Time to Help the States with Pre-K

The ill winds buffeting state economies are threatening years of investments in pre-K by far-sighted governors and other state leaders. This is the picture that begins to emerge when we look at data for The State of Preschool 2009 yearbook. The recession was relatively young when FY 2009 spending was set but the effects of the downturn were evident even then. Some states maintained their commitment to pre-K, some flat-funded their programs, and others reduced funding (see article on page 4).

As the recession has tightened its grip, the pendulum has swung toward more cuts. Details of 2010 aren’t complete but evidence suggests we can color this year red as well. That brings us to 2011. Budgeting for next year comes at a time when states have experienced a record five consecutive quarters of declining revenues and the federal stimulus money many used to plug budget gaps will run out. Little surprise, then, that 12 governors have proposed cuts to their programs for 2011 and Arizona is proposing to eliminate state pre-K altogether.

These harbingers and a growing consensus that the road to fiscal recovery will be a long one raise a troubling question: Are we entering a decade when we risk losing the investments states made in the previous one? It’s not just a question for governors and state legislatures to consider. It’s one that should grab the attention of our leaders in Washington, DC as well. Here’s why:

• States increased their investments in pre-K steadily over a decade based on solid evidence that quality pre-K pays dividends in the form of a better-educated workforce that will earn more and pay more taxes that benefit government at all levels. It’s in the best interest of all levels of government to see that these investments are not lost.
• As a candidate, President Obama promised to guarantee access to quality, affordable early childhood education for every child in America. Federal early education efforts to date have yet to help the states move toward this goal.
• State pre-K is struggling for funding at precisely the time when more families qualify because incomes are down and families have reduced capacity to purchase quality pre-K on their own. As a result, their kids are at greater risk of not receiving pre-K.

That’s why I am calling on President Obama and Congress to create an early education fund that will match all state expenditures for preschool above the 2008 level, dollar for dollar. That would be a real challenge grant, one that would respond to the real needs of America’s young children and families.

W. Steven Barnett
Co-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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New York Takes a Fresh Look at Universal Pre-K

Most States with a Goal of Providing Preschool for All Are Coming Up Short. In New York, the Stakeholder Coalition Looked at Why and What Should Be Done about It.

In 1997, New York passed legislation calling for the state to eventually provide a half day of pre-K for all 4-year-olds whose parents want them to have it. The following year, New York Universal Pre-K (UPK) opened its doors. Twelve years and many funding battles later, the state spends $414 million providing pre-K for 109,000 kids (about 43 percent of its 4-year-olds). That’s a lot of kids, but there are an estimated 120,000 more who, for one reason or another, don’t have access to the program.

New York is not alone among states that have universal pre-K as a goal but have yet to achieve universal provision of services. Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Massachusetts, and West Virginia also have laws on the books calling for preschool for all and none have achieved it. Only Oklahoma, which began universal pre-K in 1998, can be said to have achieved anything approaching universality with 71 percent of kids served by state pre-K. (When preschool special education and Head Start enrollments are added to Oklahoma’s state pre-K numbers, total public pre-K enrollment in the Sooner State hovers around 90 percent.)

With states making difficult choices due to the recession, some question how much progress the states can make toward achieving universality. In New York, the statewide early learning coalition Winning Beginning NY decided now is a good time to assess the universal pre-K program and develop a plan for moving toward preschool for all. Their report, released in March, accomplishes that and serves to remind state leaders that in difficult times early education should be viewed on the investment side of the ledger and not as a cost.

Noting the Board of Regents promotes expansion of pre-K as part of the state’s education system, the report identifies problems that challenge the effectiveness of state pre-K. They include low funding that leaves more children without access to the programs than those with it, no funding for full-day programs (a situation that may be a disincentive for parents with full-time jobs), a lack of focus on workforce development that impedes the state’s ability to turn out more credentialed teachers, and inadequate assessment tools and strategies.

Among the next steps recommended by the coalition were these:

• Develop a five-year plan to prepare an early childhood workforce that will assure all kids have access to highly effective teachers.
• Revise the UPK funding statute so that pre-K funding is sustainable, predictable, and supports full-day options.
• Enact legislation to implement a quality improvement system, to guide investments in and strengthen the quality of all early learning programs and better inform parents.

