

School Involvement in Early Childhood

Donna Hinkle

National Institute on
Early Childhood Development and Education

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement

U.S. Department of Education

Richard W. Riley
Secretary

Office of Educational Research and Improvement

C. Kent McGuire
Assistant Secretary

National Institute on Early Childhood Development and Education

Naomi Karp
Director

Media and Information Services

Cynthia Hearn Dorfman
Director

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Introduction

Public education begins with kindergarten for most children, but an estimated 1 million prekindergarten children are also in public schools,¹ and the number is increasing. As early as the 1993–94 school year, a U.S. Department of Education survey of all school districts found that 66 percent offered voluntary prekindergarten, including special education prekindergarten, general prekindergarten, and Head Start.² In 1998–99, public schools reported using Title I funds for 260,000 prekindergarten children,³ in addition to preschoolers enrolled in Even Start, special education, and other public preschool classrooms.

State governments are leading a trend toward public education for prekindergarten children. Responding to a Children’s Defense Fund survey that defined prekindergarten as “focused primarily on education for three- and four-year-olds,” 24 states⁴ reported funding prekindergarten initiatives in 1991–92. This number jumped to 42 states, serving approximately 725,000 children, in 1998–99. Of the 42 states, 24 states funded only their own prekindergarten programs, 14 funded their own programs and also supplemented Head Start, and 4 only supplemented Head Start.⁵

Responding to a General Accounting Office survey that defined preschool as programs that “generally operated as part of the public school system,” 32 states reported funding preschool in 1998–99, serving approximately 613,000 children.⁶

Differences in the Children’s Defense Fund and General Accounting Office surveys illustrate the lack of standardized definitions for “preschool” and “prekindergarten.”

¹Clifford, R., Early, D., and Hills, T. “Almost a million children in school before kindergarten: Who is responsible for early childhood services?” *Young Children*, November 1999.

²U.S. Department of Education. *Schools and Staffing Survey: 1993–94*. 1994.

³U.S. Department of Education. *Federal Education Legislation Enacted in 1994: An Evaluation of Implementation and Impact*. 1999.

⁴Surveys cited in this publication counted the District of Columbia as a state.

⁵Schulman, K., Blank, H., and Ewen, D. *Seeds of Success: State Prekindergarten Initiatives 1998–99*. Children’s Defense Fund, 1999.

⁶U.S. General Accounting Office. *Education and Care: Early Childhood Programs and Services for Low-Income Families*. 1999.

Background

This publication refers to all programs that provide regularly scheduled child care and education to children prior to kindergarten as “preschool care and education programs.” It highlights the role of public schools and refers to preschool care and education programs that are based in, or linked closely with, public schools as “prekindergarten.” There are many similarities among preschool care and education programs, but they also have some distinguishing characteristics.

The primary purpose of child care programs is to care for children, typically 9 to 10 hours a day, 5 days a week while their parents are working. Some child care centers operate as for-profit businesses, while others operate as nonprofit programs in churches, schools, and other community facilities. Home-based child care includes informal arrangements with relatives, friends, and neighbors. It also includes family child care businesses operated in homes, where one or more adults care for children.

The primary purpose of traditional preschool programs has been to provide early education, typically 2 to 3 hours a day, 3 to 5 days a week. However, increased numbers of working parents have led to programs that combine full-day, full-year child care and preschool. Most child care and preschool programs, both for-profit and nonprofit, are private and depend on fees that parents can afford to pay.

Head Start is a federal program that offers free education and comprehensive support services for preschool children and their families with incomes below the federal poverty level. Most Head Start programs are part day, 3 to 5 days a week, and operate on a school year calendar, but these programs are also changing as more parents join the workforce. In 1999, 49 percent of Head Start families needed child care, and 27 percent of these families received child care through Head Start or its sponsoring agency.⁷ Head Start is not funded to serve all eligible children.

⁷U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *1999 Head Start Fact Sheet*. 1999.

Most prekindergarten programs are targeted to three- and four-year-old children whose families do not speak English at home, have low incomes, or have other special needs that place children at serious disadvantage when entering school. Even with restricted eligibility, the initiatives are not large enough to serve all eligible children.⁸ However, some states have started voluntary programs for all four-year-olds. In 1993, Georgia became the first state to offer universal prekindergarten for four-year-olds, and in 1997, New York began phasing in their prekindergarten program, with the goal of offering universal prekindergarten for four-year-olds by 2003. In 1998, Oklahoma began paying for all four-year-olds who are enrolled in public school prekindergarten.

In addition to prekindergarten, many states are funding parenting education and other family services that are based in or linked with schools. Missouri offers its Parents as Teachers program—designed to improve school readiness through home visits to expectant parents and to families with children from birth to age five—in every school district in the state. Forty-eight other states, as well as 8 other countries, also offer the Parents as Teachers program. Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, and Ohio are some of the states that fund school-based family resource centers for families with preschool children.

Increased school involvement in early childhood has raised questions about the role of public schools with preschool children and the effects of public prekindergarten on children and on Head Start and private preschool care and education programs. The National Institute on Early Childhood Development and Education in the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) convened a group of national, state, and community early childhood and education leaders in December 1997 to discuss these questions. While the meeting was not structured to seek a consensus among all participants, certain key issues drew frequent or widespread expressions of agreement as the group considered the following questions:

- Why should public schools be involved with children before kindergarten?
- What roles should public schools play in early childhood?

⁸Schulman, K., Blank, H., and Ewen, D. *op. cit.*

- What conditions help public schools work effectively with young children and their families?
- What barriers prevent public school involvement in early childhood programs?
- What are the key issues for teacher preparation and professional development?
- What important questions can research answer?

This publication is based on discussion at the meeting and on recent related data and research. The purpose of the publication is to provide schools, families, and communities with information and ideas about public school prekindergarten and other preschool care and education initiatives that are linked with public schools. The publication offers insights from meeting participants about public school involvement in early childhood, and it provides examples of how states and communities are designing programs to expand and improve preschool care and education.

Meeting participants identified the need for a publication to assist policymakers as they make decisions about how to help all children come to school prepared to learn, and they recommended keeping the publication updated with current information and examples. To help meet that recommendation, OERI asks that you keep us informed about how schools are involved with preschool care and education in your state and community.

Why Should Schools Be Involved in Early Childhood?

A publicly funded K–12 education is considered a basic entitlement for all children in the United States, but the public education system does not extend to most preschool children. There is a growing trend, however, toward public funding for prekindergarten classes. Meeting participants discussed this trend and identified several reasons: the blurry line between preschool care and education, schools' vested interest in school readiness, universal availability of neighborhood elementary schools, universal access to public schools, and an increased understanding that preschool care and education programs can help each other.

The Line Between Preschool Care and Education is Blurry.

Family structures and lifestyles have changed, and most parents share responsibility for their children's preschool care and education with a variety of programs. Almost 65 percent of mothers with preschool children are in the labor force.⁹ The 1996 welfare reform law requires parents who receive public cash assistance—usually single mothers—to begin working within two years.

In 1995, 59 percent of all preschool-aged children were in preschool care and education programs on a regular basis, including 67 percent of three-year-olds and 77 percent of four-year-olds.¹⁰ A recent U.S. Department of Education study found that 80 percent of all children beginning kindergarten in the fall of 1998 had been in child care on a regular basis, and about half continued to be in child care before or after school.¹¹

Research, including two recent longitudinal studies supported by the U.S. Department of Education, documents the impact of preschool care and education on

⁹Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Labor Force Participation of Fathers and Mothers Varies with Children's Ages*. 1999.

¹⁰Hofferth, S., Shauman, K., Henke, R., and West, J. *Characteristics of Children's Early Care and Education Programs*, U.S. Department of Education, 1998.

¹¹West, J., Denton, K., and Germino-Hausken, E. *America's Kindergartners: Findings from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998–99, Fall 1998*. U.S. Department of Education, 2000.

children's school success. The studies demonstrate that high-quality child care is also education that helps preschool children develop emotionally, socially, and cognitively.

