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PRESCHOOL MATTERS

When economist Milton Friedman died in November at age 94, he left a body of work that directly impacts the lives of Americans—not least of them preschool-age children. People concerned about the U.S. and world economies have Friedman and his colleague Anna Schwartz to thank for monetarism, the idea that governments should control the money supply to keep inflation in check. Their research implicated government monetary policy in deepening and sustaining the Great Depression. Credit a share of the prosperity of recent decades to policies based on his thinking.

Friedman didn't confine

his efforts to monetary policy, however. He applied his considerable intellect to a wide range of policy matters. He is credited with convincing Richard Nixon to end the military draft and persuading the Clinton administration to institute a “negative income tax” for low-income workers in the form of the earned income tax credit. He was a guiding force in the rise of the “Chicago School” of economics, espousing a free-market approach to policy solutions. When Friedman was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economic Science in 1976 the presenter noted: “Friedman’s most characteristic feature is his unique

propensity and ability to effectively influence and disturb current notions and previously established knowledge.”

Milton Friedman’s efforts to disturb established ideas in education dates back to at least 1955 when he wrote an essay, “The Role of Government in Education” that marked the beginning of the school choice movement. He believed a case could be made for a government role in ensuring universal access to education but saw little justification for the government running the schools. Friedman envisioned a system of government-funded vouchers that could give parents the freedom to choose the schools their children attend.

Many at the time considered Friedman’s voucher proposal a radical idea. Most economists now believe that choice and competition can improve public education, but vouchers still play little role in the K-12 educational system. Not so in early childhood.

Friedman’s voucher idea has been embraced in early care and education to a far greater extent than elsewhere. Vouchers are a primary mechanism for child care policy, and number of state pre-K programs essentially work as voucher programs. Florida essentially gives parents \$2,500 per child with the barest minimum of constraints on where they spend

it. At the other end of the spectrum, New Jersey’s Abbott pre-K program provides over \$10,000 per child to a system of free education with stringent standards in which parent choice is more extensive than in K-12, but is far from absolute.

In 2005, Friedman wrote that “Sooner or later there will be a breakthrough; we shall get a universal voucher plan in one or more states. When we do, a competitive private educational market serving parents who are free to choose the school they believe best for each child will demonstrate how it can revolutionize schooling.” In preschool education, that breakthrough has already arrived. It is up to us in the research community to assess the successes and failures.

Economics is often referred to as the dismal science. In Milton Friedman’s capable hands, economics was anything but dismal. He was as optimistic as he was persistent. If we adopt his optimism and persistence, we have a good chance at developing his legacy in early childhood policy, though exactly what that looks like remains to be seen. ■

W. Steven Barnett
Director, NIEER

The National Institute for Early Education Research supports early childhood education initiatives by providing objective, nonpartisan information based on research. NIEER is one component of a larger early education initiative designed, funded and managed by The Pew Charitable Trusts.

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Docs For Tots: A Fresh Voice For Quality Early Childhood Education

Nearly 1,000 Pediatricians Join State Groups to Promote High-Quality Early Learning Programs; White Coats Draw Attention to Cause

When advocates in New York State held a press conference in mid-December to urge Governor-Elect Eliot Spitzer to invest more in pre-K and other early learning programs, a fresh voice rang out from the podium.

"I stand here as a pediatrician, prescribing an Early Learning Commission at the highest levels of state government," said Dina Joy Lieser, director of Docs For Tots, New York. With that utterance, the dynamic in the room shifted from that of just another advocate arguing for a cause to something more familiar—a caregiver prescribing a cure. It's why Lieser and her colleagues at the fast-growing national organization Docs for Tots are making an impact on early childhood issues.

Over the past two years, Lieser has become an energetic advocate for public pre-K, rallying dozens of prominent pediatricians to the cause. Together, they—and their trademark white coats—have been making their presence felt among policymakers in the state. Little wonder. As advocate qualifications go, it doesn't get much better than being a doctor. Polls show people trust doctors and accord them a unique brand of respect when they speak out. What's more, reporters gravitate toward doctors when they have something to say.

That's why Lieser's quest for a new commission mod-

eled after those in other states where early learning has been elevated up the list of priorities is receiving cautiously positive reviews. When Lieser cites the evidence demonstrating the advantaged of an Early Learning Commission, she gets an extra measure of attention.

The New York State chapter of Docs for Tots is one of several dozen to spring up across the country since the organization began in 2003. The national organization is the brain child of George Askew, a Cleveland native and pediatrician whose career path includes teaching pediatrics, and a stint heading a branch of the Head Start Bureau. "The organization was founded on the idea that you begin to save a child's life well before they reach a doctor's office, hospital or clinic," he says. "I could treat a sore throat or a bruised ankle, but that wouldn't begin to address what children suffered because of inadequate access to early care and education, poor housing and poverty."