Nancy Kolben, executive director of the New York advocacy organization Child Care, Inc., summed the effort up this way: “It has been 13 years since lawmakers created our pre-K initiative and in that time, new research and best practices have proven how to maximize the return on our tax dollar. For New York state, the next step is a sharper focus on quality: improving our pre-K programs and investing in our early childhood workforce.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Year UPK program began</th>
<th>Percentage of 4-year-olds served (2008-2009)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>53</td>
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<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>51</td>
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<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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New York is not alone among states that have universal pre-K as a goal but have yet to receive universal provision of services.
Will State Pre-K Stop Growing?

Troubling Signs Are Beginning to Arise, Says NIEER’s Latest Yearbook

Kids across the country are feeling the impact of the recession and preschoolers are no exception. The State of Preschool 2009, NIEER’s annual study that looks at all states on a variety of measures of public pre-K, shows an overall slow-down in the growth of state programs as well as cuts in a number of key states.

“The data we are seeing suggest that the immediate future of pre-K is in more peril than past trends might suggest,” said NIEER Co-Director Steve Barnett. He says since most experts agree state budgets will more fully bear the recession’s brunt in 2010 and 2011, the potential exists for the momentum developed in state-funded pre-K in recent years to further dissipate. Already, preschool cuts are proposed for next year in 11 states and more may be coming as legislatures address revenue shortfalls. “In some states the cuts are nothing short of a disaster,” says Barnett. He points to Ohio, where the state pre-K program has been eliminated. Preschool-aged children there are denied what had been a quality program and given child care instead.

Since budgets for fiscal year 2009 were set before many states perceived the extent of the recession, the 2009 data do not reflect the difficult choices many states were forced to subsequently make as revenues continued to decline. Even so, The State of Preschool 2009 showed that the average amount states spent per child, when adjusted
for inflation, declined from $4,179 in 2008 to $4,143 in 2009, ending an upward trend.

Total enrollment and spending increased for 2009, but not across the board. In 10 states enrollment declined. Other key findings showed modest growth in some areas and large discrepancies between states:

- Enrollment nationally increased by more than 81,000. More than 1.2 million children attended state-funded preschool education programs, 1 million at age 4.
- Total funding for state pre-K rose to more than $5 billion. The increase was $441 million, about half the increase seen in the previous year.
- Twenty-three of 38 states with state-funded preschool failed to fully meet NIEER benchmarks for teacher qualifications and 26 failed to meet the benchmark for assistant teacher qualifications. Seven states had programs that met fewer than half of the benchmarks for quality standards. States failing to meet most benchmarks included three of the four states with the largest number of children—California, Texas, and Florida.
- Texas continues to have no maximum class sizes or limits on staff-child ratios. California and Maine had limits on staff-child ratios but no class size limit. Most other states limited classes to 20 or fewer children with a teacher and an assistant.
- Oklahoma remained the only state where almost every child had the opportunity to attend a quality preschool education program at age 4, but other states approached that goal.
- Enrollment of 3-year-olds continued to rise, though in very small numbers. Illinois and New Jersey were clear leaders in serving children at age 3. Two states that were leaders in the past, Arkansas and Massachusetts, cut support.

“With more families facing economic hardship, publicly-supported preschool is more important than ever,” Barnett said. He cited new research published in the journal Child Development showing that low family income has disproportionately more negative effects on preschool-age children than on older children and adolescents. Those effects include higher school dropout rates, lower income as adults, and greater adult health problems.

“We need to get these recession babies on a progression path so they don’t carry the scars for a lifetime,” Barnett said. “That is why I am calling on the federal government to create an early education fund that would provide matching grants so the states can expand access to their preschool programs.

“As pure economic stimulus it is hard to beat pre-K,” he said. “The vast majority of the money goes directly to jobs, many in the private sector, and virtually none is spent on imported goods or services. The nation is going to have to pay for the large deficits we are running up, and that requires that we invest in our future productivity. Educationally effective preschool programs can lead to more productive future workers.”