The Cost, Quality, and Outcomes study followed approximately 400 children from the time they were three years old in child care centers through second grade. The children who had been in high-quality care demonstrated greater school readiness and success through second grade than children who had been in low-quality care, even after controlling for family differences. The impact was strongest for children whose mothers had not completed high school, compared with children whose mothers had a college education.¹²

The Abecedarian Project randomly assigned infants in very low-income families to a high-quality early care and education program and has followed them and the control group to age 21. Young adults who had been in the high-quality Abecedarian program have consistently outperformed the control group on cognitive tests and on math and reading achievement tests, and at age 21, more of them were in college or in jobs that required high skill levels.¹³

Unfortunately, most children are not in high-quality preschool care and education programs that promote their learning and development. The Cost, Quality, and Outcomes study of 400 child care centers in 4 states found that 74 percent of the centers were mediocre in quality—meeting children's minimal health and safety needs but not promoting their development and learning. The study determined that only 14 percent of centers were good quality, while 12 percent were not even safe or healthy for young children.¹⁴ A similar study of child care homes in three states found that 56 percent of homes were mediocre, only 9 percent were characterized by qualities that promote learning, and 35 percent were characterized by qualities that harm children's development and learning.¹⁵

¹²National Center on Early Development and Learning. *Cost, Quality, and Outcomes Children Go to School*. 1999.

¹³Ramey, C., Campbell, F., and Burchinal, M. *The Abecedarian Project*. 1999.

¹⁴Cost, Quality, and Outcomes Research Team. *Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes in Child Care Centers*, University of Colorado, 1995.

¹⁵Galinsky, E., Howes, C., Kontos, S., and Shimm, M. *The Study of Children in Family Child Care and Relative Care*, Families and Work Institute, 1994.

Some states are trying to improve the quality of preschool care and education as a strategy to help children in low-performing school districts meet state standards.



The Connecticut Department of Education provides \$1,930,000 in quality enhancement grants to its 16 priority school districts to improve preschool care and education, support networks of child care homes, and improve support to parents.

Most state prekindergarten initiatives acknowledge the close link between preschool care and education. Thirty-three states with prekindergarten programs fund classrooms in Head Start, child care centers, and other community facilities, as well as in public schools.¹⁶



Georgia uses state lottery funds to offer voluntary prekindergarten for all four-year-olds. Initiated in 1993, the program currently enrolls 61,000 children in schools, Head Start, and child care centers. In an ongoing 12-year study of children's outcomes, kindergarten teachers rated 64 percent of the former prekindergartners as above average in readiness for kindergarten, and at the end of the year, rated 68 percent of them as above average in readiness for first grade.¹⁷ The program received a 1997 Innovation in Government award from the Ford Foundation and Harvard University.

Ongoing neuroscience research further blurs the line between early care and education. Brain development occurs most rapidly during the first 3 years of life, when it is critically important for children to be held, cuddled, and talked to. The brain continues developing rapidly until age 8 or 10 when it slows down, suggesting that children's first years are the most crucial for shaping their capacity to learn.¹⁸



Building on a \$12 million prekindergarten initiative launched in 1986, the Illinois General Assembly appropriated \$169.6 million for the 1999–2000 Early Childhood Block Grant. The block grant includes the Prekindergarten Program for Children At Risk of Academic Failure, the Prevention Initiative Program for birth to three-year-olds,

¹⁶Schulman, K., Blank, H., and Ewen, D. op. cit.

¹⁷Henderson, L., Basile, K., and Henry, G. *Prekindergarten Longitudinal Study: 1997–98 School Year Annual Report*. Georgia State University, 1999.

¹⁸Education Commission of the States. *Brain Research and Education: Neuroscience Research has Implications for Education Policy*. 1999.

and the Parent Training Initiative for parents with children from birth to five years old.



North Carolina initiated Smart Start in 1993, and the program has grown from 18 counties to all 100 counties, with \$150 million in state funds. The county-based program is designed to improve school readiness primarily by subsidizing child care costs and improving child care quality. A six-county evaluation found that Smart Start assistance that focused directly on improving child care classroom quality improved children's skills and behavior in kindergarten. Only 9 percent of children from centers that received this direct assistance had low cognitive skills, and only 10 percent had behavior problems, compared with 17 and 18 percent, respectively, of their peers.¹⁹ The program received a 1998 Innovation in Government award from the Ford Foundation and Harvard University.

Studies have also shown that participation in Head Start and other preschool intervention programs decreases later grade retention and special education services.²⁰ The Rand Corporation recently analyzed evaluation results of nine early childhood intervention programs and concluded that carefully designed and targeted early childhood programs benefit both children and taxpayers.²¹

Schools Have a Vested Interest in School Readiness.

The National Research Council, the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, and the National Institute on Child Health and Human Development have warned that children who cannot read independently by third grade are unlikely to be successful in school. This is the first priority of the U.S. Department of Education, which supported an extensive research synthesis that documented the importance of young children “starting school motivated to read and with the prerequisite language and early literacy skills.”²²

¹⁹North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc. *More Proof that Smart Start is Improving the Lives of Young Children*. 1999.

²⁰Zigler, E. and Muenchow, S. *Head Start*, HarperCollins, 1992.

²¹Karoly, L., Greenwood, P., Everingham, S., Hoube, J., Kilburn, R., Rydell, C., Sanders, M., and Chiesa, J. *Investing in Our Children*, Rand Corporation, 1998.

²²Snow, C., Burns, S., and Griffin, P., eds. *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*. National Research Council, 1998, p. 5.

However, children’s early learning opportunities vary greatly. The Department’s study of children who began kindergarten in the fall of 1998 provided national data for the first time about differences in school readiness. Children’s literacy and math skills, as well as their general knowledge, were significantly related to maternal education, number of parents in the home, primary language, race or ethnicity, and their age at kindergarten entry. The study also found significant differences in children’s social skills, physical health, and approaches to learning.²³

The National Research Council highlighted the need for high-quality preschool environments that promote skills that predict later reading achievement. Some states and schools are putting the research into practice.

☆ *In 1997, Mississippi began its Every Child a Reader initiative. Their “Getting Ready for Kindergarten” materials provide parents with tools for introducing children to print and phonemic awareness. Videotapes demonstrate how to read to children, even if the parents are non-readers. The state provides the materials to school districts and preschool care and education programs for every parent with a four- or five-year old child.*

☆ *The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in North Carolina invest most of their Title I funds in Bright Beginnings, a literacy-based program designed to provide the foundation for early literacy development. The program began in 1997, linked to the district’s goal that 85 percent of third-graders will read at or above grade level by 2001. It serves almost 2,000 four-year-olds—who demonstrate the highest level of educational need—in 13 schools, 2 Head Start centers, and a church-based child care center.*

☆ *The Kentucky Early Literacy Initiative is working to ensure all children are able to read at the proficient level on the Kentucky Core Content Test at the end of fourth grade. The initiative encourages preschool care and education programs to promote early literacy and provides professional development to help preschool and primary teachers master effective research-based reading strategies.*

High-quality preschool increases low-income children’s IQ scores throughout the first few years of school. Dr. Doris Entwisle, a professor in the Department of Sociology at Johns Hopkins University, thinks that this advantage may be underestimated. She

²³West, J., Denton, K., and Germino-Hausken, E., op. cit.

believes that even short-term IQ gains may lay a foundation for success by boosting children's performance "during the critical transition into school." Dr. Entwisle points out that higher ability during early schooling can protect children from being placed in lower-ability groups and retained in grade, raising expectations from parents and teachers.²⁴

Some states and school districts are improving school readiness and increasing children's chances of succeeding in school, often offering prekindergarten as an essential element of school reform.

