) pre-K to first-grade classroom indicates that children are exposed to mostly whole-group activities in a fairly positive social environment but are exposed to generally mixed-to-low levels of productivity and engagement. That is, the classroom is generally characterized as socially positive but academically/instructionally passive—children mostly listen and watch. A large portion of time is spent on routines or management of activities and materials, and children have little direct contact with teachers in instructional situations. These settings are generally well organized, busy places, but they lack what we call "intentionality"—the directed,

designed, rich interactions between children and teachers in which teachers purposefully challenge, scaffold, and extend children's skills.

Another major finding relates to the factors used for policy. Regulating classroom quality based on the level and nature of teachers' education and experience, on whether or not there is a curriculum in place, or even on class size bears little or no relation to the nature and quality of experiences offered to most children in early education classrooms.

Transition Practices and Policies: Linking Children, Families, and Schools

The NCEDL research program has been focused on the ecology of transition, that is, the connections among the various areas in which competence develops: families, classrooms, teachers, schools, and communities. Our survey of kindergarten teachers across the United States indicated that for the most part school practices intended to better link families and children to school are too late, too impersonal, and too cursory to have much of an effect.

The vast majority of school-related transition practices (over 90%), for example, involve group meetings or letters to parents after school starts! Teachers identify a number of barriers to offering more comprehensive and intensive family-focused transition experiences, most of which are bureaucratic in nature (e.g., the lack of a transition plan or focus in the school or school district, or teachers not receiving a class list until the week before school starts).

Our subsequent work with more than 100 families suggested that transitions can be improved by building and maintaining supporting relationships and effective communication with families starting the year before the child enters school and continuing through the kindergarten year.

Conclusions and Implications

As noted above, research on the predictive validity[2] of many commonly used formal assessments of young children raises doubts about the usefulness of these tools. It also suggests that solely focusing on skills and competencies during the transition from preschool to kindergarten may be a mistaken strategy. Clearly, classrooms vary as much as children in the first few years of school. The level of variation in children's classroom experiences is considerable and does not appear to be a result of tailoring a curriculum to children's needs. Instead, this variability suggests there is little agreement on curriculum or how best to deliver it.

It was also the case that the instructional value in these early education classroom settings was fairly low. For the most part, classrooms exhibited only moderate or low levels of productivity or richness of instruction, with children typically engaged at a low or passive level.

[2] Predictive validity refers to an assessment's capacity to accurately predict something that it, in theory, should be able to predict.

The few associations found between classroom quality and the educational level and experience of teachers have been weak.

These findings suggest that it is not curriculum per se that should be the primary focus of policymakers; instead, it appears that *implementation of curriculum* is the key issue. Policies that result in provision of direct and thorough feedback to teachers regarding high quality implementation may result in better outcomes for children than policies that focus on one or another curricular approach.

The few associations found between classroom quality and the educational level and experience of teachers have been weak. These findings raise questions about the effectiveness of the teacher credentialing and reward system in ensuring high quality experiences for young children. In fact, we argue that rather than linking a reward structure and professional development system to credentials and educational levels, it may make more sense to link professional development and reward structures to observable indicators of classroom quality.

Finally, our work on transition planning and processes has changed how we think about the outcomes of early school transition. Family-school links should indeed be considered an outcome of the early school transition. Linkages and relationships are an important part of the transition ecology and contribute heavily to children's school competence. The transition to school is a period in which every parent of an entering child begins a new relationship with that child's school or teacher. A child's competence in a kindergarten classroom may not be the only or the best outcome measure of a successful transition. Instead, the quality of the parents' relationships with teachers, with school staff, and with the child's schooling may be an equally valid indicator of transition outcome.

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Related Resource

With support from the U.S. Department of Education's Institute for Educational Sciences, the **National Center for Early Development and Learning** is committed to enhancing the cognitive, social, and emotional development of children from birth through age 8. For further information on the center's work, visit the website at www.fpg.unc.edu/~NCEDL.

North Carolina's Smart Start Initiative: A Decade of Evaluation Lessons

Donna Bryant and Karen Ponder describe the evaluation of Smart Start—North Carolina's nationally recognized early childhood initiative—and share some of what the evaluation team has learned during the past 10 years.

The Smart Start initiative aims to ensure that all children under 5 are healthy and prepared for school. Former North Carolina governor Jim Hunt launched Smart Start in 1993 with legislation that also established the North Carolina Partnership for Children, a nonprofit organization that provides technical assistance and oversight for Smart Start statewide. Beginning with 18 counties, Smart Start has expanded each year and now encompasses all 100 counties in the state. Currently, 81 local or multicounty partnerships participate in Smart Start.

Smart Start's success is based on a few key elements: local decision making, community planning and collaboration, and a comprehensive approach to reach all children. Each local partnership develops a comprehensive plan that targets the community's greatest needs across three core service areas: child care (quality, affordability, and availability), health, and family support. Each part of this plan must connect to measurable outcomes, and services must not duplicate existing statewide or local efforts.

From the beginning, a statewide evaluation team was funded through the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), consisting of evaluators and researchers from the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute (FPG) and other schools and departments at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The evaluation's goal was to provide answers to some key questions:

- How was the process working?
- Did Smart Start–funded efforts improve child care quality?
- Was Smart Start good for children?

Between 1993 and 2003, over 35 studies were conducted. Following is a discussion of some of the findings and lessons learned from those studies.

The Value of a Logic Model[1]
The first 12 Smart Start partnerships funded 220 different activities at the local level in the first year. Evaluators were thus challenged to define what Smart Start really was and how "it" should be evaluated. The team developed a post-hoc logic model that organized and simplified the multitude of activities, based

An evaluation's value to any initiative is diminished if policymakers perceive the evaluators as cheerleaders versus objective reporters.

mainly on their delivery process and intended outcome. A tally of where the bulk of Smart Start dollars was being spent—on child care quality and school readiness, families, medical care, and the collaboration process itself—guided evaluation efforts, which then focused on these activities.

Documenting Implementation
Partnerships reported their service counts (of the number of children involved, the number of child care teachers participating, etc.) and the amount of private contributions, both in terms of cash and volunteer time, on a quarterly basis. Tracking was initially done on paper, then on diskette, and is now done via a web-entry system. FPG summarized data quarterly and annually for the state partnership and provided continuing technical assistance to counties to increase accuracy. These monitoring data have been coupled with other evaluation information to help tell the story of the initiative, particularly in the early years before impacts could be shown.

Objectivity, Expectations, and Outcomes That Matter
Four large samples of preschool classrooms were observed in 1994, 1996, 1999, and 2001 to document quality over time and to associate increases in quality with the level of centers' participation in improvement activities funded by Smart Start. The steadily increasing classroom quality scores were influential to policymakers, although what seemed to matter most to them were scores involving children's outcomes:

- Children attending centers that participated in Smart Start technical assistance (TA) were rated by teachers as more ready to succeed at kindergarten entry.
- Children from participating centers were rated by teachers as having 50% fewer language delays and behavior problems.
- Observations in 120 classrooms and assessments of 512 children showed significant relationships between Smart Start TA, classroom quality, and children's abilities and knowledge as they entered kindergarten.

Some studies have assessed the quality of family child care, linking it to providers' participation in Smart Start. Others have described the range of families participating in Smart Start–funded programs, documented higher rates of immunization and having a primary health care provider, and shown a 50% increase in the number of centers serving children with disabilities.

None of the quantitative studies described above could be considered "causal," as counties were not randomly assigned to receive Smart Start, nor were centers randomly assigned to receive technical assistance. (Random assignment is considered the best way to show that one intervention is better than another, because

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[1] A logic model illustrates how the initiative's activities connect to the outcomes it is trying to achieve.

it assures that the groups being compared are equivalent at the beginning on the characteristics of importance.) Smart Start's approach to understanding effectiveness, given that it did not use random assignment, was to steadily build evidence of a number of associations between factors and outcomes that could logically be interpreted as an effect of Smart Start.

Funders and policymakers were shown that no single study would answer all their questions. Evaluators had to resist the temptation to overstate the results; rather, they had to make very clear to decision makers what the results did and did not say. An evaluation's value to any initiative is diminished if policymakers perceive the evaluators as cheerleaders versus objective reporters.

Throughout its 10 years of evaluating Smart Start, the team also conducted several qualitative studies that focused on the following:

- Needs of local partnerships
- Partnerships' decision-making processes
- The challenges of involving parents and business partners
- The nature of the public-private partnership

Information from these studies has helped state leaders justify the financial commitment, add appropriate technical assistance, revise or recommend policies and procedures to improve the program, and explain how results were achieved. For example, a qualitative study using in-depth interviews with dozens of leaders in partnerships where quality had most significantly increased led to better insights about which strategies and activities must be implemented to truly have an effect.

Rigorous Methods

In the increasing push for accountability, policymakers have become more aware of the ideal of the "gold standard" randomized experiment. As noted above, Smart Start studies could not meet this standard. Whenever possible, though, random selection was used to enroll child care centers, teachers, family providers, families, and children into the studies. Data collectors were trained on standards of reliability and did observations in the field. When studies involved pre and post visits, two different data collectors were assigned. Data entry was double-keyed, and sophisticated analyses were conducted. Rigorous research methods in both qualitative and quantitative studies lent credibility to the results.

Translating Data to Change Practices

The evaluation team was fortunate to enjoy good relationships with both DHHS funders and the state Smart Start partnership staff. The funders and the partnership staff read all draft reports and added views from a policy standpoint that evaluators may have overlooked. Results could be understood and acted on by those most able to effect change. For example, findings from one child care study showed that certain types of quality improvement TA were more likely to be related to positive child outcomes than others. County consultants were able to use these results to recommend activities with the most impact and to decline funding for services with limited impact.

Supporting Local Evaluators

The FPG team helped train and support local evaluators so that local partnerships could compare outcomes for different local initiatives or determine whether partnerships were meeting their community goals. Approximately 50% of the partnerships employed a local evaluator either on staff or via contract. FPG support to partnerships included writing job descriptions, serving as a resource for assessment tools and reports, including local evaluators in training sessions for FPG data collectors, conducting quarterly meetings of the 50–60 local evaluators across the state, and hosting an annual evaluation conference where outside speakers would share useful information.

As a result of difficult budget times in 2002, the legislature discontinued funding for a statewide evaluation, but the team took pride in the cadre of capable local evaluators who continue to work on behalf of Smart Start all across the state, evidence that evaluation has indeed been built into the core of the initiative.

Evaluation has been used both to help improve Smart Start and to show its worth. Process studies conducted over the years helped describe and clarify the nature of the program, and provided food for thought and action until quality improvement could be observed and related to children's outcomes.

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Related Resources

Bryant, D., Maxwell, K., & Burchinal, M. (1999). **Effects of a community initiative on the quality of child care.** *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 14,* 449–464.

Buysse, V., Wesley, P. W., Bryant, D., & Gardner, D. (1999). **Quality of early childhood programs in inclusive and noninclusive settings.** *Exceptional Children, 65,* 301–314.

The Smart Start evaluation website. www.fpg.unc.edu/smartstart

Closing the Achievement Gap: Head Start and Beyond

In this segment of Ask the Expert, three figures instrumental in the early childhood care and education field discuss the past and future of Head Start. The panel includes Ed Zigler, Sterling Professor of Psychology at the Bush Center for Child Development, Ron Haskins, senior policy analyst at the Brookings Institution, and G. Reid Lyon, branch chief in the Child Development and Behavior Branch at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD).

How has the original design of Head Start and its intended role in closing the achievement gap evolved or been interpreted differently over time?

Zigler: The original planners of Head Start created a comprehensive set of services for young children that encompassed physical and mental health, nutrition, education, and social services, and included a strong parent involvement component. In hindsight, the program had too many goals; and these were too complicated for people to grasp easily. Though not intended by the planning committee, in the early years of Head Start, IQ improvement appeared to be the key goal. This continued until I became the federal official responsible for the program. At that time, social competence was enunciated as the single overarching goal of Head Start. I have argued, along with my colleagues, that social competence encompasses two key factors: (1) meeting social expectancies and (2) the child's self-actualization.