Askew, who now serves as the organization's executive director, began circulating his ideas among colleagues and hit the lecture circuit to raise awareness of how issues like early education impact children's growth and development. "It became obvious to me that tons of my colleagues were champing at the bit to get active on social



As a pediatrician and policy director for Docs for Tots New York, Dina Lieser combines her professional experience and talent for advocacy to press for an effective early childhood system. She also coaches other doctors.

policy and address these issues. They'd say, 'I'd like to get involved but I don't have time to learn the issues or get connected to effective advocates.' So I decided to start an organization that did just that," he says.

Among the organization's tenets is to seek coalitions. Docs for Tots New York channels its efforts through the statewide Winning Beginning, New York, a coalition of some 60 organizations dedicated to expanding early learning options, birth to age 5. Last year, the coalition spearheaded the fight to win \$50 million in new pre-K funding in the current budget, the largest new investment in public pre-K outside of California. With a new governor, the group is now working to make pre-K part of the state's public education system, funded through state aid.

Lieser discovered Askew's website almost the moment it went live in 2003. It didn't take long for her to sign on. "We weren't planning to have affiliates yet, but Dina was so energetic, we decided to go ahead," Askew says. That year, The Pew Charitable Trusts also provided a grant to the doctors to support their work on public pre-K. "That helped get us connected to the movement nationwide," says Askew.

At this writing, the organization has nearly 900 active doctors in more than 20 states, with several active advocacy campaigns in New York, Washington, Florida, Texas and Colorado. To learn more about how to find local doctors in your area interested in advocating for early childhood education, visit www.docsfortots.org. ■

It's in the Stars: More States are Using Quality Rating Systems for Pre-K

They Were Originally Developed For Child Care. Will They Work For Preschool?

The growth in child care and preschool education, along with the need for families to be more informed about quality has spurred the adoption in several states of systems for rating program quality through the assignment of stars or other quality indicators consumers are used to seeing for other services like hotels and restaurants. According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), 13 states are now using some sort of quality rating system (QRS) and 30 others are considering them. With numbers like that, it's safe to say the move to QRS is a trend.

Proponents of QRS say they serve as a consumer guide by providing consumers of child care and preschool education with stars or other symbols denoting compliance with various quality parameters. If effectively implemented, proponents believe QRS can enlist informed consumers in the effort to nudge program quality upward while at the same time serving as a benchmark against which providers can measure and plan improvement. In many cases, QRS is used to inform funding decisions and achieve higher levels of quality. The additive effect of all this, say proponents, is an ever-improving early childhood education system that can't help but improve early childhood learning outcomes.

While there is anecdotal evidence that QRS is having

positive effects on program quality and child outcomes, little research exists to back up that assertion. A study is now being conducted on Colorado's Qualistar Early Learning QRS system to determine its effect on classroom quality and learning outcomes and those findings are eagerly awaited. Meanwhile, education experts like NIEER co-director Ellen Frede, sounds a note of caution. "Quality rating systems certainly have the potential to act as a positive force, but, depending on how they are structured and administered, they also have the potential for setting the quality bar too low or providing additional funding to better programs for what they are already doing without increasing quality on a broad scale. Research on implementation and effects is clearly needed," she says.

That hasn't stopped states from moving forward with star-based systems. In Virginia, where Governor Tim Kaine is pushing an aggressive early education agenda, a system for measuring and reporting quality has been incorporated into the pilot program that will serve as a springboard for eventually making state-funded preschool education available to all 4-year-olds in the state. Virginia is incorporating QRS into its plans for state-funded preschool education in the policy conception phase as opposed to developing a system later.

Framers of the pilot

program say including a quality rating system right up front recognizes that achieving quality through regulation is important and that with increased public investment also comes increased accountability. According to Kathy Glazer, who heads the governor's working group on early childhood initiatives, policymakers also hope QRS will exert a positive effect in governor Kaine's efforts to raise third-grade reading scores, a benchmark he considers critical.

In most states with QRS systems, revenue flows according some type of tiered reimbursements or grants that are awarded based on some measure of quality. Pennsylvania's Keystone STARS system, for instance, offers grants that are calibrated by enrollment size and star level attained. Richard Fiene at Pennsylvania State University recently completed an evaluation of Keystone STARS and found that centers and home-based settings with higher STAR ratings had higher scores on the Environmental Rating Scales (ERS) and that the system is improving quality in child care centers. Classrooms with defined curricula and teachers with college degrees provided higher quality early education and care.

QRS systems varies by state. In Ohio, child care centers and preschools can attain a maximum of three stars. A one-star rating, for instance, can indicate a center has achieved better than

the required licensing standard in staff-child ratio and at least one teacher has an early childhood certificate or degree and the staff completes at least 5 hours of additional child development training yearly. The highest rating (3 stars) indicates centers meet national standards for high-quality care, that teachers have degrees in early childhood education and both teachers and administrators have at least 15 hours of additional training yearly.

North Carolina, one of the early states to establish a star-based system, continues to lead the way. The state recently upgraded its 5-Star



More parents are basing child care and pre-K decisions on star ratings.

system to concentrate on program standards and staff education. The old system awarded points in three areas. One star was awarded simply for complying with

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The Pew Charitable Trusts Advancing Quality Pre-K for All; Five Years Later

By Susan K. Urahn and Sara Watson

In the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, there was enormous uncertainty about what the future would hold. But shortly after that tragedy, with deep conviction that children are the best hope for the future, The Pew Charitable Trusts launched a national initiative with the ambitious goal of ensuring that every 3- and 4-year-old has access to a quality pre-kindergarten education.