☆ *The Michigan School Readiness Program, initiated as a pilot program in 1985, is serving over 23,000 children, who are at risk of school failure, in 1999–2000. An ongoing program evaluation found that the children entered kindergarten with significantly higher scores, including language and literacy, than similar children who had not attended the program. The children have continued a higher level of success than their peers through second grade, with significant differences in grade retention, interest in school, and physical ability.*²⁵

☆ *Kentucky offers prekindergarten to four-year-olds who are eligible for free school lunches, 46 percent of all four-year-olds in the state. The University of Kentucky found that prekindergarten participants at ages seven and eight did as well as their peers who were not eligible for free school lunches.*²⁶

☆ *Texas has the largest prekindergarten program in the country. The state has required school districts since 1984 to offer prekindergarten if they have at least 15 four-year-olds who are unable to speak or understand English, are eligible for free or reduced lunches, or are homeless.*

☆ *Missouri offers the Parents as Teachers home-visiting program in every school district. In 1998, they assessed 3,500 beginning kindergartners in 80 schools on 7 dimensions of school readiness. The highest performing children had participated in Parents as Teachers and in preschool care and education programs, with children in high-*

²⁴Entwisle, D. "The Role of Schools in Sustaining Early Childhood Program Benefits." *The Future of Children*. The David and Lucille Packard Foundation, 1995, p. 134.

²⁵Zongping, X., Schweinhart, L., Hohmann, C., Smith, C., and Storer, E. *Points of Light: Third Year Report of the Michigan School Readiness Program Evaluation*, High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 2000.

²⁶Kentucky Department of Education. *What We Believe About Educating Kentucky's Children*. 1998.

*poverty school districts scoring above average. Among children whose preschool care and education was in child care homes, or who had not been in a program, those who had been in Parents as Teachers scored significantly higher than children who had not. In addition, teachers rated special-needs children who had participated in Parents as Teachers, preschool care and education, and early childhood special education programs as similar to average children.*²⁷

Many policymakers are paying attention to the first national education goal that all children will begin school ready to learn, but policy lags well behind research findings on the impacts of preschool care and education. Only 2 percent of Title I funds are spent on prekindergarten,²⁸ and state investments also remain low, compared to investments in school-age children. For example, North Carolina spends about \$350 annually on each preschooler through its Smart Start school readiness initiative, compared with more than \$5,000 per year on school children.²⁹ Some education leaders, however, are urging greater investments in prekindergarten.

*“Formal education that begins at age five is TOO LATE...While our state continues to spend more and more money correcting problems that occur later in children’s lives through remediation, special education, alternative schools, and the criminal justice system, we ignore the front end of their lives, where it could truly make a difference. ...preschool will make more of a difference than anything else we can do to improve the lives of our children and our state.”*³⁰
Cecil J. Picard, Louisiana Superintendent of Education

*“Poor children begin school academically behind their non-poor peers, and schools have traditionally been unable to close that gap as they progress through school...When we know that early intervention may eliminate the need for remediation later, why aren't we investing more of our resources on high quality preschool education programs? What are we waiting for?”*³¹ Mary Jean LeTendre, Director, Compensatory Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education

²⁷Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. *Missouri School Entry Assessment Project Summary*. 1999.

²⁸LeTendre, M. *Title I Must Be #1 Now: Our Children Can't Wait for Us to Re-Write the Law*. Speech at National Federal Program Administrators Conference, April 21, 1999.

²⁹North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc., op. cit.

³⁰Picard, Cecil J. *Need for Statewide Preschool Program*.

³¹LeTendre, M. , op. cit.

Every Neighborhood Has an Elementary School.

Elementary schools are central neighborhood institutions, but preschool care and education programs are not readily available, affordable, and accessible in many neighborhoods. The U.S. General Accounting Office cites obstacles of affordability for low-income families and transportation for rural and urban families.³² Head Start serves only an estimated 27 percent of three-year-olds and 48 percent of four-year-olds whose families have incomes below the federal poverty level.³³ Similarly, the Child Care and Development Block Grant is enough to subsidize child care costs for only 10 percent of eligible families with incomes below 85 percent of their state's average income.³⁴

The inadequate availability of preschool care and education led Dr. Ed Zigler, a Head Start founder and advisor, to initiate The School of the 21st Century, a school reform model based on family support. Schools of the 21st Century include full-day, full-year preschool and school-age programs. In addition, there are other supports to parents and to child care programs with infants and toddlers.



The Independence, Missouri School District became the nation's first School of the 21st Century in 1988. The district provides child care for three- and four-year-olds and before- and after-school care for school-aged children in every elementary school. It operates Head Start and Full Start, a program initiated in Kansas City to blend Head Start and child care. Independence schools also administer Medicaid and case management and offer child development training to families and child care providers.

Dr. Zigler sees elementary schools as universal neighborhood institutions that can help all families find and afford high-quality child care, and many other education leaders agree. There are now over 500 Schools of the 21st century in 17 states, and the U.S. Department of Education is supporting an evaluation of this school reform approach.

³²U.S. General Accounting Office, op. cit.

³³Advisory Committee on Head Start Research and Evaluation. *The Growth of Head Start and Other Early Childhood Options*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 1999.

³⁴U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Access to Child Care for Low Income Working Families*. 1999.

☆ *Connecticut based its statewide network of 60 family resource centers, a \$6 million initiative, on the School of the 21st Century concept. Kentucky's education reform includes a network of 638 family resource/youth services centers, funded at \$43 million and located at or near public schools. The family resource centers in both states offer parent education and support, preschool and school-age child care, child care provider training, and youth development activities. In addition, they link child care programs with community school readiness programs.*

Neighborhood schools play a key role in our society, and most parents like their children's schools. National Public Radio, the Kaiser Foundation, and Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government sponsored a nationwide telephone survey between June 25 and July 19, 1999. Seventy-one percent of parents surveyed gave their children's schools a grade of A or B.³⁵

Many families with children in school also have preschool children, leading some schools to evolve into educational homes and resource centers for families. Including prekindergarten in elementary schools, systematically coordinating preschools and elementary schools, and welcoming young children and families into schools can provide continuity and ease the critical transition to school.

☆ *Minnesota has been offering its statewide Early Childhood Family Education program—currently funded at \$39 million with state and local taxes—through the public schools for 25 years. All families with children from birth to kindergarten are eligible, and about 42 percent of them participate—approximately 300,000 parents and children. The program offers parent discussions and education, parent-child activities, early learning activities, early health and developmental screening, lending libraries, community resource information, and home visits. Parents in the program report feeling more supported and confident, with a better understanding of child development and improved parenting skills.³⁶*

☆ *The Toronto School District in Ontario, Canada—where 50 percent of families do not speak English at home—welcomes all young children and their families and helps ease the transition to school. In 1981, the*

³⁵National Public Radio. *Americans Willing to Pay for Improving Schools*. 1999.

³⁶Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning. *Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE)*. 1998.

school board initiated parent centers in elementary schools. Now 34 schools have centers that serve 7,000 families who participate in preschool programs with their young children. The schools are used day and night to serve families and people throughout the neighborhoods.

All Children Have Access to Public Schools.

Public schools educate all school-aged children, regardless of family income and ability to buy services elsewhere. This tradition can help young children and their families who may not have access to other preschool care and education programs. The federal Head Start program is limited to children whose family incomes are below the federal poverty level, and it is not funded to serve all eligible children. Most private preschool care and education programs depend on tuition, limiting themselves to children and families who can afford the fees.

★ *In 1998, Oklahoma began paying for all four-year-olds in public school prekindergarten, a policy that doubled the number of prekindergarten students to 16,000.*

Families are enrolling their children in preschool care and education in record numbers, but the numbers remain unequal. In 1996, 71 percent of children whose mothers had completed college attended preschool care and education centers, compared with only 37 percent of children whose mothers had less than a high school education. Only 37 percent of Hispanic children attended preschool care and education centers, compared to 54 percent of white children and 63 percent of African-American children.³⁷

★ *In 1996, New Jersey established Early Childhood Program Aid in response to a school finance equity lawsuit in the State Supreme Court. The program pays for prekindergarten for all three- and four-year olds in the state's 28 poorest school districts and offers funds to 108 other districts. The U.S. Department of Education is supporting an evaluation of the program.*

³⁷U.S. Department of Education. *National Household Education Survey*. 1996. The survey defined preschool as early childhood centers, including Head Start and child care.