### Chart 1: Number of State Pre-K Programs Meeting Benchmarks 2002–2009

- **Teacher has BA**
  - 2002-2003: 24
  - 2003-2004: 26
  - 2004-2005: 27
  - 2005-2006: 45
  - 2006-2007: 37
  - 2007-2008: 41
  - 2008-2009: 46

- **Specialized training in EC**
  - 2002-2003: 23
  - 2003-2004: 37
  - 2004-2005: 37
  - 2005-2006: 34
  - 2006-2007: 42
  - 2007-2008: 37
  - 2008-2009: 47

- **Assistant has CDA or higher**
  - 2002-2003: 11
  - 2003-2004: 11
  - 2004-2005: 11
  - 2005-2006: 11
  - 2006-2007: 14
  - 2007-2008: 15
  - 2008-2009: 19

- **At least 15 hours in-service training**
  - 2002-2003: 19
  - 2003-2004: 29
  - 2004-2005: 32
  - 2005-2006: 32
  - 2006-2007: 32
  - 2007-2008: 32
  - 2008-2009: 32

- **Early Learning Standards**
  - 2002-2003: 19
  - 2003-2004: 29
  - 2004-2005: 32
  - 2005-2006: 32
  - 2006-2007: 32
  - 2007-2008: 32
  - 2008-2009: 32

### Chart 2: State Pre-K and Head Start Enrollment as Percentage of Total Population

- **3-YEAR-OLDS**
  - State Public Pre-K: 53%
  - Head Start: 33%
  - Special Ed†: 7%
  - Other*: 3%
  - No Center-Based Care/Education: 33%

- **4-YEAR-OLDS**
  - State Public Pre-K: 25%
  - Head Start: 35%
  - Special Ed†: 11%
  - Other*: 3%
  - No Center-Based Care/Education: 26%

† This is an estimated number of children in special education not enrolled in state-funded pre-K or Head Start. Total enrollment in special education is higher.

*This includes local public education as well as private child care and other center-based programs.
Many know Shakira as the vibrant entertainer with chart-topping pop hits, but there’s another side to this Colombian native. At the beginning of her musical career she made a pact with herself to help the disadvantaged kids she saw as she traveled throughout Latin America. That was the 1990s. Today, she’s a savvy advocate for universal education and providing early care and education for Latin America’s kids. She’s a coalition-builder who knows the policy issues and moves easily among heads of state in enlisting the powerful in her cause. She recently spoke with Preschool Matters about her approach to expanding early care and education in Latin America.

Q: How is it that you became interested in early childhood development (ECD)?
A: Being from the developing world affects you in so many ways. Growing up in Colombia has given me the clarity of mind to recognize that education can help break the cycle of poverty. It unlocks every child’s potential and teaches them that they can have whatever they want in life. Studies have proven that a child’s ability to think, to establish relationships, and live up to his or her full potential is directly related to the care, education, and nutrition received in the first years of life, which is why ECD becomes the best investment a society can make by giving people the possibility to live their lives in a productive and satisfactory way.

Q: You not only promote early childhood development through your own philanthropy but you also developed a rather unique coalition of other singers to leverage their fame to gain support for the cause. Could you talk about how that works?
A: ALAS Foundation is a coalition of artists, intellectuals, business leaders, public figures, and a broad movement of thousands of young members throughout Latin America. We raise awareness in society about the importance of early stimulation and care for children from birth to 6 years old. We’ve committed to be the voices of those who don’t have a voice, and that’s what we do at the international forums we attend such as the Ibero-American Summits of Presidents where we have discussed with various presidents the need to invest in this population segment. We campaign for better policies and to ensure that early childhood development is on the agenda at these international gatherings.

Q: Your organization established a research wing to help develop policy recommendations. How important is that and in what kinds of efforts are they engaged?
A: I call the ECD Secretariat for Latin America and the Caribbean a platform of knowledge on early childhood development where top agencies and experts can combine their knowledge and practices into an overall effort to achieve universal access in education, nutrition, and attention to health for Latin America’s young children. This platform wouldn’t be possible without the support of Jeffrey Sachs at the Earth Institute, Columbia University, the Pan American Health Organization, World Food Program, Inter-American Development Bank, World Bank, and others. I think this is what makes the Secretariat a unique and innovative initiative.