In the 1998 Head Start reauthorization, school readiness was clearly proclaimed as the goal of the program. In a paper I am just completing I make clear that the goals of school readiness and social competence are highly similar.

Haskins: President Johnson said we must do something "to bring these kids to the starting line, equal." We're still trying to figure out how. The goal of Head Start may have been worded differently over time, but at the core it was and is to help get low-income children ready to go to school.

Lyon: There is no doubt that young children need to develop social competencies. Children cannot learn if they do not know how to interact in groups and understand social rules and norms. Children must be nurtured in a warm and comfortable environment that promotes positive self-concept and self-esteem. Many Head Start programs have focused on these areas and have done a good job of promoting social and emotional health in young children. There is also no question that children must be physically healthy and well nourished. No one can learn and develop

President Johnson said we must do something "to bring these kids to the starting line, equal." We're still trying to figure out how.

Ron Haskins,
The Brookings Institution

optimally if they are hungry or sick. Head Start has also done a good job of systematically interacting with parents and families around these needs.

However, today the goal is to prepare children for success in school. We must realize that children between birth and age 5 need to learn about language, reading, and math. If we ignore the development of these competencies in preschool, all of the gains in social and emotional development will be negated when children later fail in school because they cannot close the gaps in language and literacy development.

What do you believe the latest research tells us about Head Start and its contribution to closing the achievement gap?

Zigler: A review of the total literature on young children reveals without question that we have reduced some of the gap. Before the 1998 reauthorization, Congress asked the General Accounting Office (GAO) whether Head Start works. They did not give a definitive answer, explaining that many studies on the efficacy of Head Start used insufficiently rigorous methodologies. The GAO felt further hampered by the fact that many of these studies were pretty old. As a result the 1998 Head Start reauthorization ordered that a national impact study of the program be conducted using a rigorous methodology. I was among the group of experts who planned this random assignment study, which is now in the field.

As was the case in 1965, today there still is a sizable gap in the school readiness of middle-class children as compared to low-income children. Since 1965 all components of Head Start have been directed at helping low-income children be better prepared for school entry. For 40 years now I have warned that we not expect of Head Start more than any 1-year, half-day preschool program could possibly deliver. Head Start unquestionably reduces the achievement gap, but much of this gap remains even after children have had the Head Start experience. A recent paper by the Educational Testing Service, *Parsing the Achievement Gap,*[1] makes it clear that totally closing the achievement gap requires efforts beyond Head Start, including improving families, neighborhoods, and a variety of economic and social circumstances. This position is also articulated in a paper aptly entitled *Do You Believe in Magic?*[2]

[1] Barton, P. E. (2003). *Parsing the achievement gap: Baselines for tracking progress.* Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.
[2] Brooks-Gunn, J. (2000). *Do you believe in magic? What we can expect from early childhood intervention programs.* New York: Columbia University, Teachers College.

Haskins: Preschool programs have the potential for narrowing the achievement gap. They won't be the whole answer—the random assignment experiments and the benefit-cost analyses by themselves are now persuasive.

The data for preschool education are strong. There are flaws and many are not based on random assignment, so we have to be suspicious. Looking at the whole picture, if we could mount widespread programs that were even close to Perry Preschool, the Carolina Abecedarian Project, and the Chicago Child Parent Center Program,[3] I don't think there's any question that the kids would have higher readiness scores and avoid grade retention and special-ed placements. There would be impacts on graduation rates and maybe even on achievement test scores.

We're now spending almost $8 billion on Head Start, but as soon as the government's flush again, Congress will start making more investments in the program. Why? Because of belief—versus knowledge—that Head Start does the trick: that it helps kids everyone agrees need help. Based on evidence, in some cases it does and in some it does not. I think the best message is that Head Start should be able to do it and we should believe in it, but it's not doing it now and we need to improve the program so it does.

Lyon: We know substantially more today than we ever have known about what children from birth through age 5 can learn and how they learn it. First, children can acquire more information in these early years than we ever thought possible. They learn best in warm, nurturing environments and from teachers and parents that have knowledge about how young children develop. Second, we know that reading development and achievement can be predicted by vocabulary and early literacy development in the first 5 years of life.

We know from the evidence that young children can and do like learning about everything, including language, reading, and math. The science clearly shows that children do well in school when they are in nurturing environments and have lots of interaction with literacy, vocabulary, and language. Yet language, early literacy, and numeracy development have not been emphasized by many Head Start and other early childhood programs. Conventional wisdom holds that the preschool years are a time for children to explore their world in a "non-hurried" manner. When we talk about 3- and 4-year-olds learning about letters and sounds, numbers, and word meanings, many people tend to visualize children being taught these concepts as they sit at desks and receive boring, repetitive instruction. Obviously, this type of instruction would not be appropriate at any age.

[3] For more information on these programs visit the National Institute for Early Education Research website, at www.nieer.org.

> *We know substantially more today than we ever have known about what children from birth through age 5 can learn and how they learn it.*
>
> G. Reid Lyon,
> *National Institute of Child Health and Human Development*

What are the strategic investments in research and evaluation that have most impacted the field of early childhood and what research/evaluation investments do you recommend for the future?

Zigler: There is the seminal research from Perry Preschool, Abecedarian, and the Chicago program. We also have important data from longitudinal studies such as the Cornell Consortium, the Cost Quality and Outcomes Study, the NICHD Child Care Study and the federal government's Early Childhood Learning Studies (ECLS and ECLS-K).

More studies like James Heckman's work on the economic impact of investing in early intervention and Art Reynolds' work showing cost-benefit comparisons of different programs would be very useful. We also need more outcome studies that use the most rigorous methods and research designs, and better measures with good psychometric properties relevant for different cultural groups. Research should further explore how specific factors contribute to social competence. Additionally, we need to know if there is an increase in children's achievement and development based on the level of educational degree that their teachers have, so we can determine the appropriate amount to invest in education and training.

Haskins: The model programs that have been referenced showed what could be done and have really had a tremendous impact. The benefit-cost figures, which I think are not necessarily highly scientific or reliable, are powerful, because you have congressmen throwing around the reference "$7 for every dollar invested." If they believe that, they're likely to support the program.

We need to go beyond the national impact study of Head Start. We should figure out how to design a random assignment study on a large scale. Optimally the program would serve every poor kid in a county or preferably in a few states. In an ideal situation, there would be two interventions: one with 4-year-olds and one with 3- and 4-year-olds. We would need to coordinate resources from Head Start, Child Care, and Title I, and get additional resources as well.

Evaluation needs to be at the heart of the strategy. You've got to have accountability, continuing improvement, continuing evaluation, or as I call it "continuing accountability."

Lyon: Susan Landry has strong evidence from the CIRCLE program that suggests how we construct early learning environments makes a difference and that if done right, we can close the achievement gap. But these findings do not yet come from controlled trials. We must do a better job and set a gold standard for this type of research.

We've invested so much in early education and yet have not systematically studied the effect of our efforts. Because of this shortcoming in our previous research efforts, we are just now finishing

up the first year of a 5-year research initiative that was launched by Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson and Education Secretary Rod Paige, in December 2003.

Research must rely on good measures. We now have more and better measures in the area of language and cognitive development than we do in social and emotional development, but we need improvements in all areas. To understand and account for program effects, we need to measure where kids are in their development. We should also conduct assessment and measurement for instructional purposes.

Beyond early childhood programs, what should we be doing to close the gap?

Zigler: We should construct social policy based on what the science tells us. We should set up programs that have the necessary levels of quality and intensity that we know result in positive outcomes. We should insist that children in the bottom 10%–15% of income do not find themselves in the type of early care and education that compromises their development. We should establish programs for poor children from birth to age 3 similar to Early Head Start, follow these with preschool programs such as universal prekindergarten and Head Start, and then with schools that provide quality education through grade three so that children read on grade level by the end of third grade.

We should do a better job of supporting parents so they can raise their children to reach their full potential. We should not tolerate the level of violence our children are exposed to in their neighborhoods and instead should rebuild our communities. We must continue in our efforts to lift families out of poverty, which we know to be devastating on the growth and development of children.

Haskins: People ought to start saying, "We've got to do this now." We need to have a strategy and the money for every poor 4-year-old to have a high quality preschool program for at least 1 year, maybe 2.

The question is whether a preschool program can do the trick by itself. Families are important. Head Start claims it involves the family, encouraging adults to talk more to kids and engage them in highly intellectual activities such as asking probing questions and having discussions—not just reading books. I think, too, that it's extremely important to change methods of discipline. I've never seen any evidence that Head Start has been able to change the behavior of parents. Parents *should* do things that are more conducive to their children's development, but I don't think we should depend on that alone. We have to count on preschool programs to help.

From the very beginning, part of the logic of Head Start has been to work with the families and not just the kids. An evaluation in Oklahoma found really big impacts with African-Amer-

ican kids, pretty big impacts for Hispanic kids, and mixed results for middle-class kids, regardless of race. We know talking to kids and effective discipline contribute to good child development. Kids from middle-income families get a lot more of that from their parents than low-income kids do. For middle-class kids, being away from their mother may not be helpful to their early development.

If money were no object, achieving quality would mean doing two things: making sure kids get a good program—a head start beginning at age 4 or maybe age 3—and working with the mother during her pregnancy, like in Early Head Start.

Another of the most pressing and immediate problems is violence among adolescent boys and people released from prison. Six hundred thousand men will come out of prison this year; many of them are fathers. We are spending less to help them now than we were 20 years ago.

Lyon: There has been a debate about the importance of social and emotional development *versus* cognitive and literacy development. I firmly believe that existing evidence in early childhood can move us beyond unproductive debates and toward the development and implementation of comprehensive and integrated early childhood interactions.

We need to get the resources and knowledge from good research to the teachers of young children. We should develop standards for early childhood that more objectively support and prepare early educators. College and university training should prepare teachers to create healthy environments that support the healthy development of young children, and to be comfortable assessing the effects of their instruction on how well children are learning. The question we should be asking is, can we do better? The answer is, we have to.

What do you think about some of the current ideas to close the gap?

Zigler: I believe strongly in accountability. We should know what we are getting for our money. But I worry that there is currently too much emphasis on assessment. Regarding the No Child Left Behind Act, the jury is still out. We have to wait on what the evidence will show to know whether or not it will close the achievement gap.

I believe a comprehensive program like Head Start is the best way to impact the lives of young children, particularly children living under the most challenging conditions. Research backs this up with consistent evidence that there is no easy fix, no inoculation we can give little kids at a magic period in time that will prevent the problems that come from drugs, violence, lack of housing and health care, and extreme poverty.

> *I believe strongly in accountability. We should know what we are getting for our money. But I worry that there is currently too much emphasis on assessment.*
>
> *Ed Zigler,*
> *Bush Center for Child Development*

> ask the expert

Related Resources

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) is conducting two new federal interagency research initiatives:

- The **Program in Early Learning and School Readiness** oversees eight early childhood programs that were selected from a competitive grant competition. Using rigorous experimental designs, the research will address which programs or combinations of program components are effective for promoting early learning and development, for which children, and under what conditions. In the first year, the projects are receiving a total of $7.4 million from NICHD, the Administration for Children and Families, the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, and the Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.

- Plans are currently underway to promote the development of theory-driven, reliable, and valid approaches to measuring young children's outcomes. Lead by NICHD, the results of the work on **measurement development** will be used to inform early childhood programs and practices in prekindergarten, center, home, and family child care as well as Head Start. This project will determine what constructs should be measured and what the strengths and weaknesses are of available instruments. A set of instruments will be developed based on the project's results; these instruments will be based on theory, tailored to specific interventions, have practical relevance, and be appropriate for specific populations.

For more information on these initiatives visit www.nichd.nih.gov/crmc/cdb/p_learning.htm.

