Like gardeners in spring, policymakers in many states have sown the seeds of state-funded preschool, casting a hopeful eye toward narrowing the achievement gap and brightening the prospects for all kids to become more productive citizens. It’s an investment that comes back many times over to states that make it. We have tracked the progress of state preschool in our yearbooks, and the just-released 2005 State of Preschool Yearbook gives a four-year perspective. (See story on page 4.)

While state preschool now serves more children than ever, our yearbook finds programs in many states to be showing signs of nutrient deficiency. When it comes to watering the pre-K program crop with funding needed to fulfill program goals, political leaders have too often balked when the going got tough for state economies. As a result, we look across the nation at some patches of verdant green where states are maintaining their commitments to young children, but other patches look like they could use a good rain.

Among the states that have policies calling for state pre-K to be available to all children, only Oklahoma, where 90 percent of preschool-age children attend some form of public pre-K, can make the case that they have met their goal.

New York has also called for making state pre-K available to all. But the state has approved no new money in the four years we’ve been tracking the data, imposing a kind of manmade drought on programs at a time when they should be expanding toward their goal. It’s not surprising then that the Empire State is in pre-K decline, dropping from 5th to 10th in the national rankings in access for 4-year-olds.

New York is not alone. The yearbook points to a pattern of advances and contractions that has reduced enrollments in 11 states. Without predictable funding, it’s little wonder that preschool programs in these states are stressed. One wonders if policymakers in those states somehow believe it is acceptable to say to preschool-age children “We’re having a bad year so you need to stay home.” They would not say the same to a 1st grader; clearly, too many policymakers still don’t consider preschool “real education.”

This doesn’t mean there isn’t good news in the yearbook. Nationally, enrollment in state-funded preschool rose 20 percent over the four years tracked. In ’04-’05, state prekindergarten programs enrolled more than 800,000 children, the vast majority at age 4. State pre-K programs enroll 17 percent of all 4-year-olds and with the addition of Head Start and preschool special education, as many as 35 percent now attend a public preschool program.

This growth in enrollment in state-funded pre-K over the last four years was accompanied by an increase in funding from a total of $2.6 billion to $2.8 billion. This was not enough to hold per-child spending steady after adjusting for inflation. The reduction comes from a number that was already well below the national average outlay by states for K-12 education.

If state-funded preschool is to fulfill its promise, more states must learn to manage their state pre-K crops the way a good gardener does. As British education leader Sir Claus Moser has said, “Education costs money, but then so does ignorance.”

W. Steven Barnett  
Director, NIEER
Pre-K Inclusion Program Benefits All

Typically Developing Kids Made Gains Alongside Special Needs Children in this Successful Mainstreaming Effort

One way some school districts make preschool education available to more children is to add typically developing children to classrooms that previously only served children with disabilities. The idea is that children with disabilities will gain from interactions with their peers who do not have disabilities. At the same time, the kids without disabilities are exposed to high-quality preschool programs they might not otherwise have received.

NIEER Assistant Research Professor Kirsty Brown conducted a study of the effects of public preschool on 67 3- and 4-year-olds who were offered a place in the inclusion program of a predominantly middle-class town in the Northeastern United States. Children without disabilities were given an opportunity to attend the program and selected on a random basis. The comparison group consisted of children without disabilities who were not selected to attend.

Brown was able to identify statistically significant gains in basic letter and word recognition skills for the public program preschoolers. When adjusted for age, the preschoolers in the public program scored slightly above the national average at pretesting and remained there at the post-test. Social skills were also assessed, but findings were inconclusive. Among other findings were these:

- There were no significant differences between the children in public preschool and the others on Picture-Vocabulary skills, applied problems (early math) or the Get Ready to Read assessments.
- All children made progress in receptive vocabulary and language ability through the year, but at the end of the year, the group attending the public program scored significantly higher on letter and word identification.
- The quality of both the public and community-based programs was similar and rated as moderate based on the Early Childhood Rating Scale scores.

Principal Maureen Higgins attributes the gains to her school’s print-rich environment, use of state preschool standards to guide curriculum and quality of its teaching staff. Because the program was developed originally for special needs students, all of its teachers are certified in special education. They also all teach kindergarten in addition to preschool, so they’re familiar with the expectations once the children move up. “We give teachers a lot of leeway in what materials they use, but they are accountable to the state standards,” she says.

Higgins says because the school’s instruction approach is based on Howard Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences, children are given the opportunity to learn through the medium that’s best suited to them such as art, music, role playing or cooperative learning.