There is strong and ongoing evidence that inequities in preschool opportunities contribute to the achievement gap for students at risk of school failure. Dr. W. Steven Barnett, a professor at Rutgers University's Graduate School of Education, reviewed 36 studies of model demonstration projects and large-scale public programs. He carefully examined long-term effects of preschool care and education on children in low-income families. Dr. Barnett concluded that there are "sizeable persistent effects on achievement, grade retention, special education, high school graduation, and socialization. In particular, the evidence for effects on grade retention and special education is overwhelming."³⁸

By joining forces, schools, Head Start, and child care programs can replace the "nonsystem of early care and education to which some 13 million American children are entrusted each day."³⁹ Public schools, Head Start, and child care programs can work together on neighborhood needs assessments, planning, and financing strategies to expand preschool care and education to children who have been unable to participate in Head Start and child care in the past.

☆ *Connecticut distributes \$39,000,000 in school readiness funds to its 16 priority school districts and 25 severe need schools, serving 6,352 preschoolers in public schools, Head Start, and child care programs. Community School Readiness Councils—community partnerships between chief elected officials and school superintendents—coordinate the development of a range of preschool care and education for all children and provide local control of school readiness funds.*

☆ *Florida legislation passed in 1999 requires all counties to form coalitions that include school superintendents and other community and private sector leaders to support early childhood education. The county coalitions are responsible for all state health and education funds for children from prenatal through age five.*

³⁸Barnett, W.S. "Long-term effects of early childhood programs on cognitive and school outcomes." *The Future of Children*. The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, 1995, p. 43.

³⁹Carnegie Foundation. *Years of Promise*. 1996, p. 53.

Schools Can Help Child Care and Head Start Programs.

Public education has an infrastructure of state-certified teachers, ongoing professional development, and professional salaries. While salaries are low compared with other professions, public school teachers have higher education and salaries than Head Start teachers, who have higher education and salaries than child care teachers. Child care teachers—with an average annual salary of \$14,250—are paid less than maids, waiters, and cashiers, making child care personnel the second worst paid group in the country, after dishwashers.⁴⁰

Linking Head Start and child care with public schools can communicate that children in preschool care and education need well-trained teachers with equitable salaries, bringing to life research findings that better educated preschool teachers contribute to children's success in school.⁴¹



In 1996–97, 97 percent of lead prekindergarten teachers in Georgia's public schools had state certification in an early childhood field, compared to only 65 percent of lead prekindergarten teachers in Head Start and child care centers. Prekindergarten teachers in Head Start and child care reported more concerns about salaries and working conditions than prekindergarten teachers in public schools.⁴² In addition, parents with prekindergarten children in public schools reported higher levels of satisfaction and were more likely to attend special programming or to believe their interactions with their children had changed as a result of the program. The Georgia Office of School Readiness changed the requirements for prekindergarten. By 2000–01, all programs will pay minimum teacher salaries based on credentials, and by 2001–02, all lead teachers will have at least a 2-year degree.⁴³

⁴⁰Krantz, L. *Jobs Rated Almanac*. Les National Business Employment Weekly Jobs, 1999.

⁴¹Cost, Quality, and Outcomes Research Team, op. cit.

⁴²Henderson, L., Basile, K., and Henry, G. *Prekindergarten Longitudinal Study: 1996–1997 School Year Annual Report*. Georgia State University, 1998.

⁴³Raden, A. *Universal Prekindergarten in Georgia: A Case Study of Georgia's Lottery-Funded Pre-K Program*. The Foundation for Child Development, 1999.

Public schools have public resources to meet the needs of children and families, and they have demonstrated the will and ability to provide high quality preschool education.⁴⁴

☆ *The Georgia Office of School Readiness requires prekindergarten administrators, teachers, and other staff to attend annual training where teachers receive training in early childhood education curriculum and best practices. Classroom observations and teacher interviews indicate that the vast majority of prekindergarten teachers consistently use developmentally appropriate practice.*⁴⁵

Including preschool care and education teachers in the public education infrastructure can increase their access to colleges and universities for teacher certification, professional development, and technical assistance. Innovations in teacher preparation and development—such as professional development schools and other ongoing partnerships between higher education institutions and local schools—can include child care and Head Start teachers, as well as teachers in public schools.

☆ *The Castleton United Methodist Nursery School, a full-day child care center in Indianapolis, partnered with Ball State University (BSU) to become the first preschool designated as a professional development school. Because the Castleton director and a preschool teacher have bachelor's degrees in early childhood, the two are qualified to serve as adjunct BSU staff who supervise BSU student teachers while they work and learn at Castleton. A BSU faculty member spends part of his time at Castleton, observing and assisting student teachers and child care staff.*

Child Care and Head Start Programs Can Help Public Schools.

Head Start and child care programs have many training and professional development opportunities that can also help school personnel. Regional training and

⁴⁴Ripple, C., Gilliam, W., Chanana, N., and Zigler, E. "Will fifty cooks spoil the broth?" *American Psychologist*, May 1999. The authors conducted a survey of state prekindergarten programs that indicated these programs have higher teacher qualifications and better classroom characteristics than Head Start but not the emphasis on comprehensive services that Head Start provides.

⁴⁵Henderson, L., Basile, K., and Henry, G., op. cit.

technical assistance providers, local child care resource and referral agencies, and colleges and universities conduct workshops in early childhood development topics that could benefit school personnel who do not have early childhood backgrounds.

Public schools typically operate only 6.5 hours a day, 5 days a week, 9 months a year, leaving most employed parents on their own to find child care during nonschool hours. Most Head Start and prekindergarten programs also operate for only part of the day.⁴⁶ Child care programs, on the other hand, operate 10–12 hours a day, all year, and sometimes at night and on weekends to help parents with atypical work schedules, including the 25 percent of low-income mothers who work at night.⁴⁷ Some states are blending child care and education to provide more comprehensive services to children and families.



The Washington Partnership links Head Start, prekindergarten, and child care programs with state agencies implementing WorkFirst, Washington's welfare reform program. Local pilot projects signed a memorandum of understanding with a common goal of improving access to Head Start and prekindergarten for WorkFirst families. The Partnership is blending child care subsidies with Head Start and prekindergarten funding to provide full-day, full-year preschool care and education services. WorkFirst, Head Start, and prekindergarten representatives meet on a regular basis to provide updates about service delivery and to conduct cross-training to learn about each other's agency culture and services.⁴⁸

Child care programs have a tradition of responding to working families' needs for extended hours of service, providing critical family support. Linking with child care programs can help schools offer extended hours for children who need safe, nurturing environments and additional learning opportunities beyond the traditional school day and year.

⁴⁶U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *1999 Head Start Fact Sheet*. 1999.

⁴⁷Urban Institute. *Assessing the New Federalism: An Urban Institute Program to Assess Changing Social Policies*. 1999.

⁴⁸Sconyers, N. "Winning early care and education funding: Successful strategies from five states." *Stepping Up: Financing Early Care and Education in the 21st Century*. Ewing Marion Kauffman and David and Lucile Packard Foundations, 1999.

☆ *The Connecticut Departments of Education and Social Services established the School Readiness and Child Day Care Program in 1997 by combining a part-day, part-year prekindergarten program with full-day, full-year child care. In 1999, the state doubled the program capacity from 3,000 to 6,000 children.*

Federal Head Start regulations require that local programs work with community resources to provide comprehensive educational, health, and family support services to Head Start children and their families. As a result, Head Start is a fully functioning family support program, based on the concept that serving the whole family is the best way to help children succeed. Head Start programs emphasize parent involvement, hire and train parents as Head Start employees, and are required to have Parent Policy Councils that establish local policies and oversee program activities.

