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Preschool

A Publication of the National Institute for Early Education Research
August/September 2003 Volume 1, No. 1
Welcome to the first issue of Preschool Matters! We are excited to offer this ‘new’ newsletter to spotlight national and international preschool issues. Thanks to Faith Wohl and others at the Child Care Action Campaign—which had published the widely-read and award-winning Child Care ActioNews—we now have Preschool Matters, in a new format but brought to you by the same excellent team. NIEER’s Preschool Matters also could not have happened without the generous support of The Pew Charitable Trusts. For this inaugural issue, I’ve asked Susan Urahn, the director of Pew’s early education programs, to give you a brief overview of the Trusts’ early education initiative.

Enjoy Preschool Matters! We think you’ll like it.

Steve Barnett, Director
National Institute for Early Education Research

The Pew Charitable Trusts Fund Early Education

In September 2001, The Pew Charitable Trusts launched Starting Early, Starting Strong, an initiative to provide access to high quality preschool for all of America’s three and four year olds. The decision reflected the board’s determination to start moving towards this goal even through one of this nation’s most trying times.

Joined by other funders, such as the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Schumann Fund for New Jersey, Foundation for Child Development, and Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation and Joyce Foundation, the Trusts now fund eight organizations to use nonpartisan research and education, and to work with business, advocates, law enforcement, education officials and others, to push towards this goal: the National Institute for Early Education Research at Rutgers University, Trust for Early Education, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, Council of Chief State School Officers, Education Law Center, Committee for Economic Development, Every Child Matters Education Fund and the National Governors Association. Through our grantees, we have supported work in 10 states: Arkansas, Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. We hope that this network of states expands over the coming years.

Two years later, despite a dismal economic climate, we can see important progress. New York advocates protected a landmark program. Illinois and New Jersey added millions of dollars to their program. Arkansas approved a plan to provide pre-K for most of the state’s four year olds. In 2002 and 2003, the Los Angeles Children and Families Commission and then First Five California Children and Families Commission decided to spend hundreds of millions of tobacco tax dollars to support pre-K.

On December 14th-16th, Florida Governor Jeb Bush will host the Governors Forum on Quality Preschool, co-funded by the Trusts and others through a grant to the National Governors Association. NGA’s new chair, Idaho Governor Dirk Kempthorne, has pledged to continue the focus on early education. This event will bring governors and senior state leaders together to discuss the importance of quality preschool. We hope that you use this forum as an opportunity to raise the visibility of pre-K in your state and encourage your governor to attend, prepare him or her to participate actively, and follow up this event with actions that can advance pre-K in your state.

There is much to do, but we are hopeful that the nation is on its way to recognizing the value of high-quality pre-K for every child. We welcome your ideas.


Susan Urahn
Director, Education Division,
The Pew Charitable Trusts

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.

W. Steven Barnett, Director
Carol Shipp, Communications Director
Mary Meagher, Communications Assistant
Betty Holcomb, Editor
Sandy Ogilvie, Art Director
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Send comments, opinions, and news to editor@nieer.org.
Address Changes: Please include mailing panel on page 12 when requesting address changes.

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National Institute For
Early Education Research
120 Albany Street, Suite 500
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
732-932-4350
Fax: 732-932-4360
www.nieer.org
America Shortchanges Its Preschoolers: Few States Require Teacher Training

Less Than Half Of All Prekindergarten Teachers Have Bachelor’s Degree, Quality Suffers

There’s no question about it: Three- and four-year-olds learn the most—socially, emotionally and academically—when their teachers have a college degree and some background in early childhood education.

The reverse is also true. When teachers lack college training and early education expertise, children reap few of the educational benefits that scientific studies show can accrue from the highest-quality preschool programs.

Those are the key findings in new research released by the National Institute for Early Education Research. The conclusions are based on a review of existing studies that link student performance and classroom quality to teacher qualifications.

Yet most American three- and four-year-olds still languish in preschool programs where their teachers are poorly trained and poorly paid, a situation that undermines the benefits of early education programs.

“Many preschool programs are educationally ineffective because they don’t hire well qualified teachers, and without well qualified teachers, student achievement drops,” says Steve Barnett, NIEER director and author of the new study.