Gardner, a Harvard education professor, developed this approach to address limitations to the traditional notion of intelligence, which is based on I.Q. testing rather than assessments that measure other areas such as spatial, musical or interpersonal intelligence. Higgins surmises the emphasis on the child’s learning aptitude may have produced the gains in language and reading.

Brown’s research is the first known to measure cognitive outcomes for typically developing children in inclusive classrooms, and it seems to allay concerns by some that when special-needs kids and those without special needs are taught together, the special needs make cognitive and social gains but the typically developing children don’t. Other studies on mainstreaming have tended to focus on the practice’s impact on the children with special needs, or in a few known studies of typically developing children, on attitudes towards children with disabilities, says Brown.

Brown calls her findings “impressive,” especially given that program quality, while above average, was not the highest. “If a public program operating under these conditions can generate gains like this after only one year, higher quality programs that are well-funded and strongly implemented may produce even better results.”

She believes her findings support the value of high-quality universal prekindergarten for all children, not just those at risk or with special needs. “This might be a viable way for schools to provide mainstream experiences to children with special needs and at the same time, provide public preschool for typically developing children. It’s a win-win that better prepares all of the students for their kindergarten experiences.”
2005 State Preschool Yearbook Shows Solid Growth in State-Funded Pre-K

Still, Funding Fluctuates and Quality Lags in Too Many States

NIEER’s newly released 2005 State Preschool Yearbook shows that over the past 4 years, state-funded preschool has moved to the forefront of early childhood education in the United States. The 16 percent growth in number of children served between the 2001-02 school year and 2004-05 (the latest year for which data are available) indicates that investing in pre-K is increasingly viewed as important at the state level. Underscoring the priority many states place on pre-K is the fact that much of this growth took place during a period when most states were experiencing difficult economic times.

NIEER has been tracking state-funded preschool for its Yearbooks since the 2001-02 school year. The just-released edition plots a 4-year trend in state pre-K across the country. It paints a portrait of state pre-K that is generally robust, yet uneven from state to state and plagued by a pattern of expansion and contraction in a number of states. Among the key findings are these:

- State pre-K served 801,902 children in 2004-05.
- Enrollment was up 109,509 children from 2001-02.
- The increase in 4-year-olds served means that state pre-K surpassed federal Head Start for number of children served.
- Of the 12 states that had no state pre-K initiatives in 2001-02, only 1 state—Florida—has started an initiative since.
- Only 26 states increased their enrollment during the 4-year period tracked by the Yearbook, 11 states experienced declines in enrollment.
- States continue to vary dramatically in their provisions for the education of young children.
- Several states are moving toward making pre-K available to all 4-year-olds. Only Oklahoma, where more than 90 percent of 4-year-olds are enrolled in publicly funded preschool education, is close to realizing this goal. Next highest in providing universal access is Georgia, where 67 percent of the 4-year-olds attended a public preschool program. Regionally speaking, the most progress in broadening access to pre-K has been in the South. Florida’s new Voluntary Prekindergarten Program is likely to raise national enrollment by 100,000 children or more when the 2005-06 year is complete.
- Although there was a national pattern of growth, 11 states experienced declines in enrollment. “We see declines in some fairly populous states like Massachusetts and Ohio,” says NIEER Assistant Research Professor Jason Hustedt. He says that while some enrollment declines may have been temporary as states move toward new programs, others appear to be due to a lingering view on the part of policymakers that, when times are tough, pre-K programs do not rate the same level of consideration as K-12 education.

The cycle of expansion and contraction in funding for state pre-K creates an uncertain base on which to grow programs. “It should be no more acceptable to keep prekindergartners home when the state has a bad budget year than it is to keep first graders home for that reason,” adds NIEER Director Steve Barnett.

Program quality standards have been slow to improve. Only one state—Arkansas—
met all 10 quality benchmarks for the 2004-2005 program year. Five state pre-K initiatives (those in Alabama, Illinois, North Carolina, and Tennessee, as well as New Jersey’s Abbott program) met nine of the 10 benchmarks. Illinois missed meeting all the benchmarks because the state does not require preschool programs to provide a meal. Overall, the median number of benchmarks met by states in 2004-2005 was six of 10. Pennsylvania’s new Education Accountability Block Grant prekindergarten initiative met only one of the 10 benchmarks—the fewest of any state pre-K program.