Now, five years later, we want to take stock of where we've been, how our strategy has evolved, and what the future might hold. Many people have worked long and hard to create the pre-K movement in this country, a movement built on a long history of commitment to the issue. We have been privileged to work with many of these dedicated individuals and look forward to continued collaboration that will achieve more victories for children.

Why did The Pew Charitable Trusts focus on pre-kindergarten?

The Trusts believes that one effective way to invest its resources is by informing and advancing state and federal policies that benefit the public. There are many policy issues deserving of attention, but philanthropic dollars are limited, and deciding where to focus is a challenge. We begin to narrow the field by identifying important issues that also meet the following criteria:

- There is a clear goal toward which to work,
- That goal is supported by objective, high-quality research,
- The issue can generate broad support from the public, policymakers and a range of influential constituencies, and
- Measurable progress can be made toward the long-term goal in three to five years.

After many years of experience in the environment, education, health and human services arenas, we have learned that advancing policy goals takes time; significant resources; rigorous, nonpartisan research; and sophisticated, focused public education campaigns. In 2001, the Trusts' board determined that a multi-year initiative with the goal of advancing voluntary, high-quality pre-K for 3- and 4-year-olds fit these criteria.

How is the Trusts' initiative designed?

We framed the issue of preschool as an integral part of children's educational experience, with the power to help reduce the achievement gap and enable more children to reach critical early learning goals and meet their potential. This framing fit into the emerging national concern over children's educational achievement and made it possible for us to bring in an array of diverse constituencies who had not previously been part of the policy debate on early education. With new research, funded by the Trusts and others, we are now reaching beyond education to frame pre-K as an economic strategy, capable of contributing to the nation's fiscal health. This increases the interest in pre-K and further diversifies the chorus of voices emphasizing its value to the nation.

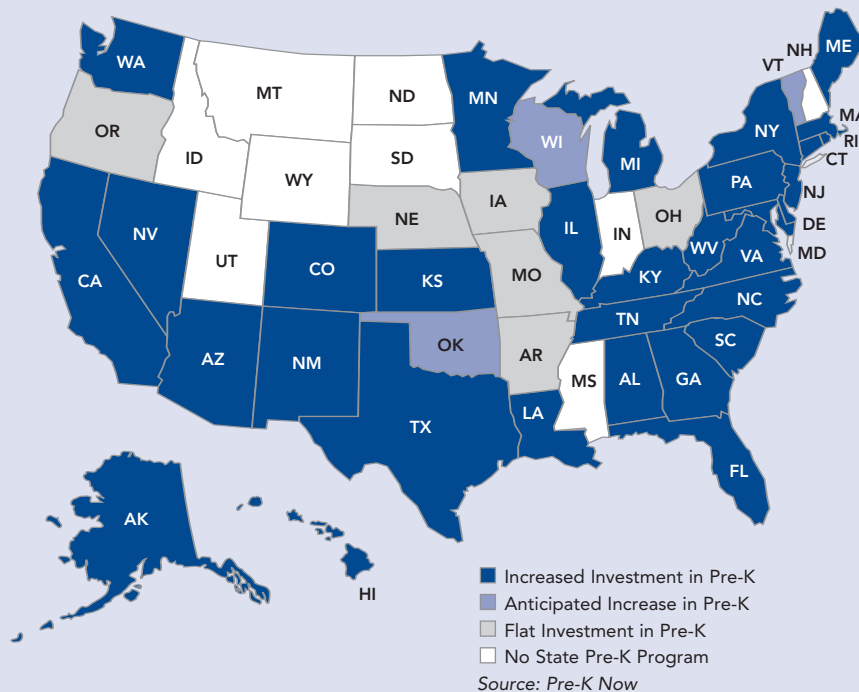
Based on this framing, our strategy has been to develop objective, rigorous information on the costs, benefits and characteristics of high-quality pre-kindergarten and to build the networks needed to ensure that unbiased research informs public policy debates nationally and in the states. Our primary focus is on identifying states that have the opportunity to advance this issue, strengthening the capacity of advocates to disseminate non-partisan research and analysis about

pre-K, and engaging a wide range of organizations and individuals, including those from law enforcement, business, education, early childhood, and physicians and seniors, to inform these debates with good data. Our principal partners are Pre-K Now of the Institute for Educational Leadership (www.preknow.org) and the National Institute for Early Education Research at Rutgers University (www.nieer.org), which have provided key research, strategic support and leadership. Other major grantees have included Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the Council of Chief State School Officers, the National School Boards Association, the Committee for Economic Development, Education Law Center, Every Child Matters, Voices for America's Children, the Hechinger Institute On Education and The Media and the Education Writers Association—all of which have put their reputations, skill and experience behind this issue.