Today one of the most serious problems confronting both Head Start and the field of early childhood education is forming realistic goals for what we are trying to accomplish. Above all we must follow the Hippocratic oath and "do no harm." Recent criticisms of Head Start question why expectations for progress are so low. As a society we must do right by our young children, but we have to be honest about the conditions that our children face every day. Closing the achievement gap depends on constructing programs and policies with the quality and intensity that we know lead to positive outcomes. If we don't do this, what can we honestly expect?

Haskins: Lately, Head Start has not responded well to what the Administration has been trying to do. It may not be the right thing, but it does make sense to set expectations and determine if they are being achieved. It especially makes sense to try it on a demonstration basis in a couple of states to see if people knit together a system and get as many kids as possible in high quality programs.

As Ed and others say, Head Start is very uneven. There are some wonderful programs, but there are a fair number that aren't that great. We have to bring up the average quality of those programs, and especially the ones at the bottom. Head Start has got to play a role. Studies have shown that many state preschool programs appear to be inferior to Head Start. Even with its flaws, Head Start is not terrible. We all need to be more cooperative and try to figure out a way to work this out.

We have to be more insistent and tell policymakers that they can't do this on the cheap—if they don't spend at least $9,000 (an estimate of the cost per child with highly qualified teachers), the program won't work.

The implications are serious for Head Start, because it's the biggest single source of funding for early childhood. A big problem for our field is how to make this work, how to take advantage of all the money—the child care money, the Head Start money, the Title I money, maybe even the money in the tax code. We need to bring all this money together and have a strategy so that we can have these 4-year-olds, and maybe 3-year-olds, in high quality programs.

Lyon: All children must have access to warm, nurturing, yet systematic interactions by the time they reach kindergarten. If some families, for whatever reasons, cannot provide these, it is incumbent on our early childhood programs to support both the families and their children to close the gaps. However, we also need informed teaching and continuous assessment and monitoring of children's progress so the necessary instruction adjustments can be made if improvements are not observed.

We know from research that by age 3 there is already a substantial achievement gap between economically disadvantaged and advantaged children in vocabulary and print concepts. We also know that many disadvantaged children entering kindergarten have heard only half the words and can understand only half the meanings that children from more economically advantaged homes can. Without evidence-based early interventions, the vocabulary gap for many disadvantaged children will double by high school. Without this vocabulary knowledge, what students read will make little sense. We also know that similar gaps exist in critical pre-reading skills that include print knowledge and phonological awareness (an understanding of the sound structure of language), and that these gaps will not close without informed, systematic early interventions.

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The Road From Research to Outcomes

Jana Martella, from the Council of Chief State School Officers, describes the organization's use of data-driven efforts to help develop and integrate policy into the nation's school systems.

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is a nonpartisan, nationwide nonprofit organization of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in the nation's states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity (which educates the children of military service members and Department of Defense civilian employees), and five U.S. extra-state jurisdictions. The Council provides leadership, advocacy, and technical assistance on major educational issues. It works to achieve member consensus and communicate its views to civic and professional organizations, federal agencies, Congress, and the public.

The Council has recently adopted a vision statement to support a system of schooling in each state that ensures high standards of performance for children and prepares each child to become a productive member of a democratic society. This lofty goal is supported by and rooted in CCSSO's core value of making data-based decisions. To that end, CCSSO leads efforts to conduct, analyze, and disseminate high quality research to promote effective practice and change for school systems.

Though the emphasis on scientific rigor might be new, the use of research to impact policy and support implementation of effective practices has been the foundation of much of CCSSO's work to date. This research-driven approach is reflected in CCSSO's policy statement on early childhood and family education, which emphasizes new opportunities derived from advances in early education research over the last 20 years. As the statement says:

> Opportunity emanates from evidence from the fields of neuroscience, cognitive science and child development, that learning stretches from a child's first days. Research confirms what parents and teachers have long observed—that early learning creates the foundation for later achievement, and that efforts to strengthen K–12 education cannot succeed without a concerted effort to support the people and improve the programs entrusted with our youngest children.[1]

The Council has formulated its project work in early childhood education grounded in the research and armed with this policy statement.

Project work is designed to help chief state school officers, with their agency staff and partners, to develop state policy based on sound evidence and to translate that policy into effective practice in their school systems, where what is known should translate into what is done. An example of this challenging, adaptive process can be found in CCSSO's Mid-Atlantic Early Childhood Education Network (MECEN). This 5-year project is sponsored by the Laboratory for Student Success, one of 10 Regional Educational Laboratories funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences.

The network consists of five state teams initially convened by their chief state school officers and comprised of multiagency and organization representatives. The teams meet twice a year as a "learning community" to systemically plan and develop successful early learning practices in their states. To date, they have focused on the following:

- The quality and effects of early learning standards
- The preparation and development of the early childhood education profession
- The research on indicators of school readiness and the multidimensional supports to early learning provided by effective programming in health care, parental involvement, and transition

The recent economic downturn has created some challenge to getting investment from state policymakers. As a result, the MECEN has attended to financing and economic development strategies based on the multiple cost and benefit studies of high quality early childhood programming.

Evaluating our success is among the most important and challenging aspects of translating research into practice. As the MECEN early childhood project sets objectives for state programming, it is also developing ways to measure success. The state teams have considered learning outcomes of primary importance. They are therefore investigating the most effective accountability mechanisms, including key considerations on developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood assessment.

In addition, the teams are looking at how to rationalize their state education data systems so that the essential information needed to show longitudinal effects can be collected. MECEN members are also closely watching their colleagues in the 17-state School Readiness Indicators Initiative [An article describing this initiative is featured in this issue on page 26. —*Ed*.], as they conclude their work on the development of consensus benchmarks for school readiness.

In the end, the successful implementation of sound, research-based policy and practice in early childhood education in the mid-Atlantic region and across the country will be tantamount to the realization of CCSSO's vision: success for all children in school and in life. Though it will take time, evidence supports the belief that we *can* get there from here.

Additional information about early childhood projects at CCSSO can be found at www.ccsso.org/projects/early_childhood_and_family_education.

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[1] Council of Chief State School Officers. (1999). *Early childhood and family education: New realities, new opportunities. A council policy statement.* Washington, DC: Author.

Thoughts on Early Childhood Research: Improving Connections

Marilou Hyson and Heather Biggar, from the National Association for the Education of Young Children, describe ways to facilitate the sharing of research among early childhood practitioners, policymakers, and researchers.

John, who works on Capitol Hill, discards a paper on early childhood programs because it's not specific to the Head Start legislation he's working on. Jenny, a reporter, glances at a 20-page report on children with special needs but puts it aside because she has to file her story in 4 hours. Carol teaches in a pre-K program and gives up reading an article on school readiness after reading about the less-than-accessible sounding "cognitive advantage hypothesis."

Connections among early childhood researchers, practitioners, and policymakers can be improved in numerous ways. Among the steps that need to be taken are providing high quality opportunities for research-related professional development, publishing research in formats appropriate for various audiences, and promoting partnerships between researchers and practitioners to highlight the relevance of research and to identify issues that need further investigation.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), an organization of over 100,000 early childhood educators and other professionals, leads and consolidates efforts to achieve healthy development and constructive education for young children. Research is used to inform association positions and contribute to the development of user-friendly association products for people like John, Jenny, and Carol.

NAEYC facilitates the dissemination and integration of research through a number of avenues:

- *Publications.* In addition to disseminating books that distill research findings into effective practice, the association publishes *Young Children,* written for all NAEYC members—teachers, program administrators, and federal and state agency staff—and the *Early Childhood Research Quarterly,* a scholarly journal that publishes outstanding new research.
- *Conferences.* NAEYC hosts conferences that attract teachers, policymakers, program administrators, therapists, students, advocates, and researchers. Special sessions highlight new research, and organizers encourage all presenters to talk about the research that informs their work.
- *Standards.* NAEYC uses evidence-based standards developed in relation to the latest research findings to accredit programs and institutions of higher education.
- *Position statements.* NAEYC develops and adopts statements to articulate its position on issues such as early learning standards, mathematics, and child abuse prevention. Based on empirical research, position statements go directly into the hands of people who make decisions about classroom practices, legislation, and teacher preparation.

- *Public policy.* NAEYC advocates for specific issues on the basis of research and evaluation findings. To make research accessible to policymakers and grassroots advocates, NAEYC posts summaries of important national reports and research, along with links to the reports and articles, on its website.

In spite of these efforts, research is not integrated into the field as well as it could be, nor is it typically accessible to non-researchers in a format that is useful and understandable. To better reach policymakers and practitioners, NAEYC recommends adopting three principles:

1. *Be relevant and provide context.* Explain why a given finding is important and relevant to the issue at hand; give a real-world example of how it would be implemented to change child outcomes.
2. *Communicate clearly and avoid jargon.* Acronyms and jargon are useful within groups but tend to shut others out.
3. *Be brief.* Describe findings in a page or less and include information on where to find further details and additional resources.

Producers and consumers of research must also be aware of potential roadblocks. Researchers, policymakers, the press, and practitioners work on different timeframes. Research may take years to complete, and findings may not be available in time for congressional reauthorizations. The hourly deadlines of policy

Related Resource

With the help of a national commission, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), through its **accreditation reinvention project,** is developing revised standards to increase the credibility and reliability of its accreditation system. Once in place, the new standards will set research-based expectations for early childhood programs to promote positive learning and developmental outcomes. Criteria for each standard were developed by nine technical resource teams, comprised of researchers, early childhood educators, and administrators, with feedback from the public at large.

After Governing Board approval and beginning in 2005, early childhood programs seeking NAEYC accreditation will need to demonstrate compliance with each of the revised NAEYC program standards. For more information on the project visit www.naeyc.org/accreditation/default.asp

Learning a New Language: Effectively Communicating Early Childhood Research to State Legislators

Jack Tweedie, from the National Conference of State Legislatures, explains the keys to communicating research to legislators in a way that will encourage them not only to pay attention to it but also to use it to inform their policymaking.

How can researchers effectively communicate research and data to state legislators? Let's start by recognizing that communicating research to policymakers is different from communicating it to other researchers. Many good researchers will be uncomfortable communicating with legislators until they get used to these differences.

For early childhood research, the audience is comprised of legislators who play key roles in policymaking on issues affecting children and families, and the legislative staff who work with them. In most states, we are talking about the members of the education and human service committees and the legislators who sit on fiscal committees that deal with human services and education budgets. Speakers or majority leaders also play a role, particularly in deciding whether to give the go-ahead on major new initiatives or big spending increases. When contacting legislators about research, it is important to keep in mind the following:

- Legislators are very busy, with little time to learn about issues or look at research unless it is directly related to something they are focused on that day.
- Legislators are often overwhelmed by people and documents and ideas coming at them; they have little time to digest and respond. They need quick, often shorthand methods for understanding.

Optimally, publications should have one- or two-page summaries that tell readers what they should know and give them a reason to explore the issue further. Legislators often have to decide whether to spend more than a minute thinking about something. Effective research publications provide legislators who do not have a good understanding of an issue with the information they need. Keep in mind that legislators are usually generalists:

- Most legislators on education or human service committees will know a fair bit about some issues but not the full range of topics.
- Fiscal legislators and legislative leaders will know less about the substance of policies that affect children and families.
- The number of legislators who have a thorough understanding of a particular issue, such as early education or welfare policy, is seldom sufficient to get a new program or significant new spending through the legislature.

Presentations must grab legislators' attention up front. Talk to them like you would to your mother or brother, not your

Talk to [legislators] like you would to your mother or brother, not your dissertation advisor.

dissertation advisor. In writing, use plain language, graphs, and illustrations. Real-life examples that demonstrate conclusions are best. For example, start your discussion about how research shows that unstable child care is a principal reason many parents cannot stay employed with a story about a single mother who lost her job because her child care arrangements broke down. Legislators appreciate research information that is explained in ways accessible to laypersons, because legislators think in human terms, not in statistical or research ones. It is important, therefore, to combine research data with descriptions about how people are affected.