Twenty-seven of the 38 states with prekindergarten initiatives required teachers to have a specialization in early childhood education. Yet only 17 states required teachers to have a bachelor’s degree. Most states lacked sufficient requirements for their assistant teachers, with just 12 states requiring them to have a CDA or equivalent credential. As in previous years, this was the benchmark least likely to be met by state pre-K initiatives.

Total pre-K spending by the states rose 7.5 percent, after adjusting for inflation, to $2.84 billion in 2004-05. That may sound like progress but because of rising enrollments, spending per child actually declined by 7.3 percent to $3,551 per child in 2004-05.

Barnett and Hustedt are quick to point out that stable sources of funding will be critical if state pre-K is to continue its present rate of growth. While $2.84 billion sounds like a lot of money, it is just over 1 percent of the $240 billion spent annually in K-12 education. The Yearbook may be accessed by visiting www.nieer.org. To order copies call 732-932-4350 or send an e-mail to info@nieer.org.

### A 4-Year Look at State Pre-K Enrollment and Funding

Of the national population, the percentage of 4-year-olds enrolled in state prekindergarten grew by 3 percent from the 2001-2002 school year to the 2004-2005 school year, with 17 percent of the nation’s 4-year-olds enrolled in 2004-2005. The percentage of 3-year-olds enrolled remained steady. From fiscal year 2002 to fiscal year 2005, state spending decreased by $278 per child enrolled, in inflation-adjusted dollars.

Funding for state prekindergarten was about $2.8 billion during the 2004-2005 school year. Although some state prekindergarten initiatives also reported financial support from local and federal sources, per-child spending in state prekindergarten was still much less than total state, local and federal spending in grades K-12.
South Carolina Court Order Spurs Pre-K Expansion

A December trial court ruling directing South Carolina to provide preschool to its poorest children has lit a fire under the move to expand preschool in the state. The court said that, although there are disparities and shortcomings in K-12 education, the state is living up to its constitutional obligation to provide an adequate education in these grades. The shocker came when Judge Thomas Cooper said that by not providing an adequate early childhood education to all at-risk children, the state is not living up to its overall constitutional obligation. Cooper ordered measures be taken to provide early care and education to at-risk kids in the districts bringing the claim and ultimately to all at-risk kids.

Since the ruling, the state education department, school readiness agencies and advocacy organizations have come together to respond. Among their tasks is standardizing the definition of “at-risk” across school districts that have traditionally held the responsibility for determining who qualifies and figuring out how much money it would take to comply. The state General Assembly reacted with surprise when State Superintendent of Education Inez Tenenbaum presented a budget showing an expenditure of $10,000 per child and a total price tag of $288 million to comply with the order. Susan Oliver, executive director of the advocacy organization Voices for South Carolina’s Children, says Tenenbaum got that reaction because she didn’t give enough explanation. The $10,000 per child includes money for other services that poor families need for their children to be ready for school, including parenting education and family literacy services.

Lawmakers and state education officials have offered a variety of other proposals. They range from a $50 million public-private partnership that would provide early education to the 13,635 at-risk kids not already in a program to a $100 million publicly run universal program. Oliver says universal preschool is a long-term goal but not in the cards any time soon. “This is a poor rural state and it’s unlikely that we’ll get universal out of the gate,” she says. “Our goal will be to come up with a plan to begin with children most at risk and continue until we serve all 4-year-olds on a voluntary basis,” she says. Tenenbaum has been working with private day care providers, faith-based organizations and public schools to develop the program.

The governor has proposed pulling money from the K-12 system to finance the court-mandated expansion, setting up a potential conflict between advocates for preschool and elementary and secondary education. Of course, all plans could be put on hold if an appeal of the preschool ruling is made and is successful.
Slow and Steady Wins in New Mexico

If New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson has his way, free preschool will be a reality for all 4-year-olds. The state’s $5 million pilot program for at-risk kids, pushed through the legislature by the governor last year, is serving about 1,500 children. Officials estimate it could take six times that to implement a statewide voluntary universal program.

Baji Rankin, executive director of the New Mexico Association for the Education of Young Children, says she knows of no other state where public money for preschool is split evenly between the agencies responsible for public school and child care. Changes may be in the offing as the pre-K program expands, something it’s set to do this year with a $3 million increase over last year’s funding. Legislators have recommended a study to determine whether a consolidated Office of School Readiness should be developed to coordinate services for children birth to age 5.

“It is definitely a benefit that the money is going through both agencies to both public schools and private programs, but I’m not sure that’s a long-term solution,” Rankin says. For now, she thinks it’s appropriate.