National Early Childhood Accountability Task Force

High-quality preschool is a large investment for states to make. To ensure that children reap the benefits of these programs, state leaders must know that they are effective. To help them, the Foundation for Child Development, the Joyce Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts launched the National Early Childhood Accountability Task Force, which is based at the Trusts as part of its overall pre-K initiative. The Task Force, led by Profs. Sharon Lynn Kagan and Eugene Garcia and staffed by Thomas Schultz, expects to release its final report in the spring of 2007. www.earlyedaccountability.org

Legislative Action on Pre-K Budgets FY 2006-2007



Is pre-K making progress?

Thanks to decades of work by many dedicated individuals and organizations, the movement for quality pre-K is taking root. It is instructive to take a look back. In 2002 and 2003, state revenues plummeted and virtually every state in the country had to cut spending significantly to balance their budgets. As the National Conference of State Legislatures noted, it was the most challenging budget situation states had faced since World War II. It was not the best of times for expanded investments in pre-kindergarten, but researchers and advocates used this time to build their case and educate the public and policymakers. As state revenues began to improve, states moved to support pre-kindergarten, as shown in the map.

Several success stories stand out. This year, Illinois became the first state in the nation to pass legislation providing quality pre-kindergarten to all its 3- and 4-year-olds. This victory is the result of a four year effort that began with local activists educating all gubernatorial candidates

in 2002 and then working with the new governor to fulfill his promise. The state provided \$90 million in new money over the next three years and then in 2006 set the program on a trajectory to serve all children by 2011. In signing the bill, Governor Rod Blagojevich said, “Study after study and basic common sense tell us that giving kids the chance to start reading early and learning early is the single most important step we can take towards helping them become successful students. That’s why it’s so critical that every child in Illinois have the opportunity to attend pre-kindergarten and it’s why we’re making Illinois the first state in the nation to make pre-kindergarten available for every 3-year-old and every 4-year-old.” Renowned pediatrician T. Berry Brazelton praised the governor, saying “I’m going to be talking about it all over the country...I’m going to be using Illinois as the example of what needs to be done.”

Other states have also taken up the pre-kindergarten banner.

- Tennessee’s governor has stated his commitment to cover all 4-year-olds. The state expanded its top-quality program by 57 percent this year and will consider additional funds next year.
- Arkansas—a poor state, with a family income that is 49th in the nation—nonetheless has continued to expand its new program that is on track to cover 60 percent of the state’s children.
- In 2006, Texas broke a long-standing logjam over expanding its program when it expanded eligibility to include children of military families.
- Even Louisiana, despite overwhelming demands on its resources, decided to make children a priority by increasing funding by \$1.5 million.
- Massachusetts has enacted a high-quality pilot program, and in 2006 both houses of the state legislature unanimously passed a bill establishing pre-kindergarten for all. Advocates hope for full approval in the next session.
- In 2002, Florida voters changed the state constitution to require a quality education for every 4-year-old. While the program’s quality standards are not yet at the level that children need, advocates continue to press for these improvements.

“Until all Illinois children have access to pre-K, we’re not going to stop beating the drum... pre-K is an investment, not an expense, and one that makes our other educational achievements more effective.”

State Representative Roger Eddy (R-IL)

There have also been setbacks—but in each case, advocates and policymakers continue to press forward. In 2006, California voters turned down a ballot initiative that would have covered all 4-year-olds in the state, citing concerns about the funding mechanism and governance structure. However, exit polls showed 62 percent of voters still supported pre-K for all children. Based on this support, the state invested \$100 million in early education shortly after the referendum was defeated.

In 2004, 14 states increased funding for pre-kindergarten by \$204 million over the previous year. In 2005, 26 states added another \$600 million, giving 120,000 more children the opportunity for a good early start. And in 2006, 31 states increased pre-kindergarten by over \$450 million—growth supported by policymakers spanning the political spectrum. **In sum, over the past 3 years, states have increased funding for pre-kindergarten by over \$1.2 billion.**

Individual leaders are also raising the visibility of this topic as never before, including governors such as Jodi Rell (R-CT) and Phil Bredesen (D-TN); and business executives such as Jim Rohr, CEO of PNC and Rusty Hammer, former CEO of the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce. Governor Tim Kaine (D-VA) made pre-K the centerpiece of the education platform in his 2005 campaign and included it in the Democratic response to the 2006 State of the Union address. Yet another marker of how this issue has grown in prominence is media coverage—last year there were over 5,000 major stories on this topic, with the nature of the coverage changing over the past few years from “human interest” stories to ones addressing core issues of quality education, financing and access.

This progress is the result of continued perseverance by a wide range of individuals and organizations. State and local advocates such as Arkansas Advocates for Children and Youth, Strategies for Children in Massachusetts, Preschool California, United Ways of Texas, Florida Children’s Campaign and the Winning Beginning and the PreK Coalition in New York have planned smart campaigns, forged coalitions with many colleagues and built a reputation for working with diverse policymakers and the public to win these victories. In Illinois there was tremendous leadership—and unprecedented collaboration—among three early childhood groups, who jointly decided to lead with pre-K while there was opportunity to make progress, with the expectation of continuing that partnership on other issues. In California, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation has been another philanthropic champion for pre-K, and they have helped develop national strategy. Other key foundations include the Foundation for Child Development, Schumann Fund for New Jersey, George Gund Foundation, and the Joyce Foundation. Head Start leaders have long made the case for the importance of pre-K for poor children. And many early childhood groups, such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children, have pushed for more and better pre-K.