Barnett came to this conclusion after reviewing existing studies that link student performance to teacher characteristics. The studies looked at teachers and children in settings as diverse as child care centers and private nurseries, Head Start and public preschool programs.

The results were conclusive, convincing and shocking to anyone who cares about children. Less than half of all teachers working with three- and four-year-olds today have a college degree, even though the research shows a clear link between student learning and having college-trained teachers in the classroom.

“Better-educated teachers have more positive, sensitive and responsive interactions with children,” says Barnett. “They provide richer language and cognitive experiences, and are less authoritarian, punitive and detached.”

Forty-two states now have public prekindergarten programs. A few, including Georgia, Florida, California and New York, even aspire to creating universal access to four-year-old child’s verbal and math skills, expanding their vocabulary and spurring their curiosity. They also gain social know-how, learn how to tame aggression, and negotiate and play with other children.

Several recent long-range studies indicate that the positive effects of quality programs last right through high school. High quality preschool programs serving even highly disadvantaged children in poor neighborhoods have been found to increase the rates at which these students graduate high school and go on to college. Several recent long-range studies also suggest kids who’ve attended a good preschool program have higher lifetime earnings.

“There’s no better investment a community can make,” says Barnett. “Preschool not only creates successful children, but successful adults who will give back to their communities.”

Still, Barnett and his colleagues at NIEER find that Americans have yet to take such findings as seriously as they should—because no program can be highly effective without skilled teachers, who thoroughly understand learning and teaching for young children.

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) agrees. “We think this is a very significant finding and hope that public prekindergarten programs and policy-makers will take it to heart,” says Marci Young, head of the Center for the Childhood Workforce, now housed at the AFT’s non-profit foundation. “Certainly, the AFT and our center supports the push for more early education teachers to get their bachelor’s degrees and credentials.”

Barnett and his colleagues at the Institute based this conclusion on studies that included both observations CONTINUED ON PAGE 8 >>
Eighteen months ago, the Committee for Economic Development, the voice of over 200 business and university leaders, took on a new cause—universal access to high-quality prekindergarten for all American children age three and over. We announced our campaign last winter, with a new report urging new Federal grants, new standards, new classrooms and skilled teachers. It’s been a heartening time since then, filled with speeches and testimony, luncheons in small towns and major cities, interviews with media large and small.

And what we’ve learned during that time is that Americans share our passion for this cause.

They believe it’s time to invest in early education, and they are happy that we have taken up the call, based on non-partisan research and the irrefutable evidence that early education benefits not only children, but every community, every employer, every school, every family.

That’s why we believe universal preschool is an absolutely essential prerequisite to school reform. Without it, no other reforms will succeed. We say this not as newcomers to education reform, but as leaders of it. CED’s Trustees held education reform as a top priority for the past 60 years. CED Trustees now recognize that education, at its earliest stages, is vital to both the quality of the workforce and the well-being of our society.

We are convinced of this priority based on the scientific evidence and our own experience—which is why we joined the growing movement for universal prekindergarten in February 2002, releasing our landmark study, Preschool for All: Investing in a Productive and Just Society. Our report makes a clarion call for a larger Federal commitment to preschool, including new Federal grants to expand high-quality programs.

Indeed, CED has become part of a growing and broad-based coalition of groups across America who believe that investing in early education is essential to our nation’s future. Without preschool, many children are doomed. With it, children gain a foothold on a bright future. Children who attend a well-conceived prekindergarten program with skilled teachers are 50 percent less likely to need special education services than others. They are also more likely to graduate from high school, less likely to get pregnant in adolescence, more likely to be employed, and less likely to be delinquent. And if those reasons aren’t enough to convince doubters, then it’s time to remind everyone that high-quality preschool pays for itself. There’s no better investment around: every $1 invested in preschool programs returns up to $7 in savings. Our schools spend less on remedial programs and we get more back in taxes and productive employment from well-educated, well-adjusted adults who have attended pre-K.

We believe universal preschool is an absolutely essential prerequisite to school reform.

That’s why we are enlisting our colleagues in business and in higher education to join this campaign. CED has been hosting business-led meetings throughout the country to educate and mobilize corporate leaders in support of early education. To date, we’ve garnered public endorsements from over 180 leaders from some of the nation’s largest and most influential companies. These endorsements are providing needed support for federal, state, and local early education advocates, on the ground, fighting the pre-K battles.