New Mexico’s slow but steady approach may have added benefits in the long run, as state officials work to get the details right. Rankin believes that has already happened in one critical area. This year’s funding included nearly a million dollars for professional development, and that should continue.

NIEER is conducting an evaluation of the New Mexico preschool program’s effectiveness, working with the Office of Education Accountability in the state. The study looks at program implementation and its influences on children’s learning and development.

Zogby Survey Asks Business Leaders What They Think of UPK

A new Zogby International survey of 205 senior executives at Fortune 1,000 companies and firms with more than 1,000 employees sought their views on preschool education.

Survey respondents viewed prekindergarten as essential to a better-educated workforce, and 63 percent of them favor active support for universal preschool programs by the business sector. Other findings included:

• Almost half (49 percent) of business leaders said the level of workers’ skills had decreased over the last ten years.
• More than half (54 percent) anticipate difficulty in finding enough educated and skilled workers to fill jobs in the future.
• One in three (38 percent) said American firms already are at a disadvantage when compared to foreign firms based on workers’ education.
• One-third (34 percent) of the executives said their companies currently are recruiting candidates outside the United States to fill jobs requiring special skills or education.
• Eighty-three percent rated the importance of a skilled workforce as “very high” if the U.S. is to remain globally competitive.
• Four in five (81 percent) said public funding of voluntary prekindergarten for all children would improve America’s workforce.

The survey was released at the forum “Building the Economic Case for Investments in Preschool,” sponsored by the Committee for Economic Development (CED), The Pew Charitable Trusts, and PNC Financial Services Group, Inc.
New Research: Children Not Necessarily Destined to Life of Shyness

Genetics and Environment Combine to Produce the Condition

Scientists have long suspected that genes and environment work together to create a shy child, but new research has documented this interaction for the first time. A study published in the journal Psychological Science found that children with the genetic tendency to be timid do not necessarily become chronically inhibited. Rather, it’s the combination of this inherited trait and the strength of the mother’s support system that determines how outgoing children become.

The term shyness refers to a set of physiological symptoms, such as rapid heart rate, nervousness or flushed skin, linked to the “fight or flight” response set off when something unexpected occurs. This stimulates a chemical response deep within the brain to produce a reaction, shy or otherwise. But genetics can dampen or heighten this response, as the study showed.

University of Maryland Professor Nathan Fox and a team of researchers analyzed data from 153 children and reported that those with a gene associated with shyness, 5-HTT, developed inhibited behavior later in childhood, but how often this occurs depends on exposure to stressful environments. To understand how the children’s home life affected their shyness, researchers asked the mothers questions about their personal situations, such as whether they worked or stayed home, whether there were two parents in the household and whether they had friends or family who could help them during tough times.

Those with more stressful home lives were more often had shy children. What researchers discovered is that in stressful situations, children with the shyness gene don’t manufacture the chemical antidote — called serotonin — needed by the brain to quell the fight or flight response reaction to stress. The result is shyness, but the mystery remains as to what exactly triggers the response.

“We don’t know how stressful the environment has to be…to affect the child, or whether there is some other influence at work,” Fox says.

Not every child with the gene will become shy, nor will every shy child have the gene. But the new findings suggest that by modifying an inhibited child’s surroundings, parents and teachers can help shy children develop better social skills that will lead to greater academic and personal success.

Harvard professor and noted shyness expert Jerome Kagan has studied newborns to identify the neurological foundations of the shyness reaction. In his experiments, certain children — ones he calls “temperamental” — reacted more profoundly to unexpected stimuli. Many of these temperamental babies became shy toddlers. Kagan is now collaborating with geneticists to tease out the subtle influences of nature and nurture in the process, but he cautions against pinning shyness on one gene, saying the research contains too many inconsistencies to suggest a single source.

Fox suspects the same chemical process the brain undergoes with 5-HTT will apply to other genetic culprits as well, providing a road map for scientists to use in their search. “It’s just different genes and environmental stressors,” he says.

How genes translate to behavior depends in large part on how a child is socialized before entering school. By about age 6, shy children with nurturing, supportive families often have developed coping mechanisms that override their biological predispositions, says Kagan. However, when timid children face ridicule at home or are overlooked in the classroom, they often withdraw further. In rare cases, excessively timid children become frustrated and angry, leading to aggression.