After the creation of the Secretariat and the presentation of the first ECD report at the Ibero-American Summit in Portugal, our group of experts is working on the second ECD report that will be presented at this year’s Millennium Development Goals Summit and XXI Ibero-American Summit in Mar del Plata, Argentina. We also just launched a groundbreaking $300 million initia-
tive with the World Bank, which offers funding and technical support to help countries create ECD programs in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Q: Here in the U.S. we can point to leading states like Oklahoma as models of success for delivering high-quality preschool education. Is there a country or program within a country you would point to that offers a model of success with early childhood programs in Latin America?
A: There are only two countries in Latin America that have a comprehensive ECD state policy: Chile and Colombia. Chile, with “Chile Crece Contigo,” founded by former President Bachelet, monitors development of every child from the first prenatal check-up until they join primary school. Last year in Colombia, President Uribe launched the Early Childhood Educational Policy, which seeks to guarantee the right to a quality early education to children younger than age 5, especially for those who belong to poor and vulnerable families. Our dream is that every Latin American country has and implements a comprehensive ECD policy of its own. Can you imagine that? Every single child will have access to early education, will have proper nutrition, and will receive attention to health. We would be giving each child the opportunity to an equal start.

Q: What do you see as the major challenges to your efforts? What about the recession?
A: I see the recession more as an opportunity than as a challenge because there is no question that a downturn is a catalyst to encourage people to think differently and early childhood development and education programs are an investment that bring the highest returns. I think it is also a major step towards a more conscious capitalism where people realize that the human and social capitals are the most important capitals for achieving economic success.

Q: It has been written that you are not shy about press-ing Latin America’s leaders for concrete proof that they are making progress in early care and education. How is that going?
A: We definitely want them to commit. We have a delegate from each of the presidents of Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Argentina, Panama, and Paraguay participating in our Secretariat, and we are inviting all the other Latin American countries to join and be part of this unique initiative. At both the Millennium Development Goals Summit and the Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government in Mar del Plata, Argentina, we will present a road map of ECD for the region and advocate for effective ECD interventions as a cost-effective way to increase social mobility, fight inequality, and improve human capital in the region. We want to help them to commit by offering them as many tools as possible to help them do so.

NIEER to Study Pre-K in Colombia

Efforts aimed at expanding early childhood education in Latin America have also drawn attention to the need for more and better research to help inform policy decisions. Much of the research on early childhood programs in the region either does not directly address program effects on children’s outcomes or is focused on a nutritional intervention or a cash transfer intervention. To help fill the gap, NIEER is collaborating with Aeio Tu, a private early childhood education provider in Colombia, to study the program’s effects on children. “Aeio Tu is well thought of in Colombia, serves disadvantaged as well as more advantaged children, and has centers in a number of communities through partnerships with the public sector, so they are an ideal partner for the project,” says NIEER Assistant Research Professor Milagros Nores who will lead the study.

Nores says plans call for conducting a randomized trial with a sample of 1,200 children to assess the effects of the intervention. The trial is expected to get underway in July. It will be conducted in two centers located in two very low-income communities in Santa Marta. The centers have a combined capacity of 600 children and 20 classrooms. Six hundred children will be randomly assigned to the centers and 600 of corresponding ages will be assigned to the control group.

At present, the duration of the study is slated for five years with the possibility of extending it beyond that. Among the questions Nores expects to answer are these:

- What effect, if any, does the Aeio Tu model of early childhood education have on early childhood cognitive, socio-emotional, and health development?
- Do the effects vary by intensity and/or cohort of children?
- Does participation in the program result in improved school readiness at kindergarten entry?
- Do the programs persist into the primary education years and do they extend beyond school?

Nores says it will be the first randomized study of a comprehensive early childhood intervention ever conducted in Colombia.
in the trenches  Preschool News From

Poor Quality Teachers Prevent Kids from Reaching Potential

When it comes to early reading, a bad teacher can prevent children from reaching their full potential. That's the finding of a Florida State University study published in the journal Science. Research with pairs of twins has shown that genetics play a larger role in a child's reading achievement than other factors such as classroom experience. Until this study, however, research hasn't been able to firmly establish that teachers have a direct influence on the ability of children to perform to their full learning potential.

Florida State University researcher Jeanette Taylor and colleagues examined data from identical and fraternal twins taking part in the Florida Twin Project on Reading. Identical twins share all of their genes while fraternal twins share, on average, half of their genes, so comparing them gives researchers a way to calculate how much of the variability in reading achievement is because of genetic versus environmental influences.

Using the scores of the twins' Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) test, which assesses reading skill they estimated how much of the variability in reading was due to genetic factors. Then they used the test scores of the twins' classmates to create a measure of teacher quality.