Business support for early education is not exclusive to CED. The Business Roundtable and Corporate Voices recently released a report calling on all state and federal governments to make high quality early education a national priority. This growing support from business as well as other groups is adding significantly to early education efforts, especially in certain key states where prekindergarten is gaining momentum.

New York State’s pre-K program survives today, after a tough budget fight. In Illinois, Governor Blagojevich’s leadership recently helped secure a $30 million increase for pre-K programs, which translates into 8,200 more children in that state attending public preschool programs this fall. California’s First 5 Commission voted to pump $100 million new dollars into that state’s push for universal prekindergarten.

These successes give us heart in these difficult economic times. Nearly every state faces tight budgets, forcing tough choices. In the coming year, it will be more important than ever to protect, and push to expand early education programs across this nation. CED remains dedicated to the vision that every child should have access to public preschool, and to helping build consensus on this issue, while continuing our efforts to reach out to the business leaders of America. Our future depends on it.

For a copy of the report, visit www.ced.org.

Charles E. M. Kolb  
President, Committee for Economic Development
For Rose Jackson, a teacher at the Metropolitan Baptist Church preschool program in Newark, N.J., there's no doubt about how things are improving for New Jersey's four-year-olds.

“The commitment to having teachers certified means that teachers know what to do in the classroom, how to deal with children better,” she says. “I can see that with my own eyes, and I can see how the children are going off to kindergarten better prepared.”

A veteran of both the public school and early education system, she knows what she's talking about. “I've taught every grade, and I know what it's like to have the children come into kindergarten without any preschool experience,” she says. “They are overwhelmed, they fall behind, and then it's hard to catch them up. That's why I switched into preschool. I wanted them to be better prepared, and now they are. We are sending them off confident, ready to go.”

Things are also improving for the teachers in her program and at other programs around Newark, thanks to a state-mandated prekindergarten program. Increased salaries are central to the goal of bringing preschool teachers up to parity with public school teachers, to stem the horrendous turnover rate among preschool teachers. Many of her colleagues have gone back to school, with tuition paid by the state, to earn a bachelor's and get certified in early education.

Jackson teaches in one of the programs in special “Abbott” districts, named after a long-running court case intended to equalize public school funding and educational opportunities for all children in the state.

The Abbott districts, mostly urban and poor, serve a high proportion of at-risk children. The Abbott districts are now under a mandate from the state's highest court to provide preschool to all their three- and four-year-olds.

The court has further ordered the program be of high quality, with every preschool teacher holding a bachelor's degree, as well as a certificate in early education, by the fall of 2004. The number of preschool teachers who are certified in early education has jumped from 38 to 49 percent since 1999, a 30 percent jump. About 80 percent now have B.A.s.

And this fall, New Jersey will add programs to serve an additional 7,000 students. The governor and state lawmakers ante'd up state funds for the expansion, despite a $6 billion budget deficit. “It's pretty amazing, all things considered,” says Cecilia Zalkind, executive director of the Association for Children of New Jersey, the leading advocacy group in the state. “No other state even came close to facing such a tough budget, but the governor kept his promise on pre-K.”

All told, New Jersey will serve 42,000 children this year, out of the 54,000 mandated by the state Supreme Court. That's up from just 22,000 two years ago.

Dale Goodwin, director of youth and children programs at Newark's Vailsburg Child Development Center, is expanding to add 75 new students in a setting that can only be described as an oasis in the midst of urban decay. “I've been in child care a very long time, and it's great to see teachers getting those degrees, finally able to earn a living. They are more excited, have more energy and ideas in the classrooms.”

Like other directors across the state, Goodwin did her best to support teachers who've had to return to school, while they work full-time. She set up a special computer room, with internet connections and had teachers who already had B.A.s coach the new students. “It's hard to go back to school as an adult and a lot of people didn't think this could be done,” Goodwin says. “But what I see is a new confidence in these teachers—and more skill in the classrooms.”