Lead with and focus on conclusions. Focus on what you can say, not on what you cannot say. Rely on your understanding of methods to guide what you present but keep discussion of methodology brief.

Listen to and pay attention to what legislators care about and address those concerns. Most legislators already have goals based on their own standards or their views of their constituency's interests. You should not assume they agree with research findings, nor should you try to convince them about what they should care about. Once you start arguing about values or goals, you become an advocate, not a researcher.

This caution is particularly important when you are discussing issues relating to the responsibilities of government or the relationship between government, children, and family. Legislators have a broad range of views on these issues, and most feel very strongly about their views. Be aware that legislators are politicians and deal regularly with claims and information from lobbyists and others focused on persuading them to take a certain position. They always look at from where the information is coming. Most have respect for neutral experts, but that respect is difficult to maintain.

It pays to take legislators seriously. Though few will know as much about your specialty as you, most have some concern for and understanding of the policy issues. Build on their understanding by correcting mistaken ideas rather than lecturing them about research conclusions. You want them to be informed as they vote and develop new legislation for young children, not to ace the final exam in Child Development 101.

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A conversation with
Art Rolnick

Art Rolnick has been director of research and public affairs at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis since 1985. He directs research on banking, monetary policy, economic growth, business cycles, labor markets, and related public policy issues. His staff regularly collect and analyze data on regional economies for reports presented at the Federal Open Market Committee, which is chaired by Alan Greenspan and is in charge of setting national monetary policy.

Q **What can state and local governments do to promote economic development?**

A Conventional economic development policies use public subsidies and tax breaks to attract businesses and jobs from one location to another. Such polices lead to economic bidding wars and are counterproductive. Allowing cities and states to lure businesses from other cities and states with public funds only moves jobs around; it does not create any new ones. Indeed, many of these businesses might have made the same location decision without the subsidy. And what happens when regions that have lost businesses begin to retaliate with higher subsidies and win some of the jobs back? The end result is that the public return on such investments is zero. And when the subsidy goes to high-risk businesses, ones that are likely to fail, the return can even be negative.

If providing public subsidies to private businesses is the wrong way to promote economic development, what is the right way? The research on this question is quite persuasive. It shows that state and local governments should instead use their limited resources on developing their public goods and, in particular, their communities' human capital, which is their workforce.

Q **When did you start to focus on early childhood development?**

A It began when I started to review the research on learning and brain development. I have been particularly influenced by the work of Professor James Heckman, Nobel Laureate in economics from the University of Chicago. I reviewed some of the key longitudinal research studies in early childhood development: the Abecedarian study, the Chicago Child Parent Center study, and the studies done in Ypsilanti and Syracuse.

Results consistently show that high quality early childhood programs help kids enter kindergarten with the skills they need to learn and that those children continue to be successful in school and ultimately become contributing members of society. Most significantly, the crime rate among those who participate in these programs falls dramatically. The research shows that positive outcomes for at-risk children can be achieved and that the cost-benefit ratio and rates of return yield a high public return. This is in contrast to the 0% return on public subsidies to private businesses that I referred to earlier. Less crime and a well-educated workforce lead to the long-term payoff of economic growth and development.

Q **Many of the studies you cite are not new and the cost-benefit rationale for investing in early childhood has been raised before. What is different about your approach?**

A Our frame of reference is economic, not social. We think of early childhood development as economic development in human capital. The studies show that the public gets a better return on its investment if government focuses its resources on human capital (education, especially education in the very early years) than on physical capital (businesses). The problem with promoting early childhood development as economic development is that it is a much longer-term project and a much less visible one than an investment in physical capital. Investments in early childhood education do not result in a factory or an office tower or a sports arena. Early childhood development is mostly invisible to the public and its benefits are mostly in the distant future.

Our approach to calculating net-benefits is also different. The 1963 Ypsilanti study (also known as the High/Scope study of the Perry Preschool Program), which followed students' performance for over 27 years, reported an 8:1 benefit-to-cost ratio. We used an alternative measure, the internal rate of return, to compare the public and the private return on investment. The internal rate of return is the interest rate received on an investment that consists of payments and revenues that occur at regular periods.

For the Perry Preschool Program, we estimated the time periods in which costs and benefits were paid or received by program participants and by the public in inflation-adjusted dollars. The result is an estimate of the average, annual real (adjusted for inflation) rate of return on investment at 4% to the individual and 12% to the public.

> *Research shows that positive outcomes for at-risk children can be achieved and that the cost-benefit ratio and rates of return yield a high public return.*

The return to the program participants was 4% because, on average, their earnings were that much more than nonparticipants' earnings. And the return to the public was 12% because, on average, the cost of educating participants went down in the K–12 schools, and because participants were much less likely to commit crimes than nonparticipants. Had the same amount of money been invested in the stock market as opposed to early intervention, the annual rate of return would only have been 7%.

How confident can we be that we can earn this high return today? On the one hand, critics will suggest that in today's world the results are overstated. It is true that problems facing young children today, such as single parenthood, drug use, and neighborhood crime, have increased, and that therefore the return may be lower. It could be argued that in the calculation some of the revenue and payments would have been made at different times, though when payments and revenues are adjusted at a more conservative distribution, the return is still very high.

On the other hand, an argument can be made that the results are understated. The original study of cost-benefits did not take into account the sibling effect and did not measure the positive effects on children born to participating families after the study period. Nor did it take into account the effects of increased parent knowledge on future generations.

Q **So what do you recommend?**

A Since we think of this issue as a public investment, we are looking for the programs with the highest rates of return. This implies that we should first fund early childhood development programs for at-risk kids. Eventually we would make these programs available to all children on a sliding-fee schedule.

In Minnesota we are proposing the creation of a foundation for early childhood development with an endowment fund of $1.5 billion secured over the next 5 years. An endowment is key so we don't get caught up in cyclical problems with budgets. A constitutional amendment guarantees sustainability of funds for the long term. These would be new funds allocated for early childhood development that would be a net addition to the funds already allocated to Head Start and other existing programs. Investing the fund in bonds yielding a 7% annual return would yield about $100 million per year in interest. The interest on this investment alone would be enough to guarantee that every 3- and 4-year-old child living in poverty in Minnesota would have access to a high quality early childhood development program, based on a cost of $10,000 per child per year.

Q **Why target at-risk children in this age group?**

A Research shows that by targeting at-risk children you get the highest rates of return. The economics are such that it is not clear that funding a universal program yields the

Art Rolnick

same returns. This is in part because of the high costs associated with the service delivery and the fact that not all children reap the same benefits, particularly those from families that already provide stimulating learning environments at home. The gains those children make are not as high, therefore the return is not as high. In addition, we wouldn't expect to use public funds to subsidize those that are able and already using quality early childhood programs.

Q **How will you raise the funds for the endowment?**

A We are planning on doing this over a 5-year period. We anticipate that private foundations and companies in the corporate community will provide a third of the funding. We are looking to secure one-third from dedicated general revenue from the state and the final third from a federal appropriation associated with the No Child Left Behind Act of $400 million over the 5 years.

Q **Have you built in provisions for accountability?**

A To ensure accountability, funding will only go to programs that show positive results. Programs receiving funds will be selected from competitive proposals based on a set of specific criteria. We propose a pay schedule that pays one-third of the tuition up front, one-third at the start of the second year, based on meeting specified objectives, and the final third only if the child passes a ready-for-kindergarten assessment test. We propose that the governor of Minnesota appoint a board of directors to oversee the allocation of funds as well as assessment and evaluation. We also propose a continuing evaluation that tracks children's progress from kindergarten through eighth grade.

Q **What is your next step?**

A Proper funding for early childhood development has become a national issue. The economic climate, with state budgets falling short on revenue projections and with early childhood programs being cut, makes the timing right for drawing attention to this issue.

The national economy is growing at a healthy pace and should start creating jobs this year. There should be no debate as to whether we can afford these programs—we can. We need to educate the public about the economic importance of early childhood development; and we need to establish a political priority for this issue.

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Supporting Governors' Early Childhood Policy Decisions:
The Role of Research

Anna Lovejoy, from the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, describes how the organization helps keep governors informed about emerging research in early childhood.

"In God we trust, all others bring data." The words of noted consultant W. Edwards Deming ring true for the nation's governors. Nowadays, research and evaluation data is crucial to identifying best practices and developing recommendations that are aligned with the goals and priorities of governors. Governors want to know what works before they make decisions; and they want proof that their decisions have achieved the intended impact. To support these efforts, policy analysts at the National Governors Association's (NGA) Center for Best Practices are doing the following:

- Translating research findings into concise and familiar language
- Providing objective analysis of the research
- Assessing the pros and cons of particular policy options
- Weighing the potential impact of particular policy changes to help governors make informed decisions

Over the last decade, the Center for Best Practices has kept governors abreast of emerging research in early childhood and helped bring issues in the field into the national spotlight. Momentum is building, thanks to the convergence of findings from brain research, longitudinal studies of early intervention programs, and recent evaluations of state and local programs. Governors are becoming increasingly aware that investments in high quality care and early learning opportunities can positively impact achievement and produce impressive long-term economic returns for society as a whole. This awareness is evidenced by early childhood messages in many of this year's State of the State addresses and high attendance at our recent Governors' Forum on Quality Preschool.

In today's fiscal climate, the demand for research-based policies and accountability has risen sharply. Governors are eager for data that will help them make the case for further investment to legislators, the policy community, and the public. They are concerned about closing the achievement gap, educating the future workforce, and supporting (not replacing) parents as children's most important teachers.

One key challenge is deciding where to focus limited resources among the range of policy options—preschool for 4-year-olds, child care quality improvements, home visiting programs, parent education efforts, or others. The Center relies on results to help identify true best practices and engages the research community to identify emerging issues and explore innovative policy solutions. Another challenge is convincing policymakers to set reasonable expectations and timeframes for measuring results, made difficult by the complexities of child development and the fact that comprehensive, longitudinal research and evaluation yield more powerful results in the long run.

In response to these challenges, NGA has sponsored a yearlong gubernatorial task force charged with developing a governors' guide to school readiness. Based on input from state policymakers and multiple experts, the final report will discuss the full range of options available to state policymakers for supporting children in the context of families, schools, and communities, and will include recommendations on school readiness assessment and evaluation policies.[1]

The Center for Best Practices also draws on its experience to offer the following advice to the research community on communicating research and evaluation results to governors:

- *Identify areas of research that are relevant to today's policy challenges.* Ask policymakers to identify pressing issues, and design studies to address specific and relevant policy questions. Whether and how to engage family child care providers to expand quality preschool opportunities and what leads to effective parent education programs are examples of the kinds of questions policymakers have begun to ask.
- *Be clear and up front with research findings.* The reality is that governors and their staffs often do not have adequate time to analyze complex and lengthy research articles. A concise but thorough and accurate synopsis of the research, including key findings and policy recommendations, is the best way to break through the competing demands for their attention.
- *Clearly tie findings to specific and realistic policy recommendations.* General recommendations (e.g., "increase investment in early childhood programs") are less helpful than specific ideas on where to invest or what policy changes to make (e.g., "raise teacher salaries" or "set specific quality standards"). Give thought to the current fiscal and political context so policymakers can prioritize recommendations. Which ones are non-negotiable to ensure positive results? Which ones should be implemented immediately?
- *Continue to conduct research.* Large-scale policy change takes time and commitment from many stakeholders. We need continued research into best practices. Additionally, new perspectives from related fields of study (e.g., early childhood investment as an economic development strategy) can help inform policy and engage broader support.

To ensure that they stay on the cutting edge of early childhood policy, we at the NGA Center for Best Practices will continue to provide the nation's governors with guidance on these critical issues.

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[1] Due out in fall 2004, this report will be available on the NGA website, at www.nga.org.