When the end-of-the-year test scores showed the entire classroom of students made gains in reading achievement beyond expectations when compared to their scores at the beginning of the year that indicated that it was primarily due to a high-quality teacher. On the other hand, low end-of-year test scores indicated a poor quality teacher. The researchers kept the twins' test scores out of the teacher quality calculations so as to assure that teacher quality scores would be independent of the twins' achievement.

Once that was done, the researchers could use statistical modeling of the scores of the various sets of twins to determine how much of their gains were due to their genetic make-up and how much to the teacher. Good teachers were able to moderate the effects of the twins' genetics because they performed up to their potential. In the case of twins with poor teachers, that didn't occur.

While other environmental factors such as interaction among children can have some effect on student performance, the data in the study clearly underscored the importance of teachers. Taylor put it this way: "When instruction is less effective, then children's learning potential is not optimized and genetic differences are left unrealized."

New Fears about Children's Exposure to Lead

Studies looking at the effects of lead on children’s development have found that even when lead is present at levels once thought safe it can negatively affect children’s development. That's because lead mimics calcium and young children absorb calcium—and lead—more efficiently than adults. Not only is lead more likely to affect young children, it is more likely to affect children from low-income families because they are more likely to be exposed to housing environments with lead paint and lead dust.

Claire Cole and Adam Winsler, both of George Mason University, reviewed the research literature on lead as it affects children for the most recent issue of Social Policy Report. Among the issues they explore are modes of exposure and absorption, children’s outcomes after being exposed, societal costs, methods and costs of abatement, and the current state of lead control policy.

Perhaps the most disturbing finding concerns children with relatively low blood lead levels. Their IQs decreased by an average of 7.4 points as their blood lead levels increased from one to 10 micrograms per deciliter. IQs continued to drop at blood levels above 10 micrograms but the decreases were less pronounced. Cole and Winsler conclude “the effect size for lead’s influence on cognitive outcomes is similar in magnitude or greater than other well-known risk factors such as poverty and maternal education.”

Among the outcomes that exact a cost on society are reductions in student achievement and increased criminal activity. In the last few years, researchers analyzing data from the long-term Cincinnati Lead Study, which includes the years before and after lead was removed from the nation’s gasoline, have correlated exposure to lead with significantly greater amounts of criminal activity and police intervention. Winsler says the overall cost of lead exposure can be estimated between $192 billion and $270 billion. Figuring that lead hazard control practices would cost less than $11 billion, they say each dollar invested in it would return between $17 and $221 in increased tax contributions and savings in health, crime, and special education costs. The report is available at http://www.srcd.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=238&Itemid=543.
Illinois Drafts ELL Rules for Pre-K Classrooms

The Illinois Education Agency has drawn up rules that if adopted by the State Board of Education would require school districts to give home-language surveys to parents to determine if a language other than English is spoken at home and screen all children from such homes for their English proficiency. In preschools where 20 or more pupils with limited English proficiency speak the same native language, they would be required to provide transitional bilingual education.

The rules were crafted to accompany a change in state law that extended the category of “children of limited-English-speaking ability” in public schools to the pre-K level. Some have questioned the move. Barbara Bowman, NIEER Scientific Advisory Board member and chief officer of early childhood education for the Chicago Public Schools, is among them.

“When you are talking about assessing a 3-year-old, they sometimes don’t talk, not because they don’t speak English, but they just don’t want to talk to you,” she told Education Week. She said some kids could end up in bilingual classes “by default.”

Bowman said she opposes the mandate for another reason: In bilingual programs, ELL children are often separated from native English-speakers so they can’t talk to them and improve their own English skills. She also said some parents of ELL kids don’t want their kids in classrooms where the home language is spoken.

Early Learning Challenge Fund Dropped from Health Care Reform but Home Visitation Survives

The Early Learning Challenge Fund, the program that would have provided billions to fund competitive grants to improve quality and coordination of early childhood services, didn’t survive the health care reform effort even though advocates believed it was one of the most progressive aspects of President Obama’s early childhood agenda.

The news coming out of health care reform wasn’t all bad for the early childhood community, however. The new law contains a $1.5 billion federal grant program for evidence-based home visitation for new and expectant families. Engaging families at home to deliver parenting education and child development guidance is not new. Programs like Parents as Teachers (PAT), Home Instruction for Parents of Youngsters (HIPPY), and Even Start have been around since the 1980s. They use home visits to deliver parent education intended to promote better cognitive and socio-emotional development of at-risk children. In the 1990s, programs like Healthy Families America and Healthy Start began using home visits in an effort to prevent child abuse.