All of this is inspiring to the state's top official in early childhood policy. “What preschool educators across the state have accomplished is nothing short of heroic in the four years since the Abbott preschool remedy was first implemented,” says Ellen Frede, who oversees pre-K across the state. Even better, she points out, “the children in the Abbott districts and the entire state of New Jersey will benefit profoundly from this program.”
Teachers’ Union Votes To Endorse Universal Prekindergarten

For the 10,000 delegates at the National Education Association’s meeting this year, the decision was a no-brainer. It was time, they decided, to call publicly for preschool for all American three- and four-year-olds. And so they did, putting the muscle of the 2.7 million strong union behind a demand for publicly-funded prekindergarten programs in every state in the union.

“If no child is to be left behind, we need to start earlier with every child,” says Reg Weaver, NEA President.

“We know that attempting to repair reading skills in the fourth grade is far more expensive and risky than guaranteeing good pre-reading skills in preschool.”

The NEA vote followed a year-long study by a specially-appointed committee that investigated the value of prekindergarten programs and produced a 75-page report attesting to the value of early childhood education.

“Our members know that education starts before a child steps foot in kindergarten, and they were telling us that children were just not coming to them ready to learn,” says Stephanie Fanjul, NEA’s director of student achievement. “They see the difference in children who attend high-quality preschool programs, and they want to see every child arrive in kindergarten equally prepared.”

To reach that goal, the NEA delegates were quite emphatic that public schools should act as the driving force behind new prekindergarten programs, using public funds and overseeing issues of quality in the new programs as they develop.

The vote was precipitated, she added, by the changing atmosphere in public education and the growing number of court decisions which mandate prekindergarten.

“With the new high-stakes testing now required around the nation, our members felt this was a necessary next step,” says Fanjul. “Otherwise, they find that children start out behind and stay behind.”

For a copy of the complete report, contact Fanjul at 202-822-7946, or visit the NEA website at www.nea.org.

California Pre-K Lurches Ahead Despite State Budget Woes

By now, nearly everyone knows that California’s budget is in shambles, a fact that now threatens Governor Gray Davis’ ability to stay in office. Nonetheless, prekindergarten programs are growing this year, and significantly so, thanks to a special tobacco tax enacted by the state’s voters back in 1998.

In July, the First 5 California Commission announced a new investment of $100 million as one of the first steps toward creating preschool programs for all three- and four-year-olds across the state. The investment amounts to a “down-payment” on a promise the commission has made to ensure that every California child has access to a high-quality prekindergarten program. “For every dollar invested in preschool, we get $7 back in reduced crime, welfare and special education costs,” says Rob Reiner, director of the commission, who is best known as an actor, comedian, director and screenwriter.

Reiner spearheaded the drive to pass a ballot initiative back in 1998, which created a new tobacco tax earmarked for early childhood programs, including health care and preschool. The tax now raises hundreds of millions of dollars a year to advance the cause of preschool. In the first phase, programs are being rolled out in major cities and small towns, including such major urban areas as Los Angeles and San Francisco.

The First 5 funds also include money to publicize and promote the value of such programs as they get up and running, in hopes of creating a strong public will to invest in early education for years to come. “The tobacco funds are a great source of support right now, but we all know that eventually those funds will dry up, as America works to end smoking altogether.

That’s why we are working so hard to get these programs up and running, so people can see what high-quality programs can do. Once they do, we believe they will all conclude that there’s no better investment than the one we make in children from birth to age five,” says Ben Austin, spokesman for First 5. For more information, contact Austin at 310-786-7460.
Nobel Prize Winner Sings Praises Of Pre-K

With preschool increasingly on the national agenda, it’s not surprising to find new experts championing the cause. But here’s one new voice who brings special authority, well-worth noting and quoting: James Heckman, Nobel prize-winner for economics in the year 2000.

After careful study of the value of educational programs, he concluded “the best evidence supports the policy prescription: Invest in the very young.” And that’s not surprising to find. An informal poll of 31 state departments of education and local preschool programs in the coming school year, and nearly all the rest simply kept funding for next year at the same levels as last year.

In some states, this is the third year in a row with flat funding, even in the face of mild inflation.

For many kids, that means no preschool at all, of course, since the cost of programs keeps rising.