Nearly 73 percent of Head Start families have annual incomes below \$12,000, almost 36 percent are African-American, and more than 26 percent are Hispanic.⁴⁹ Partnering with Head Start programs can help public schools build strong relationships with these families, whose children are typically at risk of school failure.

Head Start parents gave the program the highest customer satisfaction score, 87 on a scale between 0 and 100, of any federal agency on the 1999 American Customer Satisfaction Initiative for Federal Government.⁵⁰ Long after their children have left Head Start, families continue to identify with the program, often remaining active members of the National Head Start Association, rallying community, state, and national support for Head Start.⁵¹

Many parents with children in public schools, on the other hand, may not have enough information to actively support their schools. The National Parents and Teachers Association conducted a nationwide survey of 800 parents with children in public schools in December 1998. Only 17 percent of parents with family incomes below \$15,000, and

⁴⁹U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, op. cit.

⁵⁰U.S. Government Customer Satisfaction Initiative. 1999.

⁵¹Zigler, E. and Muenchow, S., op. cit.

15 percent of parents with incomes below \$25,000, reported that their children received Title I services.⁵²

Parents in the survey cited “most parents don’t know what is going on in school” as the number one problem in schools, with 53 percent reporting it as a problem and 24 percent reporting it as a serious problem in their own children’s schools. Thirty-three percent said that their schools do not keep parents well informed.⁵³

Perceptions were worse among African-American and low-income parents. Seventy-four percent of African-American parents believed that parents do not know what is going on in their children’s schools, and 54 percent said that schools do not keep parents informed. Sixty-four percent of parents with family incomes below \$25,000 believed that parents do not know what is going on in their children’s schools, and 46 percent said that parents do not know what is going on in their children’s schools.⁵⁴

Similarly, only 25 percent of 1,075 parents who responded to a survey about California’s statewide class size reduction initiative were aware of the initiative, including 21 percent of parents whose children were in the smaller classes. This study also found that low-income parents were less informed than other parents.⁵⁵

Some schools faced with threats of violence may seem intimidating, with locked doors, metal detectors, and guards. Many parents do not speak English, have less education than school personnel, or come from countries where parents are not expected to participate in their children’s education. While these parents may be encouraged to visit and get involved in Head Start classrooms, many may not feel welcome in schools.

Cornell University reviewed prekindergarten plans developed by 95 school districts in New York and found that some “involved things done or taught to parents with little opportunity for parent input.” Several, however, planned prekindergarten

⁵²National PTA. *National Survey of Parents of Public School Students*. 1999.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵CSR Research Consortium. *Class Size Reduction in California 1996–98: Early Findings Signal Promise and Concerns*. 1999.

approaches that offered opportunities for parents, including one where parents without high school diplomas can earn credits for work-study experience in the classroom.⁵⁶

Linking with Head Start and child care programs can help more schools reach families early to encourage active involvement in the school and in their children's education.

⁵⁶Hicks, S., Lekies, K., and Cochran, M. *Promising Practices: New York State Universal Prekindergarten: Expanded Edition*. Cornell University Early Childhood Program, 1999, p. 25.

What Roles Should Schools Play in Early Childhood?

Since public schools have not historically worked with prekindergarten children, some school and early childhood leaders are not sure how schools should be involved with younger children. Meeting participants unanimously agreed that schools should work with families and with preschool care and education programs on high-quality preschool opportunities and successful transitions to kindergarten. They discussed the following partnership roles for schools: developing a seamless care and education system, coordinating community resources, and helping families develop social networks.

Schools Can Be Part of a Seamless System of Care and Education.

Most child care programs, Head Start programs, and public schools operate in isolation from each other, even though they are located in the same neighborhoods and serve many of the same children and families. They respond to separate legislation and policies developed and administered by separate federal, state, and local agencies with little systematic coordination, even when agencies are located in the same cities and buildings.

Schools, Head Start, and child care programs develop individual policies and procedures, staff training and development, and procedures for communicating with families. Unfortunately, most programs do not communicate with each other to develop shared expectations for children or coordinate the curricula they use with children. Some states are taking steps to bring more coherence to separate programs for children.



Vermont has aligned licensing standards for preschool care and education programs in public schools, child care and Head Start centers, and other facilities. Their “Playing with the Standards” video demonstrates how preschools can implement state curriculum standards in playful classroom environments.



The Kansas Department of Education convened parents and representatives from state agencies, universities, religious and other organizations to develop Quality Standards for Early Childhood Programs. The Departments of Education and Health have endorsed the Quality Standards and implemented them in all their sponsored

programs. Parents as Teachers, Even Start, state university early childhood classes, and many private preschool care and education programs also use the standards. Research will track the academic success of children over time.



The Maryland Model for School Readiness links prekindergarten through third-grade curriculum, instruction, and assessment and the state's third-grade test. The model includes training for public school, child care, and Head Start teachers on articulation of students' progress between preschool and public school and across grade levels.



The Illinois Early Learning Initiative includes a prototype for an early learning system for all children birth through age eight, including year-by-year learning standards, assessment strategies, and program quality standards. State specialists support school districts in adopting and implementing early learning systems. The state is identifying model early learning sites—partnerships between school districts, institutes of higher education, and other community organizations—in strategic locations to offer assistance to other sites across the state.

Some public schools, Head Start programs, and child care programs are coordinating policy, family communications, and curricula to help families access preschool care and education and provide continuity for children from preschool through elementary school.



The Child Care Action Campaign works with school districts to help develop partnerships between schools and preschool care and education programs. Their recent publication documented 68 partnerships in 37 states and provided in-depth profiles of partnerships in Flint, MI; Albuquerque, NM; Nashville, TN; Covington, KY; Birmingham, AL; and Pittsburgh, PA.⁵⁷

⁵⁷Ochshorn, S. *Partnering for Success: Community Approaches to Early Learning*. Child Care Action Campaign, 2000.

Schools Can Help Coordinate Community Resources to Help All Children Achieve to High Standards.

School readiness depends on children's physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development.⁵⁸ Schools can work with medical and mental health service providers, libraries, parks, recreation centers, and police departments to develop community networks focused on school readiness and success.

☆ *The Oakland 2000: Ready to Learn initiative in Oakland, California includes 175 community organizations that deliver comprehensive services to strengthen school readiness.*

☆ *Connecticut's School Readiness Councils facilitate ongoing communication among community health, child care, social service, recreation, and education providers about their mutual roles and shared responsibilities for school readiness.*

The neighborhood school can be a focal point for agencies and organizations that serve preschool and school-age children, linking with health care and other essential services that it does not directly provide.

☆ *One of the six core goals of Missouri's Caring Communities initiative is to improve school readiness. Five state agencies combine resources to help 119 communities provide comprehensive, integrated services in schools or closely coordinated with schools.*

☆ *The Children's Aid Society sponsors four community schools in New York City and one in Washington, D.C. The schools operate Head Start and Early Head Start programs and serve as a focal point for coordinating comprehensive services for preschool and school-age children and their families.*

⁵⁸National Education Goals Panel. *Ready Schools*. 1998.

Schools Can Help Families Develop Social Networks.

Children and families need to feel part of neighborhoods, including neighborhood schools. Reaching out to other parents and contacting public schools can be difficult for families who have limited English proficiency, no transportation, children with disabilities, or other obstacles. Public schools can work with preschool care and education programs to provide facilities and opportunities for families with preschool and school-age children to develop social relationships and support systems. Schools might start “buddy systems,” pairing families who have children in school with families who have preschool children, so that children and families have someone to talk with informally about their questions and concerns.

What Facilitates School Involvement in Early Childhood?

Many public schools are now involved with children before they come to kindergarten. Some are providing prekindergarten, while others improve school readiness by working with families and with community preschool care and education programs. Whatever approach is used, meeting participants identified policies and practices that facilitate relationships between schools, Head Start, and child care programs: financial incentives, family involvement, shared professional development, and federal leadership.

Financial Incentives Can Motivate People to Overcome Barriers.