Because classrooms are often sources of anxiety for shy children, teachers and parents must use different approaches to making sure shy children are included and encouraged. Bernardo Carducci is director of the Shyness Research Institute at Indiana University-Southeast and author of The Shyness Breakthrough: A No-Stress Plan To Help Your Shy Child Warm Up, Open Up And Join The Fun. He says to start by giving shy children more time to warm up to the idea of an activity. Play to their strengths by picking activities...
New York Policymakers Call For Early Ed To Start at Birth, Including Pre-K

Today’s Children Need Early Education to Compete in the Global Economy

In mid-January, New York state’s Board of Regents broke new ground in early education policy, declaring that all children should have access to educational services starting at birth.

Yes, at birth.

The Regents—the state’s highest policymaking body—adopted the new policy unanimously. They also called for a massive expansion of pre-K services for all 3- and 4-year-olds as part of the new policy thrust—one that is sure to intrigue policymakers around the country.

The new policy emerged after a year of study by state education officials, and passed the Board of Regents unanimously under the fitting rubric, “Early Education for Student Achievement in a Global Community.” The Regents, long a leader of early education, declared the new policy would not only close the achievement gap among students in New York, but also put them on an equal footing with students around the globe, many of whom are outpacing Americans on math and science. Among the key components in the new policy are:

- Lowering the mandatory age for public school to 5.
- Making kindergarten classes full-day.
- Recognizing that the state education system begins at birth.
- Expanding the state’s pre-K program to all 3- and 4-year-olds.

“A major strength of this proposal is that it is comprehensive and systematic,” Richard Mills, the state education commissioner, noted in his written comments prior to adoption of the proposal. Mills has championed the plan not only before the Regents, but also in recent legislative hearings and public appearances. Indeed, early education was one of the key topics at a statewide Education Summit convened by the State University of New York, as part of Mills’ strong advocacy for expansion of high-quality early education.

There was little opposition to the expansion of kindergarten to full-day, given that nearly all of the state’s 781 school districts already offer such services. Currently, 79 districts do not offer full-day kindergarten; of those, 44 already have half-day K. The change in the mandatory age for compulsory schooling would affect about 13,000 children. The Regents proposed additional school aid—as well as a waiver for parents who do not wish to enroll their children at 5—to fund this new policy direction.

At the same time, the Regents began to explore new ways to finance an expansion of preschool services, using the state’s school aid formula. Already, in the current budget year, the Regents have called for $99 million in new pre-K funds to expand the program to more 4-year-olds. Currently, the Universal Prekindergarten program serves about 60,000 children, only about a fourth of those eligible. “The hope is that the $99 million would jump-start the program,” says Cindy Gallagher, who oversees pre-K services for the state’s education department.

The Regents adoption of the new early childhood policy came after months of hearings around the state, where the testimony was nearly unanimous in its embrace of the new policy direction. “The issue of early childhood education is critical,” said Maria Neira, vice president of New York State United Teachers. “We are committed to closing the achievement gap and ensuring that all children in our state are ready to engage in learning when they begin their educational journey.”

The proposal still has several hurdles to clear, however, not the least of which is getting New York’s lawmakers to ante up the money to support the expansion of services. A few days after the Regents’ vote, Governor Pataki released his executive budget, which included no new money for pre-K or other early education services. “Obviously, we are disappointed, but we know there are champions of pre-K in our state legislature and the Regents’ new statement gives them a new platform to stand on and gives advocates new ammunition for our cause,” says Nancy Kolben, co-convener of Winning Beginning, New York, a coalition of groups who champion the expansion of early education.
Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich: First to Propose UPK for 3- and 4-Year-Olds

If Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich’s reputation as a “pre-K governor” wasn’t already secure after the three substantial budget increases for state pre-K, it is now. In February, Blagojevich surprised many when he raised the stakes yet again and proposed an ambitious program to provide state-funded pre-K for all 3- and 4-year-olds. Requiring $135 million for the first three years of a five-year rollout, his Preschool for All proposal would guarantee two years of preschool education for nearly 190,000 children. He recently answered questions from Preschool Matters about his plan and how he’ll make it a reality.

Q. What was the driving force behind your decision to propose universal pre-K for both age groups?
A. Nothing is more important to parents than their children. And nothing is more important to a child’s future than getting a good education. And that’s where preschool comes in. I am proud of the strides Illinois has made in the past three years giving 25,000 more at-risk 3- and 4-year-olds the opportunity to get a pre-kindergarten education, and I saw what a big difference that makes for families.