New Jersey stood out as one of the few states expanding its pre-K programs. California also pressed ahead with an expansion of pre-K in Los Angeles, and several other cities—thanks to special tobacco tax funds earmarked for the cause. Illinois also made a remarkable new commitment to expanding preschool, with the governor and lawmakers agreeing to add about 25,000 slots to its public prekindergarten programs over the next three years.

But these states are certainly the exception to the rule. “It’s discouraging to see states cut these budgets,” says Steve Barnett, NIEER’s executive director.

“The evidence clearly shows that if we don’t invest in preschool today, we’ll have to spend more in the long run for remedial programs. We intend to stay on message, get the research out and persist in reminding policy-makers and lawmakers that cutting pre-K is penny-wise and pound-foolish. We all lose out if we don’t expand our investments in early education.”

Rhode Island is the only state that requires a bachelor’s degree for teachers in all early education programs, including licensed child-care centers.

—NIEER, policy brief, 2003

Preschool Is Hit In States’ Budget Struggles

By now, most everyone fighting for prekindergarten programs knows it’s been a tough fiscal year, with many preschool programs on the ropes in the wake of state legislative sessions.

But how bad was it? No one can say for sure, since there is no central source of information on the nation’s prekindergarten programs. However, NIEER decided to round up as much information as we could find.

An informal poll of 31 states turned up some striking trends: Half the states contacted plan to slash preschool programs in the coming school year, and nearly all the rest simply kept funding for next year.

Accross the Nation

Free Video Can Help Convince Policy-Makers

Quality is key when it comes to making preschool effective. Nearly everyone agrees on that, and with good reason. New research shows the dramatic positive impact of preschool occurs only when programs are of high quality. But what does that mean? What does “high quality” look like? What are the critical ingredients in the classroom?

Those are the types of questions that policy-makers struggle to answer every day—and now there’s a new tool that answers the questions in a quick, engaging format and brings policy to life. NIEER’s new “Growing and Learning in Preschool” video captures the elements of quality programs in just five minutes, covering a high-quality curriculum, based on solid research. This quick little teaching aide can be used to educate policy-makers, local groups, educators and parents. To view and download the video, visit NIEER’s website, at www.nieer.org/resources/video/.
America Shortchanges Its Preschoolers: Few States Require Teacher Training

Less Than Half Of All Prekindergarten Teachers Have Bachelor’s Degree, Quality Suffers

Teacher Power Is Key To Learning

NIEER’s new research shows that teachers with a bachelor’s degree and background in child development are more effective in the classroom. Kids are more excited, learn more, enjoy school more because these teachers tend to:

• have stronger literacy skills,
• design more exciting lessons,
• be better at handling behavior problems,
• individualize learning,
• identify and work on specific skill areas,
• be more sensitive and responsive.

because teachers with knowledge of child development were better able to gear lesson plans to both the interests and abilities of three- and four-year-olds, based on a scientific understanding of how young children learn. The research showed the teachers with higher degrees were also:

• Better at individualizing teaching to suit a child’s temperament, learning style, home language and culture and other factors that can be critical in motivating a child to learn.
• Better prepared to work with groups of children, and help each child in the group not only acquire pre-reading and math skills, but social skills that helped them get along better with other children.
• Better at developing relationships with a child’s family, which is critical to helping a three- or four-year old learn.
• Better at dealing with learning disabilities and behavior problems in the classroom.
• Better problem-solvers when they encounter children facing serious emotional challenges, such as a death or divorce.

Yet despite these findings, the majority of American children attend preschool and child care programs where teachers are poorly educated. That situation is underwritten by public policies, which fail to emphasize the critical importance of teacher education.

Forty states require no college education at all, requiring only a high school diploma or a G.E.D. for teachers who work with three- and four-year olds in licensed child care programs. Twenty-three states allow preschool teachers to get by with less training than kindergarten teachers. Until recently, the federal government’s Head Start program did not require its teachers to have any college training at all. Today, only half have a two-year college degree, and just over one-fourth have a four-year college diploma.

The lax requirements in the United States compare poorly with other industrialized nations, which require most early education teachers to have advanced degrees. In France, for example, teachers must have the equivalent of a master’s degree.