Public school, child care, and Head Start leaders are busy with their individual jobs and programs, responding to daily problems and pressures and separate bureaucracies. Some states are overcoming this barrier by offering grants that require neighborhood partnerships to plan and implement emerging prekindergarten programs.

☆ *The Massachusetts Department of Education initiated Community Partnerships for Children in 1993, requiring schools, Head Start, and child care programs to apply for and use the grants as partners. The initiative has grown from \$13 million to \$80 million, subsidizing preschool care and education for 18,579 preschoolers, whose parents work and have incomes below the state median income, in 313 communities. The initiative impacts more than 54,000 children by providing training, materials, supplies, and other supports to preschool care and education programs. Seventy percent of communities use funds to pay for teacher planning time, and the percentage of children with disabilities in inclusive programs has increased from 20 percent to more than 80 percent.⁵⁹*

Coordination is time-intensive and requires stepping outside familiar terrain and understanding policies, practices, problems, and philosophies that define other programs. Some states motivate leaders to do the extra work required for coordinated services by offering financial incentives to local councils that develop preschool care and education

⁵⁹Massachusetts Department of Education. *Fact Sheet: Community Partnerships for Children*. 1999.

systems. The councils, which include families, businesses, and community organizations and programs, determine how to supplement and improve existing community resources to better meet the needs of all young children and their families.

☆ *Ohio has provided grants since 1992 to Family and Children First Councils in every county to coordinate education, child care, health, and other family support services for families with children from birth to eight years old. Councils receive \$20,000 grants and consist of families (20 percent of the membership), county commissioners, and other key business and community members.*

☆ *In 1997, Oregon's Commission on Children and Families directed \$58.4 million to commissions in each of its 36 counties. Collaboration among community programs was a prerequisite for the grant.*

Families Can Help Leaders Understand the Importance of Preschool.

Welcoming families and encouraging them to participate in neighborhood schools can help school leaders justify early investments that pay off with better school readiness and success, fewer behavior problems, and lower rates of grade retention and special education placements.⁶⁰

☆ *The Children's Aid Society helps school districts establish community schools that actively involve whole families. New York City School District 6 serves almost 30,000 students in a 2.5 mile radius and has to bus children to other schools. Child care programs in the district are equally crowded. Despite facility obstacles, school leaders agreed to expand their existing Head Start program by devoting three classrooms to Early Head Start for families with infants and toddlers.*

Many families participate in separate programs and can act as informal consultants to bridge the gap between programs attempting to work across boundaries.

⁶⁰Barnett, S., op. cit.

Shared Professional Development Facilitates Coordination.

Shared professional development activities can help school, Head Start, and child care personnel develop common understandings about children's learning and development, making it easier to coordinate programs. All young children have the same basic needs for responsive adults who help them develop and learn, making it highly valuable and feasible for programs to coordinate and share professional development opportunities for their educators. Participating in joint professional development activities can also help school and early childhood educators develop respect for each other's roles and perspectives.

☆ *The Mississippi Department of Education provides research-based training for public school prekindergarten and other preschool care and education teachers. Training includes reading assessment and intervention, early childhood teaching strategies, and helping children transition to school.*

☆ *The Maryland Model for School Readiness includes 8 days of training for public school prekindergarten and primary school teachers, who receive continuing professional development credits required for recertification. The Maryland Committee for Children, in collaboration with the Maryland Department of Education, the Maryland Head Start Association, and Villa Julie College, is sponsoring 50 Head Start and child care teachers who also participate in the training for college credits.*

☆ *Missouri initiated a preschool program in the 1999–00 school year, awarding 126 competitive grants to public schools and licensed preschool care and education programs for 3,080 three- and four-year-olds. Ten percent of each grant must be used for professional development activities in the community.*

Colleges and Universities Can Facilitate Coordination.

Separate programs often need outside facilitators to help them initiate and continue discussions. Some institutes of higher education are working with schools and preschool care and education programs to apply research findings and theory related to children's

school readiness and success. The U.S. Department of Education supports research and development partnerships to improve children's transition to public school and anticipates having data available in late 2000.

☆ *Fordham University is working with families, preschools, and public schools in New York City's Community School District 4 to learn how they can help children successfully enter public school. The project is surveying parents and teachers, following the progress of 62 children as they move from preschool to elementary school, and analyzing if and how transition experiences are related to school performance and adjustment.*

☆ *The National Center for Early Development and Learning is facilitating connections among families, preschools, schools, and children, as 110 children transition to school. Activities include visits to kindergarten classrooms, informal playground nights at elementary schools, and school contacts with families. Researchers are collecting and analyzing data about family involvement, teacher-child and family-school relationships, children's language, literacy, math and logic skills, and teachers' experiences with transition to kindergarten activities.*

Federal Leadership Can Motivate States and Communities.

Federal offices administer separate programs and funds with different guidance, technical assistance, and information to state agencies and schools, Head Start, and child care programs. Meeting participants pointed out that these federal offices do not systematically coordinate their efforts to increase the availability and quality of preschool care and education. They recommended that federal offices overcome bureaucratic, political, and philosophical barriers to coordination and encourage states and communities to follow their example.

☆ *The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services offered expansion funds in 1997 to Head Start programs that partnered with child care to provide full-day, full-year services. The Head Start and Child Care Bureaus encouraged programs to combine staff and funds for child*

development and support for working families, highlighting examples of collaborations that include Head Start, child care, and schools.⁶¹ The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services also funded the Head Start-Public School Early Childhood Transition demonstration. The initiative supported comprehensive services for children and families from Head Start into kindergarten and through the third grade in 32 communities. Evaluation results will be released in 2000.

The federal government plays a leadership role by funding preschool care and education for some low-income families, including those led by very low-income mothers. However, preschool care and education remains primarily a private service paid for by parents. Families pay more for preschool care and education than they do for tuition at public colleges and universities—\$3,848 per year compared with \$2,700—largely due to greater state and private subsidies for higher education.⁶² The first *Children’s Roundtable Report* from the Brookings Institute points to inequities inherent in the private preschool care and education market. The report calls on a new early education commitment from the federal government, as the only entity that can ensure equal access to a good education, regardless of where young children live.⁶³

⁶¹U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. “Head Start-child care partnerships.” *Head Start Bulletin*. June/July 1997.

⁶²Mitchell, A., Stoney, L., and Dichter, H. *Financing Child Care in the United States*. The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts, 1997. The authors base their information on U.S. Census Bureau and U.S. General Accounting Office data.

⁶³Sawhill, I. *Investing in Children*. Brookings Institute, 1999.

What Challenges Do Public Schools Face with Involvement in Early Childhood?

Although increasing numbers of public schools are offering prekindergarten classes, most children do not begin school until kindergarten, and some early childhood and education leaders prefer to keep preschool care and education separate from public schools. The meeting participants talked about the reasons for maintaining the separation and the barriers that discourage schools from becoming involved with preschool children and programs: professional development for personnel, competition among programs for limited resources, and time constraints of program administrators and teachers.

Teachers May Not Be Prepared to Work With Preschool Children.

A 1998 nationally representative survey found that 78 percent of kindergarten teachers have professional credentials in elementary education, including kindergarten, not in early childhood education.⁶⁴ Differences in professional preparation for early childhood and elementary school teachers may help to explain the claim that kindergartens have changed from playful learning environments to classrooms where five-year-old children are expected to achieve specific academic goals within specified time periods.⁶⁵

Without specialized training in early childhood education theories, practices, and research, elementary school teachers may not equate professional preschool practices—more individualized activities with time for children to develop their interests and abilities at their own pace—with real teaching.

Programs View Each Other as Competitors for Limited Resources.

Schools and Head Start programs are funded separately and work hard at justifying their funds, making some leaders hesitant to coordinate their limited resources

⁶⁴National Center for Early Development and Learning. *Kindergarten Transitions*. 1999.

⁶⁵Barbour, N. and Seefeldt, C. *Developmental Continuity Across Preschool and Primary Grades: Implications for Teachers*. Association for Childhood Education International, 1993.

with other programs. Head Start agencies, working for 35 years with preschool children who are at serious risk of failure in public schools, receive limited funding to serve only a portion of eligible children and may feel threatened by better-funded public schools.