How long will the Trusts’ pre-K initiative last?

Since 2001, the Trusts has invested over \$50 million in more than 20 organiza-

tions, with grantees supporting rigorous nonpartisan research and analysis, as well as public education campaigns to inform policy debates in over half the states. Our grantees have had great success to date, but as is true with all our work, future investments will depend on the opportunity for continued progress—which for pre-K looks very promising over the next few years. However, at some point, states will move from pre-K to a new challenge. That’s the natural cycle of policy change. Our philosophy is to target issues where there is a unique window of opportunity to advance change, and when that window begins to close, move to the next issue.

Our philosophy is to target issues where there is a unique window of opportunity to advance change, and when that window begins to close, move to the next issue. (In the future) the structure of our pre-K initiative... may well lend itself to other issues.

In fact state advocates have told us that, the structure of our pre-K initiative—a tight focus, support for research and public education efforts, and engagement of diverse messengers—may well lend itself to other issues. So we would hope to use the lessons learned from this experience to develop an effective campaign in another area of vital interest to children, such as some aspect of health care or supports for infants and toddlers—as long as it meets our criteria.

We also hope that the long-term research commissioned under this initiative, as well as the advocacy training and capacity-building supported by the Trusts’ funds, will leave a lasting benefit to the field.

What do you mean by “quality pre-kindergarten for all”?

Every state has its own definition of pre-K and will implement that vision somewhat differently. But here’s what we look for (figure 1):

Figure 1

Pre-K programs should:

- Meet **quality** benchmarks associated with improving children’s outcomes, such as highly-trained teachers
- Have a **fun and engaging** atmosphere that children look forward to and enjoy
- Encompass **all aspects** of children’s development—cognitive, social, emotional, physical
- Include referrals to **health and other services**
- Help **parents** educate their children and encourage parents to be involved in the pre-K program

State pre-K policies should:

- Improve both the **quality** of pre-K programs as well as children’s **access** to them
- Provide **voluntary** access to a core program for all families who want pre-K for their 3- and 4-year-olds
- Establish an ultimate goal that **pre-K will be available to all** children, but they may reach that target through a **phased-in enrollment that serves disadvantaged children first**
- Offer a core pre-K program for all children and **additional services for at-risk** children
- Include diverse settings—schools, community-based, and faith-based settings—to **give parents good choices**, as long as quality standards are met
- Collaborate with **child care** to provide the coverage that working parents need
- Support pre-K not as a stand-alone policy but as part of a **system of services** (including Head Start) that are needed for young children’s future success
- Use improvements in pre-K to **strengthen the rest of the early childhood system**
- **Not take funding** from one children’s program to pay for another

Would the Trusts' pre-K initiative support a broader agenda?

Children need far more than pre-K to thrive, and states are tackling a variety of those issues. As has always been the case, advocates in each state will determine which of the very important supports that children need are most likely to move in their state's policy climate. And because states face different challenges and have different needs, they will have different priorities—some will focus on health care, some on child care and others on pre-K. Many advocates have a broad vision for children—and they should because children need a wide range of supports. But as policy experts repeatedly advise, what is most important is that advocates choose some focus within that vision to win real victories for children—one step at a time.

In some states, such as Texas, advocates focused on pre-K because they were convinced that it was the only child-focused topic that would move in their state at that time. Other states are packaging pre-K with selected other services in skillful ways—with the Trusts' support. Illinois is a powerful example of using pre-K's lead message and strong data to strengthen the entire early childhood system, since the new commitments support an early childhood fund that devotes 11 cents of each dollar for infant/toddler programs. In Massachusetts, advocates look just beyond pre-K and are working toward a combined package of pre-K and full-day kindergarten. Other states and school districts are concentrating on pre-K to third grade given the critical window of opportunity to solidify early learning in those years.

We are also pleased to participate in a new collaboration—joining the Packard Foundation, Gates Foundation and the Buffett Early Childhood Fund in support of a joint effort by Zero to Three and Pre-K Now to develop a vision for a coordinated and comprehensive system of early care and education services for children prenatal to age 5 that foster their success in school and life. The paper will document best practices from select

states in their journey to build bridges between pre-K, child care, infant/toddler programs and other family support services and offer policy recommendations for those who are striving toward this vision.

Two other points are important here. First, no matter which issue advocates choose to focus on, it is critical that states not rob Peter to pay Paul—taking funds from one effective children's program to pay for another. And second, while the Trusts' pre-K initiative has a specific goal, we are moving towards that target in ways that we hope ultimately will strengthen the whole network of early childhood



While the Trusts' pre-K initiative has a specific goal, we are moving towards that target in ways that we hope ultimately will strengthen the whole network of early childhood services.

services. For example, improvements in pre-K, such as better teacher training opportunities, can be structured so they also apply to those who teach programs for younger children. And after states win victories in pre-K, advocates are well-positioned, with deeper skills and experiences, to build on that success to advance other policies needed to create a nurturing environment for children.