“It’s scandalous that America lags behind on this. We need to create a situation that recognizes early educators as professionals, supports their professional development and pays them accordingly,” says Barnett. “Otherwise, our children—and especially the children who are most disadvantaged—will continue to suffer. The evidence is overwhelming. Teacher quality makes a difference in how much children will benefit from educational experiences prior to kindergarten.”

Barnett and his colleagues are actively working to get the word out about the new research findings, as a way of encouraging state policymakers to adopt stricter requirements for teachers working with three- and four-year-olds. “Apparently many people are unaware of the evidence,” Barnett says.

NIEER recommends that policymakers and educators take several steps to remedy the situation, including:

• Requiring all new teachers in Head Start and state prekindergarten programs to get a four-year college degree. If teachers in licensed child care programs are expected to educate three- and four-year-olds, they too should be required to be fully qualified teachers. At this writing, Rhode Island is the only state to have this requirement in place, though several other states have set it as a goal.
• Providing funding and courses for current teachers who want to upgrade their training and education.
• Adopting the standards already suggested by professional early childhood groups, such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children, as part of state certification and regulation programs.
• Improving teacher pay and benefits to attract and retain highly qualified teachers in the field.
• Supporting colleges as they develop new courses and degree programs for early educators.
Massachusetts Supreme Court Hears New Arguments In Landmark Case

The drama now unfolding in a Boston courtroom could have broad implications for school systems across America, bringing new pressure on policy-makers to treat public preschool as integral to public education.

Lawyers for the Council for Fair School Finance, a Massachusetts-based advocacy group, sued the state a decade ago to win better funding for the state’s public schools. Activists charged that the schools were so poorly funded that they failed to provide children with an adequate education—a fact borne out by statistics in the case. Many schools had high drop-out rates and poor test scores. In the latest phase of the court action, the activists made a powerful argument that prekindergarten programs must be included in the broad definition of public education.

“We have said all along that children need preschool if they are going to succeed. We know that the effects of high-quality preschool programs are quite profound, positive and long-lasting,” says Norma Shapiro, council president. “There’s no question, when you look at the evidence, about how necessary early education is.”

That evidence was presented by NIEER’s director Steven Barnett in the latest round of testimony in the case, which has been ongoing since the early 1990s. In 1993, the state’s Supreme Court ruled the state had violated its constitutional mandate to provide every child with an “adequate” education and ordered the state to come up with a plan and the resources to fulfill that mission.

Both the language and the scope of the case instantly garnered national attention, since the court had mandated not just an equal education for students both rich and poor, but also set a new benchmark, that the education provided be of “adequate” quality. “That meant, suddenly, the schools had to meet certain standards. Students had to be able to read, to be literate, to have real skills in school,” says Shapiro. “It was an important precedent. Since then, we’ve been quoted in cases around 100 times, in many other states.”

As Barnett pointed out in his testimony, preschool can play a key role in ensuring that children succeed in school, and turn into productive students and citizens later on. Children who attend preschool are more likely to graduate from high school, less likely to need remedial education and more likely to attend college or some form of higher education.

Yet despite this evidence, recent studies show that many four-year-olds in Massachusetts, especially low-income children—who stand to gain the most from pre-K programs—still do not have access to high-quality programs. At least one study to date—a study funded by the state’s own department of education—shows that children in low-income school districts are the least likely to attend a high-quality program. “That disparity is one of the primary problems we hope to correct,” says Shapiro. “We also think it is clear the state will save money in the long run by getting such programs up and running since such efforts more than pay for themselves.”

Testimony in the case will continue through the summer and fall. No decision is expected before next spring. “Whatever is decided here is likely to have a dramatic impact on the rest of the country,” says Shapiro. “We broke new ground in getting the court to decide that the best measure of an education is whether it is adequate, and now we are just going further in defining exactly what ‘adequate’ looks like. We think that includes high-quality, well-funded preschool. That has to be part of the package of any public education in the twenty-first century.”

To read the expert testimony in the case and learn more about the case, visit www.goodschoolsformass.org.
Welcome to Preschool Matters, the new newsletter published by the National Institute for Early Education Research!

Many of you may be familiar with the institute, but for those of you yet to make our acquaintance, we’d like to introduce you to our mission, our staff and the national context of our work for all three and four-year-olds in America.