The Home Visit Forum:
Understanding and Improving the Role of Home Visitation

Heather Weiss, director at the Harvard Family Research Project, describes a consortium of national organizations working to improve home visitation systems to help young children and their families.

The Home Visit Forum is a group of six national home visitation programs working together to strengthen the research and evaluation capacity of home visitation and contribute to continuous improvement efforts in the home visit arena. The Forum consists of representatives from Early Head Start, Healthy Families America, Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters, the Nurse-Family Partnership, Parents As Teachers, and the Parent-Child Home Program. To maximize the potential for organizational learning and application at local, state, and national levels, each program brings to the table its chief executive officer, directors of research and of training, a local program director and, in several cases, a university-based research and evaluation partner.

The Forum's management, facilitation, and strategic planning are provided by Dr. Deborah Daro, from the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago; Dr. Barbara Wasik, from the Center for Home Visiting at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; and myself, Dr. Heather B. Weiss, from Harvard Family Research Project, Harvard Graduate School of Education.

In the sometimes-competitive world of home visitation, the Forum is committed to achieving three goals:

- Strengthening the empirical and clinical capacity to improve home visitation services and outcomes
- Developing strategic and multimodel research efforts that link to and improve practice, model development, and training
- Sharing lessons with the broader home visitation and early childhood fields through papers, publications, new tools, and a website

While each of the six participating program models has unique attributes, all share a number of goals and challenges. In each case, home visitation is the main mechanism by which services are delivered. Each program is engaged in efforts to scale up and develop a strong national organization that supports state and local affiliates. The six groups work together to create areas for cross-model cooperation and learning that benefit the Forum and the home visitation field as a whole, as well as each participating organization.

The Forum has developed a three-stage theory of change[1] that guides its work. During the first stage, members shared information and learned about one another's models, evaluation strategies, and organizations. They also discussed areas where joint inquiry and practice-based research would be helpful to their own and other home visitation and early childhood programs.

After considering a broad range of issues, Forum members voted to focus the second stage of their work on the major issue of participant recruitment, engagement, and retention. Once a shared set of research questions had been developed and a commitment to sharing results had been made, each model received a mini grant to conduct research with affiliate sites. Doing cross-model planning for the mini grants and conducting research with local affiliates resulted in clarification and revision of the definitions of enrollment and retention rates and how to measure them.

Additionally, several new partnerships between the models and university-based researchers interested in applied research were formed. Emphasis on affiliate data quality and the use of data to inform training and supervision practices increased, and new means were developed to monitor and support affiliate development. Forum members shared data collection instruments and measurement tools along with research results.

Discussion of the mini grant results surfaced a number of lessons and issues for consideration at the national-office level and beyond. These include the way contextual factors—particularly the multiple and unstable sources of funding—influence home visitor training and retention, and how this in turn affects recruitment and parent engagement. The lessons also include recognizing the need for better understanding of the role and training of supervisors or program coordinators, the tensions around delivering the model and meeting other family needs, and finding the right balance between replication and local individualization of the model.

The cross-model learning process prepared the Forum for its third and current stage—collaborative work to develop materials that will be useful beyond the Forum and the examination of the roles home visitation can play in broader systems of early childhood services. This current work is guided by three cross-model working groups focusing on public policy and advocacy, training and supervision, and research and evaluation. The first group is preparing materials to inform policymakers about the benefits of home visitation; the second is developing tools to improve home visitor supervision. The third group, working on research and evaluation, is examining and comparing the theories of change used by each of the six models to further clarify and test them.

The Forum, in keeping with the goal of sharing its work, will post these materials on its website. The Forum's facilitators will also be preparing a paper[2] assessing the group's development and effectiveness as a means of moving from competition to coopetition (i.e., selective cooperation) in order to support continuous learning and improvement to strengthen the home visitation field.

More information on the Home Visit Forum is available on the website, www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/home-visit/index.html.

Heather B. Weiss, Ed.D., Director, HFRP

[1] A program's theory of change explicitly articulates how the activities provided lead to the desired results by linking service receipt to intermediate changes (such as changes in attitudes or in-program behaviors) to short- and longer-term outcomes in participants.

[2] This paper is due out in late 2004 and will be posted on the Forum's website.

Private Foundations and the
Move Toward Universal Preschool

Lisa Klein, guest editor for this issue of The Evaluation Exchange, *reveals how private foundations are spending their money in the emerging arena of universal preschool.*

Over the past 2 years there has been a significant trend toward extending what we know to be formal education to include serving 3- and 4-year-olds. Both the public and private sectors have hopped on the universal prekindergarten (UPK) bandwagon. Several states, including Georgia, New York, Florida, and selected school districts in New Jersey, have launched efforts to provide UPK. In addition, some private funders are targeting a greater portion of funds to UPK.

Private Foundations' Changing Early Childhood Strategies

Private foundations have experienced a shift in their funding patterns related to early childhood. The Pew Charitable Trusts has made a significant investment in early childhood education at a time when some funders have decreased spending in this area. Sue Urahn, special projects director at Pew, explains, "There was a growing sense that [the board] could have a bigger impact by moving the education strategy to the earlier years." This is echoed by Ellen Alberding, president of the Joyce Foundation. Both refer to the triumvirate of impact studies from Perry Preschool, Abecedarian, and the Chicago Child Parent Center Program (see the box on page 21) as very compelling for getting boards to support UPK.

After suffering a significant loss in assets and with a renewed emphasis on having an impact, the Packard Foundation has recently targeted its grantmaking strategy for early childhood on UPK in California. Lois Salisbury, Packard's director of children, families, and communities, explains, "It is important to lead where there is strength. Right now that is with universal preschool."

Foundation Investments in UPK

Of the private foundations investing in UPK, each has a unique emphasis. The Pew Charitable Trusts approved an initiative in September 2001, shifting resources in the education area from K–12 and higher education to preschool. Urahn, who directs policy initiatives in the education program, reports, "Our goal is very focused—to increase access to universal, high quality preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds."

Local strategy is state-based and funds New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Illinois to advance their work in UPK. It is likely that a second tier of states will be given grants for planning and polling activities.

National strategy has three key components:

The house is being built. We want to put up the walls. We're doing this by direct and indirect grants in support of universal preschool.
Wanda Newell, McCormick Tribune Foundation

1. *Building a research base.* The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) was established to ask the right questions, get timely answers, and ultimately make policymakers aware of the issue through user-friendly communications.
2. *Advocacy to ensure that knowledge is used.* The Trust for Early Education was established in Washington, D.C., to be the voice for preschool nationally as well as in select states that have been targeted for intensive work.
3. *Building a constituency.* In an attempt to build a new constituency to speak about preschool, Pew supports Fight Crime Invest in Kids to reach the law-enforcement community; the Committee for Economic Development for engaging the business community; and the Council of Chief State School Officers to reach the K–12 education community.

The Foundation for Child Development has taken a leadership role in the research and dissemination of information in support of UPK. The Foundation served in an advisory role in the beginning of the Pew initiative, co-funds the Trust for Early Education, and is now exploring a collaborative line of work around UPK assessment.

In March 2003 the Packard Foundation board approved a change in funding for the children, families, and community area. Investments largely support the development of UPK in California. Preschool for All is a 10-year effort, its goal to make voluntary preschool available for all 3- and 4-year-olds in the state. The first part of their three-part strategy funds 15–20 initiatives to build leadership and mobilize a broad constituency supporting preschool in California. The second part supports policy development and advocacy activities for preschool. The third flagship part of the strategy is a large-scale demonstration project aiming to increase the supply and quality of preschool programs in select California counties.

The Joyce Foundation has made a recent investment supporting UPK in three states: Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin. The goal is to integrate early care and education by supporting the delivery of UPK in local schools and community-based child care settings. Alberding explains, "We are trying to figure out how you do universal preschool on the ground in ways that reach the most disadvantaged kids." The strategy targets enhancing quality, increasing capacity, and adopting standards to close the achievement gap. Funding for preschool is leveraged with partners including the Pew Trusts and the McCormick Tribune Foundation.

The McCormick Tribune Foundation directly supports advocacy for UPK in Illinois. Investments that indirectly support UPK focus on the quality of programs implementing UPK and

professional development. A program called Centers for Excellence funds capacity building for not-for-profit top- and mid-level executives to provide quality child care. Investment in community colleges is aimed at ensuring that teachers are properly trained early in their careers to work with young children.

The Schumann Fund for New Jersey supports pilot demonstrations in selected school districts that are implementing the ruling of the court case mandating high quality preschool in the poorest urban districts. [An annotated list of papers pertaining to this case is listed in the New & Noteworthy section of this issue, on page 31. —*Ed.*] The fund also supports communication efforts and advocacy to extend UPK to other children across the state.

The Role of Research and Evaluation

Aggregate polling data in the last few years show greater acceptance by the public for preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds. Pew conducts their own polling with every state that they consider working with to determine the level of readiness for UPK. All states funded by Pew track their media coverage and some basic output data, such as the amount of coverage, the number of hits on their websites, and the number of events in which spokespersons address UPK. Pew also created a logic model[1] with the end goals of (1) national policies that support UPK and (2) high quality UPK

As states adopt pre-K programs it becomes increasingly important to know more about the quality of experiences in classrooms.
Fasaha Traylor,
Foundation for Child Development

[1] A logic model illustrates how the initiative's activities connect to the outcomes it is trying to achieve.

in 4–6 states for all 3- and 4-year-olds by 2008.

Indicators of climate change are being assessed as well. Among these indicators are the number of hits on pre-K sections of grantee websites, the number of stories on high quality UPK in the media, the number of bills introduced and hearings held on UPK, and a change in the number of unusual stakeholders and key policymakers that publicly support UPK.

Through NIEER a tracking yearbook is being produced annually. The first was published in February and shows where all 50 states are in regard to policies related to UPK. An external impact evaluation will be conducted when the initiative is mature.

The Packard Foundation held a meeting last summer to discuss evaluation. Harvard Family Research Project, in coordination with SRI International, is participating in an extended evaluation-planning phase. The board is interested in evaluation for two purposes: to serve as a learning tool for grantees and, later, to facilitate a focus on accountability for results.

Barbara Reisman, executive director of the Schumann Fund, describes evaluation efforts to determine how effectively the court mandate mentioned above is being carried out: "We are looking at some child outcomes associated with the pilots to see if the preschools are making a difference."

The Question of Sustainability

Private foundations have joined together to leverage funding in support of UPK. As Urahn says, "It's ridiculous to think that Pew can do it all by itself." The Packard Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, the Schumann Fund for New Jersey, and the McCormick Tribune Foundation are collaborating with the Pew Charitable Trusts to establish a broader, more sustainable base of support for UPK.

Even with significant investment, universal preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds is not something private foundations alone can fund. Rather, they are attempting to leverage public support to make preschool part of the formal public education system. Strategies to achieve widespread, sustainable change include investing in a mix of programmatic, research, and advocacy efforts.

Pew operates under the philosophy that informing the development of good policy is necessary to effectively leverage change. Rather than conducting a demonstration project and trying to scale it, Pew relies on research, public education, and constituency development to influence policy and, therefore, leverage public support and investment. According to Urahn, "If the public sees a benefit from UPK and if we can show good results, then sustainability on the program level will take care of itself. Sustainability in the policy arena comes down to strong public support."

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Related Resource

The **National Institute for Early Education Research** (NIEER) was established at Rutgers University with a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts. NIEER supports early childhood initiatives by making available objective, nonpartisan information based on research. NIEER targets journalists, researchers, and educators as well as policymakers at the state and national levels. The institute is part of a strategy to ensure that every 3- and 4-year-old has access to high quality early education.

Recently, NIEER completed a cost-benefit analysis of three longitudinal research projects. The three—**Abecedarian, Perry Preschool, and the Chicago Child Parent Center Program**—are collectively known as the "trio of early childhood studies." All three have data that show that high quality early childhood intervention has positive effects on children and that the impacts last over time. Savings were found in greater school success and higher earnings by both the children and their mothers. For more information on these projects visit www.nieer.org.