For years, these programs have been plagued with questions about how well they work. The quality of research on them is mixed, as are the findings. For the most part, when positive effects have been found, they have tended to be modest. The strongest results so far have been for the Nurse-Family Partnership, which began in the 1970s and targets low-income, first-time mothers with visits from trained nurses. Randomized trials have found the program produced positive outcomes that, among other things, included fewer childhood injuries and improved school readiness among the children of parents visited.

Experts say a good deal more high-quality research needs to be done on home visitation to identify what works for given sets of circumstances and to inform various aspects of the policy process. Among those calling for that is John Schlitt who directs the Pew Home Visiting Campaign at The Pew Center for the States. His initiative is looking at what each state is doing in this area and will publish initial findings this year.

Beginning this year, the campaign will support statewide advocacy and public education efforts aimed at expanding and improving home-visiting programs in Louisiana, North Carolina, Ohio, and Washington. Schlitt says those states were chosen because they have a variety of approaches to home visiting and leaders there have voiced a desire to expand and improve them. Meanwhile, a number of states are funding programs that don’t have much in way of compelling evidence that they are working, say experts.
Parents in need of child care are faced with many important decisions. To whom are they willing to entrust their children while they are away? How much of the day and what part of the week will children spend in child care? Which type of setting best meets their needs? How much of the family budget can and should be spent? Some parents will select from a broad menu of choices, including in-home care by another family member, enrolling in a child care center, or even hiring a private nanny. Others, due to circumstances such as poverty and geography, will have many fewer options. Regardless of their specific circumstances, many parents will struggle in choosing the right child care option for their families.

Even though child care is a fact of life for most families with young children, Penelope Leach emphasizes that “nothing about child care choices is simple or obvious…. ” (p. 58). In this book, Leach offers a wide-ranging overview of the current landscape of child care, with a particular emphasis on the United States and the United Kingdom. As a key researcher for the large-scale Families, Children and Child Care (FCCC) study in the U.K. and as author of the well-known *Your Baby & Child*, she is well qualified to succeed at that ambitious goal. This hefty volume is primarily geared toward making parents and the general public more aware of the nuances of child care and the options that may be possible for today’s families.

Leach organizes her book around four major issues, each represented by its own section: the status of child care today, the types of care that are available, the importance of quality, and how the future of child care might look. Since the sections are reasonably self-contained, readers have the option of focusing on topics that are of greatest interest, although the book as a whole makes for compelling reading.

Leach begins by highlighting societal changes that have shaped our current need for child care. Though parents’ (and especially mothers’) lifestyles and work schedules have evolved over time, children below a certain age will always need constant care. This can lead to complex balancing acts. A parent seeking a return to the workforce must arrange for child care that meets the family’s standards of quality while not costing more than the new job brings in. Grandparents and free or low-cost public options may not be readily available. Families must be comfortable with leaving their children in the care of others—sometimes for significant portions of the day—and be able to accept the tradeoffs between work and home life.

With this context established, Leach offers individual research-based summaries of what is known about different types of child care. These helpful chapters address home care by various types of family members and non-family caregivers, as well as more formalized care in child care centers and schools. She also provides overviews of the critical issue of child care quality from the perspectives of researchers, parents, and children. These perspectives are of course part of the difficult calculus in selecting a child care provider. For example, parents’ real-life child care choices may not reflect the features of child care that parents rate as most important, and types of preferred child care arrangements may differ by the age of the child. Leach wraps up her summary of quality by identifying important features of a high-quality child care setting as well as tips on what to avoid.

This book is particularly relevant because in order to get child care right, there is much more hard work that still needs to be done. Parents, child care providers, and governments all bear responsibility for their part in this work. Leach favors national models that have secure funding and integrate both care and education. One possible model is the “social investment state” in which parental self-sufficiency is key but public funding of early care and education is viewed as an important investment in global competitiveness. Leach concludes with a powerful statement on the status of child care today and a guidepost for the future: “Right now, scarcity of child-friendly attitudes throughout the English-speaking world weighs even more heavily against high-quality child care than scarcity of financial or other resources. We can do better.” (p. 297).