As many of you already know, a growing body of evidence establishes that high-quality preschool programs produce remarkable results for all children, but most especially for children who start out life at a disadvantage. For children from low-income families, research has found that the benefits of a good prekindergarten experience persist even into adulthood, with graduates attaining higher lifetime earnings and giving back to their communities as productive workers and taxpayers.

Welcome CCAC Readers!

Thousands of you who are reading this premiere issue of Preschool Matters were subscribers to Child Care ActionNews, a publication of Child Care Action Campaign for twenty years. When CCAC closed on May 30, we were delighted to be able to turn over to NIEER our newsletter mailing lists, our archives and, most importantly, our wonderful editor and designer, Betty Holcomb and Sandy Ogilvie. We were thrilled that NIEER agreed that a newsletter about important developments in early education should continue, albeit under a new name, new management and with a special focus on preschool, which was also a CCAC program priority.

The result is this beautiful first issue of what promises to be a worthy descendant of our award-winning (and much loved) CCAC newsletter. Congratulations to NIEER on this fine effort and thanks so much to Steve Barnett and Carol Shipp for “carrying on” our CCAC legacy. And a special welcome to all CCAC subscribers. We hope you find this newsletter a must-read and a valuable support for your work.

Should any of you want to contact me, you can write me at fwohl57@yahoo.com.

—Faith Wohl

NIEER's mission is to provide objective, nonpartisan information based on solid scientific research.

While most children now attend some kind of preschool program prior to kindergarten, the number of children served by high-quality programs is still woefully small. Millions of three- and four-year-olds still languish in communities without quality pre-K, as policy-makers, grassroots organizations and national corporate leaders across America press for the funds, the know-how and the infrastructure to give all children access to the best early education possible.

That’s why NIEER was established at Rutgers University’s Graduate School of Education with a generous grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts. The Institute is part of the Trusts’ larger grant-making strategy in the field of preschool education.

NIEER’s mission is to provide objective, nonpartisan information based on solid scientific research. NIEER’s staff spend their days producing the studies and the data to answer key questions about how to help children succeed through the highest-quality learning experiences. NIEER targets four primary groups—policy-makers, journalists, researchers, and educators—to provide them with accurate and timely information. This new newsletter is one of the ways we reach out to you all.


With the addition of the Pew Trusts’ support, the institute has become a useful and powerful force as we all move forward to further the cause of quality education for young children. You can reach us at www.nieer.org.
Back in November, Florida's voters spoke, and lawmakers, who had long remained deaf to the call for prekindergarten across the state, suddenly had to listen. A grassroots ballot initiative requiring the state to provide preschool to every four-year-old by the fall of 2005 passed by a landslide.

State policy-makers are now scrambling to create that reality, starting with the creation of a vision of just what universal preschool should look like in Florida.

“Should it be full day? What credentials should the teachers have? By when? What should the curriculum be? How much should it be prescribed? What settings will we use? How will we pay for it?” asks Phyllis Kalifeh, head of the Florida Children's Forum, and longtime activist and advocate for high-quality early education.

Lieutenant Governor Toni Jennings is now in charge of finding answers to those questions—or at least making strong recommendations—as she oversees the work of a new state-funded Preschool Advisory Council, required to report back to the state Legislature by October 15.

With 20 members—ten from business and ten from the “school readiness” community—the new council must address everything from curriculum and program delivery to assessment standards and expected outcomes for kids, to coordination between existing programs and the state's public schools.

Florida already has a substantial number of public preschool programs serving 60,000 of the state’s four-year-olds. “We’ve already made a serious commitment to school readiness in Florida,” says Katherine Kamiya, head of Florida's Partnership for School Readiness, but Kamiya concedes the task ahead is daunting. “Our state is large, diverse and not immune from economic pressure. We are already trying to come to terms with measures for outcomes, standards and performance. This is a great opportunity, but also a great challenge.”

Kamiya was one of three experts to provide expert testimony to the council, along with NIEER’s director Steve Barnett and Catherine Scott-Little of the University of North Carolina and regional director of the U.S. Department of Education’s SERVE program. Barnett briefed the group on the characteristics of successful early education programs, drawn from both NIEER studies and those of others, such as the High/Scope Perry Preschool, Abecedarian and Chicago Child-Parent Studies, concluding that quality is key to any program’s success. He praised the new “Florida School Readiness Standards” for the vision of excellence in early childhood education that they embody.