Infant-Toddler Intervention on the Road to School Readiness: Lessons From Early Head Start

Helen Raikes, John Love, and Rachel Chazan-Cohen, from the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation team, share evaluation findings and discuss the role of intervention with infants and toddlers in preparing young children for school.[1]

Emerging thought in the early childhood field suggests that interventions aimed at infants and toddlers can contribute to putting vulnerable children on the road to school readiness. These ideas are based on what we know about early brain development and the importance of early intervention for improving the odds for low-income children.

The Opportunity of Investing During Infancy

Between birth and age 2 brain growth is fastest and the brain is most flexible. During this period, children acquire language and develop fundamental relationships with caregivers that contribute to lifetime patterns of trust, communication, and emotional regulation. Findings about early development are often used as an argument for educating children between ages 3 and 5. However, many of these findings suggest intervening before age 3, in accord with an oft-stated principle of developmental psychology that says opportunities to alter the course of development are greatest during periods of rapid growth and change.

The conceptual approach of Nobel Laureate Dr. James Heckman brings an economic view to supporting intervention during the earliest years. "Early ability begets further learning," according to his principle of "dynamic complementarity" (Heckman, 2000). By this principle, children who develop well at earlier ages will elicit interactions and experiences that accelerate development, thereby maximizing the return on early investment.

Improving the Odds for Low-Income Infants and Toddlers: The Early Head Start Intervention

Early Head Start was launched in 1995 by the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The program, which now serves more than 63,000 children and families in over 700 American communi-

[School readiness] takes an integrated approach ... because the research clearly tells us health, social-emotional development, and cognitive development are intertwined.

Joan Lombardi,
The Children's Project

ties, was designed to serve low-income pregnant women, and families with infants and toddlers up to age 3. Early Head Start programs can either be home-based, center-based, or mixed—a combination of the two.

A nationwide impact study was conducted with 3,001 families who applied to 17 Early Head Start programs between July 1996 and September 1998. These families were randomly assigned either to a program group, consisting of those who would participate in Early Head Start, or to a control group, consisting of those who could access all services in their communities except Early Head Start. Interviews with parents and assessments of children's development were conducted when the children were approximately 14, 24, and 36 months old. A comparison of the performance of program group families with those in the control group showed a large number of statistically significant benefits owing to participation in Early Head Start:

• Early Head Start children scored higher on standardized measures of cognitive and language development at 24 and 36 months, although their performance still trailed the national norms.
• Early Head Start children showed benefits in social-emotional development. They were rated lower on aggressive behavior problems at 24 and 36 months than those in the control group. Also, at 36 months they were observed to be even more attentive to objects, less negative, and better able to engage their parents during play.
• Early Head Start parents exhibited increased support for language and learning, were more likely to read daily to their children, and had lower rates of punitive discipline practices when children were 24 and 36 months old.

Several findings are especially noteworthy for policymakers who want to know what types of programs work for what types of families. Programs that fully implemented Head Start's program performance standards and provided a flexible mix of home- and center-based services had the greatest impacts on children's development and family functioning. Among the diverse families served by Early Head Start, impacts were particularly notable for children whose mothers enrolled while still pregnant and whose families faced a moderate number of demographic risks. Early Head Start was particularly effective in enhancing outcomes for African-American families.

Some children in the study developed particularly well across three areas: cognitive development, receptive vocabulary, and sustained attention to objects (see the box on page 23 for details). Early Head Start programs offering a mix of home- and center-based services quadrupled a child's chance of performing well on *all three* outcomes relative to children in the control group.

A Growing Body of Findings on Interventions With Infants and Toddlers

The research on Early Head Start builds on the findings from other demonstration programs for infants and toddlers that show interventions with high-risk infants and toddlers can have long-term effects on children's development. The Carolina Abecedarian Project of the mid-1970s, for example, enrolled 120 high-risk African-American families in four cohorts. That program had large impacts that were sustained into adulthood (Ramey & Campbell, 1991). The Nurse Home Visiting program has also shown sustaining effects in families of first-time mothers (Kitzman et al., 2000). The Early Head Start study, however, is the first to examine the effects of a national intervention for infants and toddlers in a program operated at scale in many different types of communities and with diverse populations. The diverse sample has also created the opportunity to begin to study for whom and under what conditions the program is most effective.

Conclusion

The Early Head Start evaluation illustrates that intervention during the first 3 years of life can positively affect the development of children in low-income families. We have found that it is possible to increase cognitive, linguistic, and social-emotional development over and above the levels seen in the randomly assigned control group. The next step for interventions focused on infants is to continue to conduct rigorous effectiveness studies to learn more about what aspects of interventions are particularly crucial for achieving desired outcomes. The more we know, the better prepared children will be for school from the beginning.

The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of Health and Human Services, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.

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A CLOSER LOOK AT THOSE WHO BENEFITED FROM EARLY HEAD START

By age 3, how many children are likely to excel on outcome measures in each of the three domains of cognitive development, receptive vocabulary, and sustained attention to objects? To address that question, we identified a subgroup of children who performed well above average on outcome measures in each of these domains. Children in the subgroup scored more than one-half standard deviation above the sample mean on the Bayley[1] and PPVT,[2] and 6 or better on sustained attention with objects from videotaped mother-child interaction coding.[3]

Considering each outcome separately, 40% of the program children scored in this range on the Bayley, 36% were above this cutoff on the PPVT, and 30% on sustained attention. However, just a small group did this well on all three measures—only 12%.

Improved Chance of Success Across Multiple Domains
While the program had no statistically significant effect on the percentage of children jointly scoring well on all three measures, large impact effects were seen for some subgroups:

- In mixed-approach programs, 14% of program children scored in the upper range on all three outcomes compared with just 3.3% of control group children. The effect size for this impact was 36%.
- Early Head Start significantly increased the percentage of African-American children scoring exceptionally well on all three outcomes, with 11.7% of the program children in this range compared with 1.8% of the control group (an effect size of 33%).

All Kinds of Children Can Be Successful
The Early Head Start children who met this more-demanding cutoff on all three outcomes represent what all programs strive for: children who perform well across multiple domains of development and therefore have the potential to continue high patterns of achievement as they enter preschool, kindergarten, and elementary school. These children averaged 106 on the Bayley (compared with an average of 91.4 for all Early Head Start children) and 100.3 on the PPVT (compared with 83.3 for all Early Head Start children). They came from all 17 sites that participated in the evaluation and represented all racial/ethnic groups.

[1] The Bayley Scales of Infant Development measure cognitive and motor development in and assess the behavior of infants from 1 to 42 months of age.
[2] The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT-III) measures receptive vocabulary for standard English and screens for verbal ability.
[3] Adapted for the national Early Head Start evaluation from Owen, M., Norris, C., Houssan, M., Wetzel, S., Mason, J., & Ohba, C. (1993, September). *24-month mother-child interaction rating scales for the three boxes procedure.* Paper presented at the NICHD Study of Early Child Care Research Consortium, Richardson, TX.

Rethinking the Evaluation of Family Strengthening Strategies: Beyond Traditional Program Evaluation Models

Charles Bruner, from the Child and Family Policy Center, argues for a reworking of traditional program evaluation methods in order to better assess the effectiveness of family strengthening efforts.

Both science and common sense tell us that families play a crucial role in a child's development. Particularly for very young children, parents are the first and most important teachers. We know that attachment to a consistent and nurturing adult is critical to a child's social and emotional development, which in turn are crucial to educational growth and success.

Case studies of a number of programs have demonstrated the potential for impacting child development through activities that support and strengthen families. Findings, although not based on randomized trials and comparison groups, have been so pronounced that they justify attribution of child outcomes to the programs themselves (Schorr & Schorr, 1988). These case studies show that it is possible to construct programs and strategies that strengthen the capacity of vulnerable families to nurture the learning, growth, and health of young children. While these programs defy neat categorization, they generally adhere to a set of attributes of effective practice put forward by researchers and by reform efforts across most education and human service disciplines.

Overall, however, evaluations of parenting education and family support programs have shown modest impacts, at best. Findings from the federal Comprehensive Child Development Program showed that case management failed to produce gains in strengthening families or improving child development (St. Pierre, Layzer, Goodson, & Bernstein, 1997). A meta-analysis of evaluations of family support programs commissioned by the federal government indicated very modest program results and suggested that successful child development interventions needed to be child centered as well as family centered (Layzer, Goodson, Bernstein, & Price, 2001).

An overview of the research literature on home visiting with young parents similarly found few programs that could boast significant impacts (Gomby, Culross, & Behrman, 1999). A few select programs that have been subject to experimental or quasi-experimental design have shown evidence of success at strengthening families and improving child development. These include the Infant Healthy Development Program, the Chicago Child Parent Center Program, and Early Head Start. Yet these, in many respects, represent exceptions to the rule.

In addition to producing inconclusive results, evaluations of family strengthening programs often fail to help programs improve themselves or understand where they are having impacts and where they are not. With today's current emphasis on results-based accountability, there has been pressure to establish

Policymakers often seek "silver bullets" for solutions to social problems. They would like to find and then fund "the program" that can eliminate "the problem."

outcome measures that may be only indirectly and distally related to realistic program impacts; these measures prove to be largely unhelpful in program self-evaluation and improvement (Bruner et al., 2002).

To both better evaluate the effectiveness of family strengthening efforts and help programs in their own continuous improvement, we need to re-examine our evaluation methodologies. We must conduct evaluations that will build a body of credible evidence of what factors contribute to success in strengthening families, under what conditions, for what types of families, and with what impacts. To do so, we need to rethink traditional program evaluations to recognize the following points.

1. *Relationships and practices, not program structure or curriculum, are key to achieving success.*

Particularly in the human services world, most efforts to impact child or family behavior and therefore prevent "rotten child outcomes"[1] are based on nurturing human growth and development. A long line of research makes clear the importance of relationships and trust building to produce this growth and change.

Most evaluations of family strengthening and support programs, however, do not examine the quality of relationships that are established or the way they are established. Marc Freedman, a leading scholar in the resiliency field, suggests that one reason for this is that the focus of much evaluation is wrong. "[The substance abuse prevention field] spent lots of money on program evaluations—and they never look at relationships, only program content" (Henderson, Bernard, & Sharp-Light, 1999). Freedman goes on to emphasize that how a program is conducted (its focus, curriculum, and content) matters less than the development of genuine relationships that help sustain and support people in their continued growth.

The pioneering work of Carl Dunst and Carol Trivette, two of a small group of researchers examining the relationship side of family strengthening programs, shows that while programs and centers adhering to relationship-based family support principles produce results, programs that don't put those principles into practice do not (Dunst & Trivette, 2001a, 2001b).

Evaluations that measure relationship building are not as simply or neatly conducted as those based on program participation. Measuring relationship building poses particular challenges

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[1] The term "rotten outcomes" has been used to refer to a variety of child and adolescent problems, including infant mortality, low birth weight, child abuse, school dropout, juvenile delinquency, substance abuse, teen parenting, and youth violence. Lisbeth Schorr attributes the term "rotten outcomes" to Mary Jo Bane. Schorr, L., & Schorr, D. (1988). *Within our reach: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage*. New York: Anchor Press Doubleday.

to experimental design. Yet to evaluate fairly the effectiveness of family strengthening programs and strategies and to help foster continuous improvement, evaluations must focus on this area.

2. Impacting "rotten outcomes" requires a systemic, not simply programmatic, focus.

Policymakers, particularly legislators, often seek "silver bullets" for solutions to what they have identified as pressing social problems. They would like to find and then fund "the program" that can eliminate "the problem." Increasingly, as results-based decision making is being employed, these policymakers also justify inaction by citing the absence of an identified "silver bullet."

However, rotten child outcomes rarely emanate from a single incident or source. A confluence of factors, both risk and protective, interact to produce them. This does not mean that single actions or interventions cannot make a difference, and in some instances *the* difference, in children's lives. Without other supporting structures and institutions, however, individual interventions may be battling uphill.