The Trusts has now helped organize a new project addressing children prenatal to age 5 called the Partnership for America's Economic Success—does that mean the Trusts has changed its focus?

Not at all. As mentioned earlier, the Trusts' pre-K initiative is moving full steam ahead. But we're excited about pursuing a separate but related project to help children. While the research is clear that pre-K makes a tremendous difference, it's not the only support children need to thrive. With 11 other funders, we helped start (and now administer) the Partnership for America's Economic Success (www.partnershipforsuccess.org). Robert Dugger, a managing director of Tudor Investment Corporation, is our lead partner and chair of the advisory board. Sara Watson is the project director. Its purpose is to assess the contribution that different supports for young children make to the nation's economy. That project is in the early stages, while the pre-K initiative is a full-fledged campaign.

If the evidence compiled by the Partnership is compelling—and we hope that it is—we will seek to work with our partners to expand the Partnership into a major campaign designed to advance the most effective investments in children. Just as the Trusts supports projects to protect the world's oceans as well as the world's old growth forests, so too can we advance a variety of effective, targeted initiatives that help children grow into healthy, productive adults.

This is an exciting time for early childhood advocates. Our nation has the opportunity to fundamentally change what it means to provide a quality education for all children. Success to date shows that a focused agenda, backed by good research and fueled by smart strategies to get that information into policy debates, can win substantial victories for children.

Susan Urahn is the Managing Director, State Policy Initiatives and Sara Watson is Senior Officer, State Policy Initiatives at The Pew Charitable Trusts

For more information on the Trusts' strategy, visit www.pewtrusts.org.

The Pew Charitable Trusts serves the public interest in three major areas of work: informing the public on key issues and trends as a highly credible source of independent, nonpartisan research and polling information; advancing policy solutions on important issues facing the American people; and supporting the arts, heritage, health and well-being of our diverse citizenry and civic life, with particular emphasis on Philadelphia.

Related Reading

A Testament to How Parents Adapt and Spend Time with Their Children

Changing Rhythms of American Family Life

By Suzanne M. Bianchi,
John P. Robinson and
Melissa A. Milkie

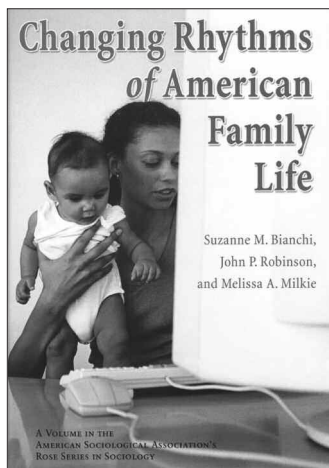
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The time parents spend with their children builds the social capital kids draw upon as they develop in life. Observers worry that workplace demands and other societal changes are eroding child-parent time. That concern was voiced by none other than President Bill Clinton in 1999 when he delivered, in a speech, a startling revelation—parents were spending 22 fewer hours per week in the home compared with 30 years earlier. The president's Council

of Economic Advisers had arrived at this figure by adding the hours mothers and fathers spent in the paid workplace and comparing them to 1968. The implication—that child-parent time was indeed diminishing due to workplace demands—seemed inescapable to many. It lingers to this day.

Against this backdrop arrives *Changing Rhythms of American Family Life*, an authoritative new volume from the Russell Sage Foundation that takes much of the mystery out of how parents are spending their time these days. As is often the case, there is good news and bad news. Despite more harried lives, parents are, on average, spending more time with their children than in the 1960s when more children grew up in homes where dad was the breadwinner and mom stayed at home. This is less so among the poor and in single-parent families, however. *Changing Rhythms* is a report, in book form, on time diary studies of American parents over four decades. University of Maryland sociologist Suzanne M. Bianchi and colleagues analyzed data from time diaries and interviews of 1,200 parents in the National Survey of Parents (NSP). That survey has completed six waves to date—from

1965 to 2000.

For many who have witnessed the march of women into the work force and rise in single parenthood, the notion that there has not been an overall decline in the amount of time parents are spending with children seems counter-intuitive. The story that unfolds from Bianchi's analysis, however, is one of adults striving to make time for children in an environment where many things compete for their time. Among the compensations parents are making is less emphasis on cooking and housework than in the past. When children are first born, working mothers work less and dads work more to compensate. Men are helping out around the house more and they are spending more time with children than men did in the 1960s.

Because birth control makes not having children easier and society now accepts that people may choose not to have children, there has been a change in who is having children. Parenthood can now be timed later in life when adults feel more ready to devote time to children. This delay is accompanied by a decline in the number of children mothers have, permitting a larger investment in each child.

In disadvantaged popu-

lations, this is often not the case. There, child-bearing occurs earlier in life, forcing what the authors call “adultification” of adolescents into early parenthood. In many respects, family formation is bifurcating along social and economic class, with children arriving later and within marriage among the better-educated and earlier and outside of marriage among the least well educated.