Preschool can make a big difference for middle-class families as well—families who work hard, pay their taxes and play by the rules. They make too much money to qualify for help from the state, but not enough to afford the high cost of health care or preschool for their children. They deserve our help. Last fall, we passed into law the All Kids plan to provide affordable, comprehensive health insurance to all uninsured children. To me, the next step is to ensure that all young children have a chance to attend a quality preschool as well.

Countless studies demonstrate the benefits of early learning in preschool and those benefits should be available to all families who want it for their children.

I have two children of my own, so my wife and I have seen first-hand what a quality early learning experience can do for a child. However, not everyone has the same opportunities. Preschool for All is about making sure that hard-working families get the help they deserve for their children to succeed in school and grow up to be successful adults.

Q. You are the first to include 3-year-olds in a universal program. Could you talk a little about why you feel it important to include the younger kids?
A. It’s simply a matter of increasing access for all families who want it. If we know that giving children a chance to go to preschool as early as age 3 can make a big difference in their academic and social success later, then we have an obligation to do what we can to give every 3-year-old the chance to get an early start in school. Research shows that the extra year can make a major difference, and if we can help the children of Illinois with their development in that critical year, we should.

Q. Where will the money come from?
A. Illinois’ Preschool for All will be an expansion of the Early Childhood Education Block Grant, which is funded by general revenue.

Q. Does the state have enough teachers? How will you build your workforce?
A. The current workforce of early childhood teachers is well qualified. In fact, Illinois has been recognized for our quality standards, which includes the high educational standards for our pre-kindergarten teachers.

As Preschool for All expands over the next three years, the demand for certified early childhood teachers...
New Insights Into Preventing Shyness

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8 >>

that they have mastered and that put them at ease. Then reassure them by pointing out that they already possess the necessary skills to complete the activity. Once they have acclimated, change one variable at a time, such as introducing a classmate into the activity or doing the project in a new setting.

Other strategies for teachers include: initiating contact each day, giving children tasks that encourage moving around the room, teaching them how to join group play, and pairing them with more outgoing children on classroom activities (although Carducci recommends picking a younger child to keep the situation balanced).

“There’s tremendous pressure on shy people to be more like everybody else,” Carducci says. “Rather than trying to change them, we should try to help them understand their shyness and work with their strengths.”

He believes teachers need to work closely with parents so that they can practice classroom activities at home, helping to reduce the child’s anxiety.

One thing many researchers know is that biology isn’t destiny. Kagan’s advice to early educators: Forget about biology and concentrate on helping shy kids overcome their anxiety.

Pairing shy children with their more outgoing peers is one way teachers can encourage and help shy students to overcome their anxiety.
Staying abreast of early childhood education research is, by virtue of the sheer volume and variety of material, a work in progress. Here to aid that progress is the latest edition of the *Handbook of Research on the Education of Young Children*. Edited by Bernard Spodek and Olivia N. Saracho, the *Handbook* aims to ensure that research related to child development, curriculum, policy, and research and evaluation strategies is, “more available and readily accessible.” It succeeds.

Numerous early childhood education topics are covered with each chapter providing a thorough, stand-alone overview of an issue. Chapters are grouped under four primary research foci, so that reading additional chapters can expand one’s understanding beyond a discrete topic. For example, the first chapters fall under the heading of early childhood education and child development, but focus individually on children’s cognitive, social, moral, emotional, creative and motor development. Readers can therefore choose to increase their understanding of any of these individual developmental areas or child development overall.

Similarly, the second set of chapters focuses on early childhood educational curriculum. Children’s early language, literacy and math development are addressed, but so, too, are the domains of the visual arts, music, and creative movement. Additional chapters address children’s multicultural education, the importance of pretend play in learning, and the literacy education of children from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

These first two sets of chapters could most likely serve as a more-than-adequate handbook. However, the editors have also wisely incorporated chapters focusing on the critical policy issues that affect early childhood education, such as poverty, child care and family contexts. Since each chapter synthesizes the latest research, the editors have devoted the fourth set of chapters to early childhood education research and evaluation strategies. These chapters provide guidance in the areas of assessing children’s learning and program quality, as well as some approaches to research that can provide new perspectives and understandings. Though lengthy—the *Handbook* is 600 pages long—it is a “bookshelf must” for a wide variety of early childhood stakeholders.

If increasing children’s access to high-quality early education is important to you, I highly recommend using the *Handbook* as the *vade mecum* it was intended to be.

—Debra J. Ackerman, Research Associate, NIEER