Individual programs, however good they are at relationship building and hope giving, still work with participants who require health care, education, decent housing, safe neighborhoods, and jobs to succeed. A family strengthening program may succeed in instilling resiliency in the families and children it serves. But if a child then goes to a school that does not believe he is educable, remains in a neighborhood infested with drugs and gangs, lacks adult role models, and exists in a society that marginalizes him because of the color of his skin or a disability he possesses, many of his gains in the program's environment will be negated.

A family strengthening program represents only part of what families and children need to succeed. Other public and private systems also must treat families and children with respect and value building relationships with them, recognizing their backgrounds, experiences, and journeys. In short, other systems besides the program need to be family strengthening as well. Programs need to be accountable for their role in supporting pathways to success, but they should not be held accountable for the entire journey.

3. Effective family strengthening programs and strategies create social capital, which is not measurable through a subject-treatment-impact approach.

The recent publication of the Child at Risk Committee, *Hard Wired to Connect*, provides scientific evidence for the importance of "authoritative institutions" in improving results for children at risk (Institute for American Values, 2003). The defining characteristics of authoritative institutions are analogous to the attributes of effective services cited earlier but emphasize commonality and peer (not primarily staff-to-participant) relationships. These authoritative institutions need to be sufficiently diverse in structure and character within a community to engage families and children with different interests, cultures, and needs for social engagement.

Program evaluations, however, usually only examine participant impacts, based on a subject-treatment-impact model, which limits the evaluation's scope to the impact of the program's treatment on the subject. Programs are not recognized for their contribution to the community as mediating institutions or social-capital builders. They may serve as community anchors, solidifying support for children and families. If they are evaluated only for their direct impacts on those participating in a particular activity or treatment, their broader community impact is missed.

Clearly, most social interventions designed to strengthen families occur through programs or centers, involving staff, physical space, and activities. At the same time, the best such programs and centers are more than a set of activities and curricula. They create opportunities for families to exercise leadership, and they serve as community-building anchors. In fact, case studies of exemplary programs consistently show these community-based impacts as among the most significant (Schorr, 1997). Evaluations of family strengthening efforts need to focus on these as well as individual program impacts. We know such authoritative institutions represent essential building blocks for improving children's growth, development, and success on a community scale.

The evidence is clear that too many very young children are at risk, and that some of this risk is a consequence of stressed, unprepared, or inattentive parenting. Such parenting itself is often the result of family or community poverty, lack of education or economic opportunity, or violence. At a policy level, if we are to remove young children from risk, we must develop and support strategies that are effective in strengthening these families, in the context of their communities and the systems that serve them. This places a major responsibility on the evaluation field and requires new conceptions of what constitutes credible and relevant evaluation of family strengthening efforts and strategies (Bruner, in press-a, in press-b).

> *If [programs] are evaluated only for their direct impacts on those participating in a particular activity, their broader community impact is missed.*

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Identifying School Readiness Indicators to Stimulate Policy Action

Elizabeth Burke Bryant and Catherine Walsh, of Rhode Island Kids Count, report on the progress of an initiative to compile school readiness indicators in 17 states.

During the past several years, state policymakers have increasingly focused on the school readiness of young children as a public policy goal essential for improving outcomes for children. In a time of decreasing revenues and higher stakes for student achievement, how will governors, legislators, and other policymakers know whether their investments are making a difference in terms of preparing our youngest citizens for school?

Indicators are one tool for achieving public policy change. The most powerful sets of indicators combine child outcomes indicators in all areas of development (physical, cognitive, social, and emotional) with systems indicators that monitor the capacity of programs to meet the variety of needs across communities. Regular reporting and tracking of indicators can help state policymakers and opinion leaders identify areas needing intervention and justify investments in programs and policies.

However, the nation lacks a comprehensive set of indicators that measure child well-being during the early childhood years and the years of transition from early childhood to elementary school (from birth to age 8). To address this problem, in October 2001 the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation formed a funding partnership to launch an initiative, called School Readiness Indicators: Making Progress for Young Children, to create a national set of school readiness indicators.

Rhode Island Kids Count, based in Providence, Rhode Island, has overall management of the initiative. The 17 participating states include Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts,

Missouri, New Jersey, Ohio, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, and Wisconsin. Each state's participating team includes representatives from the public and private sectors: the governor or first lady; legislators; heads of the Departments of Education, Health, and Social Services; business and civic leaders; child advocates; and researchers.

The initiative has three goals:

1. Identify a set of measurable indicators defining school readiness that can be tracked regularly over time at the state and local levels.
2. Have states adopt this indicators-based definition of school readiness, fill in the gaps in data availability, track data over time, and report findings to their citizens.
3. Stimulate policy, program, and other actions to improve the ability of all children to read at grade level by the end of third grade.

The policy assistance portion of the initiative, the State Early Childhood Policy and Technical Assistance Network (SECPTAN), created to link indicators with potential policies, is managed by Charles Bruner, executive director of the Child and Family Policy Center in Des Moines, Iowa. State teams receive ongoing technical assistance from both Rhode Island Kids Count and SECPTAN to identify, track, and use indicators to influence policies for young children. Indicators are selected based on each state's political, social, and economic context. In addition, there is an emphasis on paying attention to what Mark Friedman refers to as the communications power of indicators.[1] The idea is to ensure that indicators can be easily communicated and that they reflect what truly matters for school readiness.

In May of this year the state teams presented their final set of school readiness indicators, monitoring plans, and communication products for disseminating the indicators. During the remainder of 2004, Rhode Island Kids Count and a team of technical advisors will look across the state lists to identify a core set of school readiness indicators. The core set will represent indicators most commonly identified, along with measures and tracking plans.

Nonparticipating states will be able to benefit from this initiative by using this core set of indicators as a starting point for their own lists rather than starting from scratch. In addition, the core set of indicators, if adopted by the majority of states, can serve as the beginning of a national definition and accountability system for school readiness.

For further information on this initiative visit www.gettingready.org.

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[1] Friedman, M. A. (1997). *Guide to developing and using performance measures in results-based budgeting.* Washington, DC: The Finance Project.

Rhode Island Example: Results of Indicator Tracking

Rhode Island began tracking child well-being indicators several years ago. The state found that an alarmingly high percentage of children were entering kindergarten with elevated levels of lead in their bloodstreams. As a result, a comprehensive community-wide effort was launched to enhance lead poisoning prevention, screening, and treatment. The new policies and programs have lead to a dramatic decrease in childhood lead poisoning.

Rhode Island's indicator trends also showed that the number of licensed child care slots in the state would be insufficient to accommodate even a fraction of the young children of parents making the transition from welfare to work. Annual tracking statewide and for every city and town resulted in a significant increase in state funding for child care.

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Early Head Start: Further Lessons

Researchers at the Harvard Graduate School of Education have partnered with Early Education Services in Brattleboro, Vermont, to collect and analyze longitudinal data to supplement national findings from the Early Head Start study and to inform practice at the local level. The results provide a closer look at parenting stress, the language skills of children in Early Head Start, and the factors that influence sample attrition in program evaluation research.

Results showed that, over time, parenting stress decreased for families in both the program and comparison groups, with the highest stress usually reported during the child's infancy. By the time the child was 14 months old, families receiving Early Head Start services showed lower levels of parenting stress than comparison families, differences that were maintained through age 3. For Vermont families, Early Head Start participation reduced parenting stress and helped parents feel more competent as parents.

For children, participation in Early Head Start had many benefits, including the development of a larger vocabulary by ages 2 and 3—a critical predictor for later literacy development. Parents were found to be a good source of information about their children's current language skills, an asset that program staff can use in monitoring children's development (Pan, Rowe, Spier, & Tamis-LeMonda, in press).

Program evaluation research with at-risk families is often plagued with high sample attrition. In the current study, analysis showed that both study design and participant characteristics influenced attrition/retention. Families who were recruited into the study during pregnancy were found to be less likely to leave the study. Attrition among families in the comparison group was more likely early on (during the first 8 months) and less likely thereafter. Mothers reporting high parenting stress at study entry were more likely to leave the study than their counterparts reporting moderate or low parenting stress.

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Pan, B. A., Rowe, M. L., Spier, E., & Tamis-LeMonda, C. (in press). Measuring productive vocabulary of toddlers in low-income families: Concurrent and predictive validity of three sources of data. *Journal of Child Language*.

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The Build Initiative:
An Evaluation of State-Level System-Building Efforts

Barbara Gebhard of the Build Initiative describes the initiative's interactive evaluation approach between the five states in the evaluation and their evaluation partners, who are all contributing toward a national report on the initiative.

The Build Initiative is a nine-state, multiyear initiative supported by a number of the foundations that participate in the Early Childhood Funders' Collaborative (see the box). The initiative supports teams of key stakeholders in selected states with planning and mobilization activities directed toward building comprehensive early learning systems. Build focuses on the first 5 years of life and has a broad conception of systems building, which includes health, family support, early intervention, and early care and education. Build's definition of the elements necessary for a comprehensive early learning system includes infrastructure development, quality improvement, evaluation, financing, and public engagement.

The overall Build Initiative is constructed as a learning partnership across all nine states, its technical assistance and peer-learning activities contoured to the evolving issues and opportunities identified by the states. The evaluation of the Build Initiative

Related Resource

The Build Initiative represents one instance of a joint funding activity conducted by members of the **Early Childhood Funders' Collaborative** (ECFC). In this case, the group chose to pool funds to develop comprehensive early learning systems in selected states.

ECFC was established in 1995 to foster connections among those working in the field of early childhood care and education. Its approximately 35 members represent foundations or corporate giving offices known for making substantial investments in the field at national, regional, state, and local levels. The collaborative has come to serve a number of important functions:

- Providing opportunities for networking among colleagues
- Sharing information about strategic grantmaking in early childhood
- Facilitating joint or coordinated grantmaking activities

Members take turns hosting up to four meetings a year, conducting business, and often bringing in outside experts to inform the group about select topics and opportunities in early childhood. In addition, ECFC conducts research to help inform grantmaking in early care and education by commissioning papers, convening small meetings, and conducting interviews with key stakeholders in the field.

began with four states—Illinois, Minnesota, New Jersey, and Ohio—in May 2002. In 2003 Build added a fifth state, Pennsylvania, as part of the national evaluation, and four learning partner states—Hawaii, Michigan, Oklahoma, and Washington.

The Child and Family Policy Center (CFPC), the national evaluation partner for Build, consulted with each of the five states participating in the evaluation to select and support a state evaluation partner. The state evaluation partner observes and participates in Build planning activities at the state level and is responsible for producing a site case study, which is later incorporated into a larger national report.

In the first year, the state evaluation partner also was responsible for guiding the Build team in assembling baseline data on the status of young children and services in the state and on the extent of planning and mobilization around the state's early learning agenda. This data will be used for tracking progress in subsequent years. Build's interactive evaluation approach also has provided the teams direct access to evaluation expertise while they are engaged in their planning work.

The CFPC supports the states in developing outcome-based self-evaluation capacities for continuous learning and improvement; it constructed a common matrix for baseline data collection and a protocol for developing the state case studies. Staff from CFPC conducted site visits to each of the states to provide support for the evaluation process. The resulting cross-site insights contributed to the observations, lessons learned, and emerging issues cited in Build's national first-year evaluation report.

The Build Initiative's approach is to invest in state teams of committed leaders in early learning from both the public and private sectors, including state agencies, service providers, and advocacy organizations. It does not specify a specific organizational or governance structure, recognizing that each state often already has a number of different planning and governance structures around early learning. Instead, Build is designed to enable states to work through existing structures where appropriate, and to provide additional resources and information to strategically move the states' overall early learning agenda forward.

Build's national evaluation partner has characterized the initiative as a Margaret Mead approach to funding systems building, investing in "passionate individuals" working together to produce change, rather than prescribing a specific structure or set of activities.