Reviewed by Jason Hustedt
Assistant Research Professor, NIEER
Most States Agree to Creating Common K–12 Standards in Math, English

Kindergartners in California would be held to the same expectations as those in New Jersey or Hawaii under a set of common “core” learning standards for K–12 education in math and English that 48 states have agreed to consider. The standards, the final version of which is being drafted at the behest of the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, are an evidence-based list of what children should learn and are intended to replace the patchwork of standards that currently exists across the country. Once they are in effect, they will enable more standardization of textbooks and testing and enhance comparability of data from state to state.

While some criticized the effort as representing a step toward nationalizing education, most welcome it. Only Texas and Alaska chose not to participate. Ellen Frede, NIEER’s co-director and an expert on learning standards in early childhood education, said when the standards are finalized, they will directly impact teaching and curriculum if used as intended and will affect state policy pertaining to kindergarten and the early grades. She and other early education experts have advised the standards-making group that they need to take into account what we know about the way young children learn. Otherwise, the new standards could have unintended negative consequences for the early years.

“The common standards approach is a step in the right direction,” said Frede. “As should be the case, they are outcome-focused, listing skills children should have achieved at the end of a given grade level, such as kindergartners being able to count to 100 or know all of the upper and lower case letters.” Frede said focusing on discrete skills makes it all the more important that: (1) the benchmarks are accurate targets; (2) we ensure teachers know how to teach the skills in appropriate ways; and (3) the child is never blamed for lack of mastery.

Standards for K–12 education already exist in one form or another in every state. Frede says as the states go about modifying theirs to incorporate the common standards, they will be making progress toward ensuring equality of education for all America’s children. However, she worries that by focusing only on math and literacy, as the initial standards do, “We run the risk of implying that already-neglected subjects like science and social studies aren’t all that important.”

Many in the early childhood field also worry that omitting social-emotional aspects of education could be misinterpreted to mean that child growth in these areas is not necessary for later success or is not the responsibility of public education. “That’s not to say we don’t need clear standards. We do,” says Frede, “but we need to use the ‘Goldilocks’ test to ensure that the indicators aren’t too prescriptive or too general, but just right for the early years.” She suggests that more early childhood experts need to be brought to the table to carefully analyze each outcome and ask:

• Does it overestimate what children can do at this age based on our best knowledge?
• Does it underestimate what children can do at this age based on our best knowledge, especially in the context of pre-K standards?
• Is it too general, leading to teachers not knowing how to use it?
• Is it too specific, leading to “a mile wide and an inch deep” curriculum?

“The fact that 48 states have signed on to the common core standards effort is testimony that we have gone far too long without clear common standards to guide teaching,” Frede says. At press time, a number of early childhood professionals and national early childhood organizations had weighed in with constructive suggestions.

Common core learning standards for K–12 education are an evidence-based list of what children should learn at a particular grade level.
Worrisome Findings on TV Viewing Patterns in Home- and Center-Based Child Care

Recent findings from a study of children’s television viewing while in child care are likely to heighten concern that many kids are getting too much screen time too early in their lives. Working on behalf of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), Dmitri A. Christakis and Michelle M. Garrison of the Seattle Children’s Research Institute surveyed home- and center-based child care programs in Florida, Massachusetts, Michigan, and Washington. They asked whether television was used in the program, the age groups for which it was used, and how many hours each week it was used for each age group.

They found that in as many 70 percent of home-based care settings and 36 percent of center-based settings the kids watched television daily. When television was viewed, infants and toddlers in home-based programs spent two to three hours watching television and in center-based programs kids that age watched about 1.5 hours. Their analysis of daily television time showed that preschool-aged children in center-based programs watched 1.84 fewer hours per day than the kids in home-based care.

Christakis, who has done previous research on children’s screen time, said he found the findings disconcerting for a number of reasons. While this is the first data to be drawn from child care settings, the findings are generally consistent with previous research on children’s television exposure. It suggests little has changed in way of reducing the amount of screen time young children are exposed to despite the fact that AAP has promulgated guidelines regarding television use since 1999.

Infant and toddler television exposure has been associated with obesity and language delay. Long-term studies have shown that early television viewing habits predict later television viewing behavior. And, television viewing displaces a key ingredient in children’s development—play.

Christakis concedes that television viewing can be educational in nature, furthering children’s literacy and pro-social behavior. However, the benefits of children’s television viewing have not been evaluated against an alternative of formal education and socialization by teachers. The article appears in the journal Pediatrics, Volume 124, Number 6.