The authors point to two facts that point to the mounting pressures parents feel: Parents' total workload continues to increase with parents averaging a 9- to 9.5-hour work day 7 days a week when unpaid work is added to paid work. Employed mothers average a 10-hour work day 7 days a week. And, American parents have less vacation and work the longest annual hours than any other country, including Japan.

This is a timely, comprehensive, and well-written overview of how today's American parents allocate their time. Besides clearing up misconceptions about the state of parenting today, it offers surprising insights into gender equality and parents balancing of work and children. For more information, visit <http://www.russellsage.org/publications/books/060110.113159> ■

Hooked on Literacy: Why Dorothy Strickland Sees Language as Job One

Few educators have the depth of knowledge and breadth of experience in early childhood literacy as Dr. Dorothy Strickland. She occupies the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Chair in Education at Rutgers University and is



a Senior Research Fellow at NIEER. Her numerous contributions to the field of language acquisition have been recognized by organizations such as the International Reading Association where she has been installed in the Reading Hall of Fame.

A prolific author, Strickland's most recent publications are *Teaching Phonics Today*, *Beginning Reading and Writing* and *Learning About Print in Preschool*. *Preschool Matters* asked her what she thinks about the state of early childhood literacy education these days and what can be done to improve it.

Q: Of all the subjects in early childhood education these days, literacy seems to be red hot. Why do you think it is at the forefront of so many initiatives?

A: Literacy achievement is at the forefront of accountability in our country. For better or worse, schools, teachers, and children are measured in large part by student performance in reading and writing. Attention to early literacy as a function of school readiness is reflected in early childhood education classrooms and in the public policy arena. The focus is on both prevention and early intervention with a special emphasis on children who may be at risk for failure.

Q: Many in and out of education talk about literacy as if it were a fixed concept. Is it? How would you define literacy?

A: Research on literacy learning and teaching is ever-evolving, resulting in a changing definition of literacy that takes into account the increasing demands of all aspects of our lives—personal, social, and economic.

While it is still true that becoming literate involves the development of some very basic skills and strategies, low-level basic skills that involve surface level decoding and the recall of information are hardly enough. It is not only what we are required to do with texts that has changed; the texts themselves have changed.

We view and generate texts in endless variety: books, magazines, and pamphlets of every conceivable design; letters and memoranda arriving via fax, e-mail, and surface mail; images on television

screens, computer screens, and other electronic displays in our kitchens and offices; not to mention the array of information for product assembly, care, or operation. Today's learners need literacy skills that help them adapt to constant change. Thus, becoming and being literate is a complex endeavor, and it begins during the early childhood years.

Q: What are the components of a high-quality literacy classroom?

A: High-quality classrooms are those in which literacy learning is grounded in all the ways that children learn and grow—physically, socially, emotionally, and cognitively. Play is integral to exploration and instruction. Teachers are keenly aware of individual differences among their students.

Differentiated instruction is reflected through flexible grouping in which children have opportunities to work with the whole group, in small groups, and one-to-one with adults. A variety of media and materials are provided for exploration and teaching. These include an abundance of children's literature—both fiction and non-fiction—and lots of materials and opportunities for drawing and writing.

The environment in these classrooms is rich with print, representing language familiar to children and resulting from daily activities and thematic inquiry. Teaching

and learning include, but go well beyond, basic skills to focus on problem solving and strategies for independent learning.

Q: Can the kind of classroom you describe serve English Language Learners as well as those for whom English is their first language?

A: Early childhood professionals in high-quality learning environments seek to learn as much as they can about the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the children with whom they work. Such teachers understand the nature of linguistic diversity and provide developmentally appropriate experiences with English language literacy for children.

Family literacy programs are offered to reinforce these experiences and provide continuity between home and school. Whenever practical, such programs employ staff who speak the children's home language as well as English.

Q: The debate over assessment of preschoolers seems never-ending. How can preschool children's literacy development be faithfully assessed and educators held accountable?

A: Monitoring and assessing children's early literacy development is an important part of a comprehensive early childhood program. A sound assessment program can be used to monitor children's

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More States are Tracking Preschool with Quality Rating Systems

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licensing requirements. Anna Carter, who oversees licensing at the North Carolina Division of Child Development, says awarding stars for compliance in the old system amounted to “free points”. Providers who had achieved a 5-Star rating under the old system are now wrestling with how to keep their rating under the more stringent new system. Carter says inaugurating the new system has required a big communication effort with

providers and parents. “How do you explain to parents that nothing has changed with the way you deliver care but today you’re a two-star facility and yesterday you had three stars?” Carter asks.

Most states make participation in their QRS programs voluntary but in North Carolina and Tennessee, it is part of the licensing process and therefore mandatory. Nearly all states with quality ratings include accreditation as a requisite for achieving the top levels. Anne Mitchell,

president of NAEYC’s board and author of the United Way Guide on Quality Rating Systems, says the quest for accreditation actually gave rise to QRS systems in the first place. States recognized the huge gap between the national standards and their own regulatory requirements. As programs struggled to achieve national accreditation, many fell short and states saw the need to establish levels of achievement.