For a summary of Build's first-year evaluation report, which includes brief case studies from the four original states, email Barbara Gebhard at the address below.

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Early to Read: A Local Emergent Literacy Initiative

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation's Community Partners Program is working to improve the quality of life in 26 communities around the country where the Knight brothers owned newspapers. This article describes the foundation's early literacy initiative in Philadelphia and its ongoing evaluation.

Many low-income urban children start school so far behind that they never catch up. Concerned by this lack of school readiness, Knight Foundation responded by focusing its grantmaking, in 12 of its 26 communities, on early childhood. In Philadelphia, Knight Foundation's local Community Advisory Committee—a group of community, business, and nonprofit leaders who help define funding priorities that fit within the foundation's mission and strategically address issues of community concern—identified early literacy as the foundation's local 5-year funding priority.

The strategy was informed by early childhood research that shows high quality early education programs help improve academic outcomes for low-income children. Studies show that economically disadvantaged children in Philadelphia have relatively high rates of participation in early care and education programs and kindergarten, yet one-third to one-half start school without the linguistic, cognitive, or social skills they need to succeed academically.

Program Description

In September 2003 Knight Foundation made a $2.5 million grant to the United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania to implement Early to Read (E2R), a 4-year initiative designed to support the emergent literacy of at-risk, low-income children; to provide family literacy support to parents; and to increase and improve emergent literacy teaching practices in 15 child care sites in two targeted neighborhoods in Philadelphia. The initiative builds on United Way's larger Early to Learn: Partners for School Readiness (E2L), an initiative that aims to improve the quality and integration of early child care and education, health care, and parenting.

Programs participating in E2R receive services through E2L, including money, quality monitoring by independent evaluators, technical assistance, and mentoring support. Staff members also receive literacy coaching, take coursework at Saint Joseph's University, and earn bonus incentives for academic accomplishments. E2R also incorporates the Raising a Reader program to increase school readiness by improving home literacy practices.

Program Evaluation

The Child Development Laboratory in the Department of Psychology at Saint Joseph's University is conducting the evaluation of the early care and education component of E2L (Preschool Plus) and the Knight-funded literacy add-on, E2R. The first evaluation goal is to describe the different patterns of service delivery within E2R and how these differ from what is offered through E2L. Through case study methodology the evaluation will examine the implementation of E2R in two sites and document the factors that promote successful implementation and those that pose challenges to service delivery, particularly in service integration.

A second evaluation goal is to assess the impact E2R has on classroom environments, children's language development, and early childhood educators' characteristics and behaviors. Specifically, the evaluation will examine the following:

- Whether enrolling early childhood educators in college courses has an impact on their teaching credentials, retention rates, and classroom practices regarding emergent literacy
- Whether the college coursework and meetings with literacy coaches and mentors affect the quality of the literacy environment provided in early childhood classrooms
- Whether the expected improvements in teacher characteristics, behaviors, and classroom environments have an impact on young children's emergent literacy (e.g., print awareness, alphabet knowledge, letter-sound knowledge, and writing skills)

Using a between-group comparison, the evaluation will investigate whether the E2R program provides benefits that demonstrate a high quality classroom literacy environment above and beyond that of E2L. The evaluation will examine the issue of dosage using a within-group comparison to investigate whether further participation in the E2R program beyond the first year leads to subsequent improvements. Finally, children's performance on norm-referenced tests will be used to compare their rate of change with national samples and determine whether the progress observed in the sample matches or exceeds that which would be expected by normal development.

The 6-year evaluation is in its third year. The first year was spent planning and is being followed by 4 years of data collection and 1 year of data analysis and writing. To date, the evaluation team has collected initial baseline data for all E2L classrooms, including demographic and professional characteristics of directors and teachers, and documentation from technical assistance agencies concerning the needs and improvement goals for each program. The team has conducted three assessments of classroom quality; final results are due in 2008. Annual interim reports will be shared with the implementing partners and used for program improvement.

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This section features an annotated list of papers, organizations, and initiatives related to the issue's theme.

Administration for Children and Families Child Care Bureau. (2004). *Supporting an early learning framework*. Washington, DC: National Child Care Information Center. This free CD-ROM is for technical assistance use in research and practice, and includes resources on Good Start, Grow Smart, the Bush Administration's initiative on early literacy. It can be ordered online at nccic.acf.hhs.gov/sam2004.

Barnett, W. S., Robin, K. B., Hustedt, J. T., & Schulman, K. L. (2003). *The state of preschool: 2003 state preschool yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research. This is the first report in an annual series reporting on state-funded preschool programs for 3- and 4-year-olds. nieer.org/yearbook/pdf/yearbook.pdf (Acrobat file)

Bruner, C. (2002). *A stitch in time: Estimating the costs of school unreadiness*. Washington, DC: The Finance Project. This report contains an annotated bibliography that cites a number of approaches to estimating social costs and calculating potential returns.

Bruner, C., Elias, V., Stein, D., & Schaefer, S. (2004). *Early learning left out: An examination of public investments in education and development by child age*. Des Moines, IA: Voices for America's Children and the Child and Family Policy Center. This report tracks state, federal, and school district investment in children's education and development by age. www.voicesforamericaschildren.org/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm?ContentID=3384

Bruner, C., Floyd, S., & Copeman, A. (2003). *Seven things legislators (and other policymakers) need to know about school readiness*. Des Moines, IA: State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network. This report includes a matrix describing the four seminal studies and the derivation of the table in this report, including the specific savings each study identified.

Bryant, D., Maxwell, K., & Burchinal, M. (1999). **Effects of a community initiative on the quality of child care**. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 14,* 449–464. This paper reports on the preschool child care quality improvements over the first 3 years of North Carolina's Smart Start initiative.

Buysse, V., Wesley, P. W., Bryant, D., & Gardner, D. (1999). **Quality of early childhood programs in inclusive and noninclusive settings**. *Exceptional Children, 65,* 301–314. This study reports that centers in North Carolina that served children with disabilities were of higher quality than centers that did not.

Duke University. (2004). *The Foundation for Child Development index of child well-being (CWI), 1975–2002, with projections for 2003: A composite index of trends in the well-being of our nation's children*. Durham, NC: Author. Seven areas of quality of life are tracked for children ages 1–19, including educational test scores, health insurance coverage, mortality, poverty, suicide rates, drug use, and crimes committed by children. www.brookings.edu/comm/events/20040324index.pdf (Acrobat file)

Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation. (2002). **Set for success: Building a strong foundation for school readiness based on the social-emotional development of young children**. *Kauffman Early Education Exchange, 1*(1). This report discusses linking social, emotional, and cognitive development to prepare young children for school success. www.kauffman.org/pdf/eex_brochure.pdf (Acrobat file)

Foundation for Child Development. (2003). *First things first: Pre-kindergarten as the starting point for education reform*. New York: Author. This paper outlines the Foundation's P-3 Initiative to align pre-K programs and full-day kindergarten through the third grade. www.fcd-us.org/about/annualreports/fcd.2003.ar.pdf (Acrobat file)

New Resources From HFRP

Due out this summer are three new briefs in our *Issues and Opportunities in Out-of-School Time Evaluation* series:

- *Attracting and Sustaining Youth Participation in After School Programs* analyzes research on recruitment and retention in after school programs and offers strategies for sustaining youth participation.

- *Measuring Activity Participation and Its Link With Outcomes* reviews multiple indicators of youth participation in out-of school time (OST) activities and examines how these indicators are associated with youth outcomes.

- *Promoting Quality Out-of-School Time Programs Through Professional Development* examines professional development in OST and related fields and provides a framework for evaluation tailored to OST professional development initiatives.

To be notified when these are available on our website, sign up for our out-of-school time updates email at www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/subscribe.html.

The Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE) announces the **Spring 2004 issue of its *FINE Forum* e-newsletter**. The new issue of *FINE Forum* examines how families connect with communities, including out-of-school time programs, and how these connections support children's school learning. The issue is available at www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/fineforum/index.html.

To be notified when FINE Forum *is available, sign up to be a FINE member (membership is free) at www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/joinfine.html.*

Hampton, J. (2003). *How Florida's voters enacted UPK when their legislature wouldn't.* New York: Foundation for Child Development. This paper describes how a campaign for universal preschool was passed despite opposition from the state legislature. The report serves as a how-to guide for child advocacy that can be used by policymakers, practitioners, advocates, teachers, and parents. www.ffcd.org/pdfs/HOwForidasVotersEnactedUPK.pdf (Acrobat file)

Kagan, S. L., & Scott-Little, C. (2004). **Early learning standards: Changing the parlance and practice of early childhood education?** *Phi Delta Kappan, 85*(5). This paper describes the growing early learning standards movement and points to some of the critical questions that still need to be answered.

McCall, R. B., & Green, B. L. (2004). **Beyond the methodological gold standards of behavioral research: Considerations for practice and policy.** *Social Policy Report, 18*(2). This paper explores the benefits and limitations of theory-driven hypotheses, random assignments, and experimenter-controlled, uniformly applied interventions. www.srcd.org/sprrecent.html

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Research Program in **Early Learning and School Readiness** supports research that centers on preparing children from infancy up to age 8 to succeed in school. www.nichd.nih.gov/crmc/cdb/cdbhtm

Papers presented at the *White House Summit on Early Childhood Cognitive Development*, held at Georgetown University July 26 and 27, 2001, are available. www.whitehouse.gov/firstlady/initiatives/education/earlychildhood.html

Ribeiro, R., & Warner, M. (2004). *Measuring the regional economic importance of early care and education: The Cornell methodology guide.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, Department of City and Regional Planning. This report illuminates the problems of and offers guidance on analyzing child care as an economic sector. government.cce.cornell.edu/doc/pdf/MethodologyGuide.pdf (Acrobat file)

The **Supreme Court of New Jersey,** through a series of historic rulings in the long-running Abbott v. Burke court case, has mandated high quality preschool as one solution to help close the achievement gap between students in New Jersey's poorest urban school districts and their more affluent suburban peers. The following three case studies by Julia Coffman describe the Abbott case and relevant lessons for other states working to make quality preschool universally available. The studies cover New Jersey's experiences with broad-based coalition building, raising preschool teacher qualifications, and building effective research-advocacy collaboration:

- Coffman, J. (2002). *Research and advocacy collaboration: A New Jersey case study.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project. www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/content/pubs/onlinepubs/advocacy/advocacy.pdf (Acrobat file)

- Coffman, J., & Lopez, M. E. (2003). *Raising preschool teacher qualifications.* Washington, DC: The Schumann Fund for New Jersey and Trust for Early Education. www.trustforearlyed.org/docs/NJAbbottBrief.pdf (Acrobat file)
- Coffman, J. (2004). *Partners for preschool advocacy.* Newark, NJ: Association for Children of New Jersey. For a copy of this report email the author at julia_coffman@msn.com.

The **Talaris Research Institute** is a Seattle-based nonprofit dedicated to advancing knowledge of early brain development and providing research-based tools to help parents raise their children. In partnership with the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), Talaris has created 60-second "interstitials" to air between television programs. The interstitials relay tips for parents and model how parents can support their young children's healthy development. To build on the impact of the interstitials, Talaris will provide training materials to local PBS stations and award grants to selected communities across the country to support outreach activities that advance related local early learning efforts. www.talaris.org

Vecchiotti, S. (2003). **Kindergarten: An overlooked educational policy priority.** *Social Policy Report, 17*(2). This policy brief describes the state-by-state status of kindergarten in the United States. Policy issues, including mandating kindergarten, entry age, curriculum and instruction methods, screening and assessment, teacher qualifications, and full-day versus part-day instruction are discussed. www.srcd.org/spr.html

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and press people and the yearly cycles of practitioners need to be taken into account as well.

An additional consideration is that needs for specificity of research differ: Policymakers may need a study that focuses on a particular type of setting or program; program administrators may be interested in a certain curriculum; and teachers may be looking for help regarding specific children.

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