Scott-Little addressed a wide range of concerns as policy-makers make quality a goal, including issuing some caution around the kinds of standards that might be adopted, with an eye to the ways those standards might be used. “Each developmental domain is important,” she contends, from emotional growth to learning language.

Not only that, but it’s crucial to “expect variations in children’s abilities,” as they grow and in relation to their particular culture, language and possible disabilities. Indeed, the danger of a reliance on standards that might be punitive to a particular child are so grave that Scott-Little advised the council to be sure that whatever standards are adopted, “be sure that the program, not the child, is held responsible.”

That kind of thoughtful advice gave heart to organizations across Florida who have long been fighting for high-quality pre-K in Florida. “I am glad that the Legislature and the governor have given over some time to think about what model they want to implement, rather than rushing to create just any old program,” says Kalifeh. “That gives me hope that we will create something of high quality and high value for children.”

To read the papers and research from the experts quoted in this article and to learn more about Florida’s efforts to create universal prekindergarten, visit the advisory council’s website at www.upkcouncil.org.
New Findings On Childhood Aggression

Preschool Programs Best Way To Curb Bullying

As Americans continue to debate whether child care programs turn young children into bullies, one of the world’s most prominent scientists offers a critical perspective, based on two decades of research.

High-quality preschool programs are more likely the cure for, not the cause of, bullying behavior.

Richard Tremblay, world class scientist and professor of pediatrics, psychiatry and psychology at the University of Montreal even sounds surprised by his own findings. “If anyone had told me two decades ago that I would be saying this now, I’d have been stunned,” he concedes. “Like just about everyone else, I believed that aggression was a learned behavior and that it peaked in adolescence.”

But, after studying adult offenders, juvenile delinquents, kindergartners and even toddlers, his view has changed. Aggression is, he asserts, an inborn human trait. “What we have learned is that aggression is in everybody, starting at birth, peaking about 17 months later.”

From then on, the evidence shows that parents, teachers and other adults are agents of civilization, teaching children how to moderate and control their aggressive impulses. “It is during the preschool years especially that people slowly gain more control over their impulses, as their neurological systems mature and they learn strategies to curb those impulses.”

Even more profound, Tremblay has discovered that if children don’t learn ways to regulate their aggression at this age, they may suffer lifelong problems trying to control their behavior. The children most at risk—those who are born to very young mothers—may indeed grow into bullies without some help.

“What this research shows is that preschool really offers the chance to tame aggression, not the other way around,” says Tremblay. “A high-quality preschool environment can teach children ways to channel aggressive impulses in constructive ways, such as how to use words, negotiate, and get along with all those other pint-sized aggressors.”

Tremblay’s research convinces him of that because self-regulation is tied to neurological development—the brain is literally growing and developing during these early years, laying down patterns that are hard to break later. “In the early years, one of the tasks we have as humans is to learn to gain control over our body and our impulses. With the maturation of our neurological systems, we learn to do it better and lay down lifelong habits,” says Tremblay.

“For example, we learn to regulate our appetite, that it is uncomfortable to eat too much. That kind of learning is translated into habits, and then integrated into our thinking and neurological development. It’s very hard to learn something different later, if we don’t learn it as we are laying those patterns down in the early years. It’s like learning a new language. You may be able to do it, but it’s a much harder challenge.”

Tremblay also warns that poor quality pre-K could very well fail to stem bullying behaviors in children. Teachers who are poorly trained and poorly compensated, suffering from poor morale, and required to work with groups that are too large may never be able to teach children the basic lessons in civility. “It’s fairly simple to understand, isn’t it?” asks Tremblay. “If we create programs that don’t give children the tools to tame their aggression, then we are going to have problems. The sad thing is that we could be creating programs that did just the opposite.”

Tremblay’s home province of Quebec has taken this advice to heart, creating a new high quality early childhood program. For more on Tremblay’s research and Quebec’s early childhood programs, visit www.excellence-earlychildhood.ca.