With so many states now exploring quality rankings, it makes sense to align the various accreditations more closely. Through a joint project, NAEYC, the National Association for Family Child Care and the National After School Association will collaborate to help states build accreditation benchmarks into their quality rating standards so providers don’t have to satisfy two separate sets of requirements.

North Carolina’s Carter and Virginia’s Glazer are

among those who believe national accreditation isn’t necessary to demonstrate quality in state program. In fact, Carter says that even though legislative restrictions on using national accreditation as a licensing requirement have been lifted, her state is better off for having one agency oversee licensing and quality assessment. Her team in North Carolina has advised other states like Washington, Wyoming and Indiana on ways to raise program quality. She cautions against applying a cookie-cutter approach to quality rating systems. “We were fortunate that we had other systems in place (Smart Start, a strong community college system, TEACH, and salary supplements) before we implemented our star system,” she explains. “Not all states have those supports in place, so they may be shooting themselves in the foot if they try to simply copy what other states have done.” ■

North Carolina’s Star Rated License System	
Number of Stars Received	Total Points Earned
★	3-4
★★	5-7
★★★	8-10
★★★★	11-13
★★★★★	14-15

In North Carolina’s system, up to 5 points can be awarded in each of three areas—program standards, education standards and compliance history. The highest score achievable is 15. Stars are awarded based on total number of points earned. The highest star rating is five.

Dorothy Strickland: Hooked on Literacy

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development and learning, to guide a teacher’s planning and decision making, to identify children who might benefit from special services, and to report to and communicate with others.

In addition to the ongoing, day-by-day assessments that link closely to the early childhood curriculum, there is a growing trend toward the use of child assessments for program accountability. These assessments, in which early literacy is often a major component, reflect an increasingly high-stakes climate in which preschool programs are required to demonstrate effectiveness (often on standardized measures) in improving school readiness and creating positive child outcomes. Unfortunately, assessment results related to early literacy are sometimes interpreted to be representative of all aspects of the instructional program. Early childhood educators should make use of multiple measures if the assessment information will be

the basis for important educational decisions and recommendations. Knowledge about the different types of assessment and their uses is essential for all concerned.

Q: How can policymakers and others get more information about enhancing literacy development in preschoolers?

A: My colleague, Shanon Riley-Ayers and I co-authored the policy brief *Early Literacy: Policy and Practice in the Preschool Years*, available at the NIEER website at <http://nieer.org/docs/index.php?DocID=143>. Information from that brief will also be published in a forthcoming book, *Literacy Leaders in Preschool Settings: A Quick Guide for Directors, Principals, Supervisors, and Teacher Leaders*, co-published by Teachers College Press and the National Association for the Education of Young Children, Spring 2007. ■

Is Over Scheduling of Extracurricular Activities Really Harming Children?

Peruse the parenting bookshelves or surf parenting web sites these days and one is likely to encounter the view that many preschool-aged and older children are being over scheduled with extracurricular activities. The idea that children are being over scheduled to the detriment of their healthy development and parent-child relationships is widely held. A 2006 Roper poll conducted by the Public Broadcast Service and the National Parent Teacher Association found that four out of five parents believe there is a national trend toward over-scheduling children.

Yale University psychologist Joseph L. Mahoney, University of Texas sociologist Angel L. Harris, and University of Michigan psychologist Jacquelynne S. Eccles examined a broad swath of research to test the over scheduling hypothesis. They found the bulk of research on organized activ-

ities shows positive consequences for children who participate. Not only do children benefit academically and educationally, they also benefit in social, civic and physical development.

School-aged children in the U.S. and other Western countries average 40 to 50 percent of their waking hours in discretionary activities outside of school. They spend part of that time in organized activities such as sports, clubs, and fine arts. The rest is divided between educational activities like homework, television watching, playing games, working and what the researchers refer to as “hanging out.”

Mahoney, Harris and Eccles say proponents of the over scheduling hypothesis base their view on three interrelated propositions:

- Children participate in organized activities because of perceived pressure from parents or other adults;

- The time commitment required for such activities is so extensive that traditional family activities like dinnertime and parent-child discussions are sacrificed;

- Children devoting lots of time to these activities are at risk for developing adjustment problems and poor relationships with parents.

They found that while there are many reasons children participate in organized activities, they seldom describe pressure from parents or the role such activities.

On average, children between ages 5 and 18 spent about 5 hours per week in organized activities—about the same amount of time they spent on out-of-school educational activities. They spent less time performing household chores and hanging out and more time playing games and watching television.

Time spent participating in organized activities increased from childhood to adolescence but did not dominate American children’s free time.

They found predominantly positive associations between total number of organized activities participated in and social and academic outcomes such as academic achievement, self-concept, college attendance, parental involvement and career aspirations. Yale’s Mahoney says we should be less concerned about over-scheduling and more concerned about the 40 percent of children who don’t participate in organized activities. The report is featured in Volume XX Number IV of the Social Policy Report, a publication of the Society for Research in Child Development. To read it, visit <http://www.srcd.org/press/mahoney.pdf>. ■

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