Some private preschool care and education programs, dependent on parent fees, see public school prekindergarten as a threat to their businesses,⁶⁶ and many early childhood leaders worry about the impact of public school prekindergarten on the supply of infant and toddler care. Many private preschool care and education programs balance infant and toddler care—more costly due to adult-to-child ratio and group size requirements—with more lucrative preschool classrooms and may not be able to stay in business if three- and four-year-old children move to public school prekindergarten.

Differences in Credentials and Compensation Can Create Barriers.

Teacher credentialing and compensation differences contribute to tensions and hinder collaboration between schools, Head Start, and child care programs.⁶⁷ Although research has linked children's school readiness and success with high-quality preschool care and education, there is no systemic public infrastructure to pay for professionally certified preschool teachers. State laws require licensed teachers for children in public schools but no professional credentials in child care programs where many preschool children spend 10 hours a day.

Federal regulations do not require certified teachers in Head Start. However, the 1998 Head Start reauthorization moves programs in the direction of public education. It requires that half of all Head Start teachers have at least an associate's degree in early childhood education or a related field by September 2003.

The differences in education, compensation, and status can lead to an informal professional hierarchy that gets in the way of public school, Head Start, and child care teachers developing respectful, professional relationships.

⁶⁶Jacobson, L. "Tensions surface in public-private preschool plans." *Education Week*, September 15, 1999.

⁶⁷Jacobson, L. , Ibid.

Coordination Can Be Complicated and Time-Consuming.

Public school, Head Start, and child care leaders are often overwhelmed with the day-to-day tasks of operating programs and responding to the needs of children, families, and policymakers, who do not usually demand coordination among programs. It is difficult for leaders to take the time to understand programs when they are not responsible for the success of those programs.

Even if leaders recognize a need to coordinate, it is easy to delay communicating with people whose programs operate within different organizational cultures, respond to different bosses, and where tensions may already exist. It takes a long time of meeting and talking together to build respect and trust and develop collaborations that begin to put the needs of children ahead of individual program requirements.

☆ *New York initiated a \$5 million public school prekindergarten program in 1966. In 1997, New York began phasing in a voluntary universal prekindergarten program for four-year-olds, and required school districts to spend at least 10 percent of the new program funds outside public schools. The state education agency appointed a work group with representatives from a broad array of child and family services, and it required local prekindergarten boards to encourage participation from all sectors. Through regular meetings, individuals began identifying prekindergarten as a shared interest,⁶⁸ and 51 percent of 1999–00 funds—a total of \$89 million for 27,500 children—pays for prekindergarten outside the public schools.*

⁶⁸Sconyers, N., op. cit.

What Are the Key Issues for Professional Development?

Meeting participants were unanimous in their opinion that school involvement in early childhood has significant implications for professional development for school and preschool personnel. They discussed specific areas for training and ongoing professional development: early childhood education, parent involvement, and working across program boundaries.

Preschool Teachers Need Training in Early Childhood Education.

Preschool teachers need specialized knowledge and skills in child development. Without specialized training, teachers and administrators may view preschoolers as smaller versions of elementary school children rather than understand their unique developmental levels and ways of learning. Some states are training teachers in how young children learn and develop.



The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education established Project Construct in 1986 at the University of Missouri in Columbia. The project helps preschool, primary, and elementary teachers incorporate curriculum based on Piaget and constructivist theory into national and state curriculum frameworks and standards.

Other states have established requirements to ensure that all teachers who work with young children demonstrate the ability to offer developmentally appropriate and culturally sensitive learning experiences.



Oklahoma requires that all prekindergarten teachers have early childhood education certification and that teachers use curricula and learning environments that are designed for four-year-olds and appropriate for their developmental levels.



Connecticut is increasing the focus on literacy and the overall quality of preschool special education, Head Start, and their school readiness programs. Their Facilitation Project supports public school, special education, child care, and Head Start programs in seeking

accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Preschool Teachers and Administrators Need Training in Parent Involvement.

Meeting participants believed that some teachers and administrators do not welcome parents, despite 30 years of research demonstrating that parent involvement is a key to student achievement.⁶⁹ Teachers and administrators of programs with young children need ongoing professional development in welcoming and working respectfully with all parents as children's first and constant teachers and including them in policymaking, program planning, classroom practice, and evaluation.

Teachers and Administrators Need Training to Work Across Programs.

Coordination across programs requires leaders who respect, listen to, and learn about and from each other. It is important for child care, Head Start, and school leaders to identify the goals and objectives that they have in common and to understand the unique niche filled by each program. Teachers and administrators need training and professional development to work through conflicts and across program, cultural, and historical boundaries.

⁶⁹U.S. Department of Education. *Partnership for Family Involvement*. 1998.

What Are the Key Research and Evaluation Questions?

Meeting participants discussed research studies that demonstrate the relationships between preschool care and education and later school success, and they identified questions that require further research and evaluation.

- What are the quality levels and outcomes of prekindergarten programs funded by Title I?
- Twenty-six states have completed or are conducting evaluations of their prekindergarten programs.⁷⁰ What are the overall findings?
- What are the characteristics, teacher qualifications, funding levels, observed quality, and outcomes of prekindergarten programs?
- Do school policies and classroom practices in prekindergarten, kindergarten, and primary grades reflect early childhood development theories and developmentally appropriate practice?
- How are parents involved in prekindergarten, kindergarten, and primary grade classrooms?
- What professional development opportunities are available and required for elementary school teachers who become prekindergarten teachers?
- What are the characteristics of preschool care and education partnerships that include schools? What are the outcomes for children, families, schools, and communities? How does public prekindergarten affect the availability and affordability of infant and toddler care? What are the long-term results of a continuum of integrated preschool and school-age care and education?
- How are states and communities assessing young children? What school readiness indicators are they using? What are the alternatives for assessing school readiness? What common indicators can be used across preschool care and education programs to determine success?
- What do education leaders think schools should do in preschool care and education? How do they define high-quality prekindergarten classes?

⁷⁰Mitchell, A. *State Pre-Kindergarten Programs*. Families and Work Institute, 1998.

Summary

Meeting participants unanimously agreed on the need to move from the current state of fragmented programs to a coordinated preschool care and education system that is linked with the public school system. They highlighted examples of inclusive planning processes already established in some states and communities that are taking advantage of existing child care, Head Start, school, and other community. They recommended that public schools become involved with families and preschool care and education programs to define expectations about school readiness and to improve school readiness and early school success.

Various prekindergarten models are emerging in different states. Whether prekindergarten operates as part of the public school system or as part of a separate preschool care and education system, meeting participants emphasized the need for coordination to improve continuity and early school success. There was consensus about the need for professional preparation, development, and compensation for all preschool teachers and quality assurance processes for all programs, regardless of where they are located. In particular, they identified the need for professional training in welcoming and meeting the needs of children and families with diverse languages and cultures.

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Meeting Participants and Affiliations

Rosa Agosto
Children's Aid Society

Lynson Moore Bobo
Council of Chief State School Officers

Natasha Cabrera
National Institute on Child Health and Human Development

James Caccamo
Kansas City Partnership for Children

Darion Carney
American Federation of Teachers

Richard Clifford
National Center for Early Development and Learning

Libby Doggett
U.S. Department of Education

Margaret Dunkle
Institute for Educational Leadership

Gwen Freeman
National Head Start Association

Sandra Gellert
The Children's Foundation

Robert Glenn
National Education Association

Arlene Goldstein
National Head Start Transition Training Contract

Mary Gordon
Toronto School District Parenting Centers

Jerry Govan, Jr.
South Carolina House of Representatives

James Griffin
U.S. Department of Education

Shelly Gross
Massachusetts Department of Education

Merrie Hahn
National Association of Elementary School Principals

Yvonne Hicks
Even Start, U.S. Department of Education

Glinda Hill
Office of Special Education Programs

Donna Hinkle
U.S. Department of Education

Maggie Holmes
National Head Start Association

Susan Ignelzi
Ohio Family and Children First, Office of the Governor

Naomi Karp
U.S. Department of Education

Jane Knitzer
National Center for Children in Poverty

Dane Linn
National Governors Association

Dreama Love
National Congress of Parents and Teachers

Phillip McLaurin
National Education Association

Joyce Muhlestein
National Education Research Policy and Priorities Board
U.S. Department of Education

Patricia Murdock
National Education Association

Carmen Nazario
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Celeste Osborn
Georgia Office of School Readiness

Gail Richardson
Child Care Action Campaign

Robin Rooney
National Center on Early Development and Learning

Nancy Sconyers
National Association of Child Advocates

Pat Spahr
National Association for the Education of Young Children

Lynn Spencer
U.S. Department of Education

Helene Stebbins
National Governors Association

Christa Stephens
ASPIRA Association

Ruby Takanishi
Foundation for Child Development

Judy Waggoner
Oakland Unified School District

David Walker
North Carolina Partnership for Children

Andrew Williams
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

State Early Childhood Education Contacts

Alabama

Rosemary Mobley
Even Start
Alabama Department of Education
Gordon Persons Building, 50 North Ripley Street
P.O. Box 302101
Montgomery, AL 36130-2101
Phone: (334) 242-9700
Fax: (334) 242-8199
E-mail: rmobley@sdenet.alsede.edu
Web site: www.alsde.edu

Alaska

Kathi Wineman
Program Specialist
Alaska Department of Education and Early Development
801 W. 10th Street, Suite 200
Juneau, AK 99801
Phone: (907) 465-8706
Fax: (907) 465-8638
E-Mail: Kathi_Wineman@eed.state.ak.us
Web site: www.eed.state.ak.us/EarlyDev

Arizona

Kathy Reimer
Early Childhood Program Specialist
Arizona Department of Education
1535 West Jefferson BIN #7
Phoenix, AZ 85007
Phone: (602) 364-0161
Fax: (602) 542-3818
E-Mail: kreimer@mail1.ade.state.az.us
Web site: www.ade.state.az.us/programs/

Arkansas

Gail Potter
Director, Curriculum and Instruction
Arkansas Department of Education
4 State Capitol Mall
Little rock, AR 72201-1071
Phone: (501) 682-4478
E-mail: gpotter@arkedu.k12.ar.us
Web site: <http://arkedu.state.ar.us>

California

Marjorie McConnell
Division of Child Development
California Department of Education
560 J Street, Suite 220
Sacramento, CA 95814
Phone: (916) 323-3034
Fax: (916) 323-6853
Email: mmconne@cde.ca.gov
Web site: www.cde.ca.gov/preschool

Colorado

Frank Fielden
Early Childhood Collaboration Senior Consultant
Colorado Department of Education
201 E. Colfax, Room 408
Denver, CO 80203
Phone: (303) 866-6674
Fax: (303) 866-6879
E-Mail: Fielden_F@cde.state.co.us
Web site: www.cde.state.co.us/cdedepcom/piccpilotrfp.htm

Connecticut

Joyce M. Staples
Education Consultant, Bureau of Early Childhood Education and Social Services
Connecticut Department of Education
25 Industrial Park Road
Middletown, CT 06457
Phone: (860) 807-2057
Fax: (860) 807-2062
E-Mail: joyce.staples@po.state.ct.us
Web site: www.state.ct.us/sde/early/index.htm

Delaware

Jim Lesko
Education Associate
Delaware Department of Education
P.O. Box 1402
Townsend Building
Dover, DE 19903-1402
Phone: (302) 739-4667
Fax: (302) 739-2388
E-Mail: jlesko@state.de.us
Web site: www.doe.state.de.us

District of Columbia

Mary Gill
Executive Director, Office of Elementary Programs
District of Columbia Public Schools
825 N. Capitol St., NE, Room 8127
Washington, DC 20002
Phone: (202) 442-5650
Fax: (202) 442-5602
Web site: www.k12.dc.us/dcps

Florida

Patty Ball Thomas
Director, Office of Early Intervention and School Readiness
Florida Department of Education
325 Turlington Building, 325 West Gaines Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0400
Phone: (850) 487-0946
E-mail: ballthp@mail.doe.state.fl.us
Web site: www.firn.edu/doe/bin00021/home0021.htm

Georgia

Celeste Osborn
Director
Georgia Office of School Readiness
10 Park Place South
Atlanta, GA 30703
Phone: (404) 656-5957
Fax: (404) 651-7429
E-mail: Celeste.Osborn@mail.osr.state.ga.us
Web site: www.osr.state.ga.us

Hawaii

Gary Kemp
Assistant Administrator, Benefit, Employment and Support Services Division
Hawaii Department of Human Services
830 Milliana Street, Suite 606
Honolulu, HI 96813
Phone: (808) 586-7054
Fax: (808) 586-5229
E-mail: gkemp@dhs.state.hi.us
Web site: www.state.hi.us/dhs

Idaho

Bob Milette
Grants Specialist
Idaho Department of Education
P.O. Box 83720
Boise, ID 83720-0027
Phone: (208) 332-6800
E-mail: bmillette@sde.state.id.us
Web site: www.sde.state.id.us/SpecialEd

Illinois

Audrey Witzman
Principal Consultant
Illinois State Board of Education
100 West Randolph C 14-300
Chicago, IL 60601
Phone: (312) 814-2229
Fax: (312) 814-2282
E-Mail: awitzman@sntp.isbe.state.il.us
Web site: www.isbe.state.us

Indiana

Jayma Ferguson
Education Consultant/Manager, Division of Prime Time
Indiana Department of Education
Room 229, State House
Indianapolis, IN 46204-2798
Phone: (317) 232-9152
Fax: (317) 232-9121
E-Mail: jferguso@doe.state.in.us
Web site: www.doe.state.in.us

Iowa

Susan Andersen
Iowa Department of Education
Grimes State Office Building
East 14th and Grand Streets
Des Moines, IA 50319-0146
E-Mail: susana1037@aol.com
Web site: www.state.ia.us/educate/programs/ecn.index.html

Kansas

Lynne Owen
Education Consultant
Kansas Department of Education
120 SE 10th Avenue
Topeka, KS 66612
Phone: (785) 296-4964
Fax: (785) 296-1413
E-Mail: lowen@ksbe.state.ks.us
Web site: www.ksbe.state.ks.us

Kentucky

Debbie Schumacher
Director, Division of Extended Learning
Kentucky Department of Education
500 Mero Street, 16th Floor, CPT
Frankfort, KY 40601-1972
Phone: (502) 564-7056
Fax: (502) 564-6952
E-Mail: dschumac@kde.state.ky.us
Web site: www.kde.state.ky.us/osle/extend/preschool/default.asp

Louisiana

Candy Jones
Early Childhood Program Coordinator, Elementary Standards
Louisiana Department of Education
P.O. Box 94064
Baton Rouge, LA 70804-9064
Phone: (225) 342-3366
Fax: (225) 342-4474
E-Mail: cjones@mail.doe.state.la.us
Web site: www.doe.state.la.us

Maine

Jaci Holmes
Early Childhood Consultant
State Department of Education
State House Station #146
Augusta, ME 04333
Phone: (207) 287-3272
Fax: (207) 287-5900
E-mail: jaciholmes@state.me.us
Web site: http://janus.state.me.us/education/homepage.htm

Maryland

Rolf Grafwallner
Chief, Early Learning
State Department of Education
200 West Baltimore Street
Baltimore, MD 21201
Phone: (410) 767-0342
Fax: (410) 333-2379
E-Mail: rgrafwal@netman.state.md.us
Web site: www.msde.state.md.us

Massachusetts

Elisabeth Schaefer
Administrator, Early Learning Services
Massachusetts Department of Education
350 Main Street
Malden, MA 02148
Phone: (781) 338-6357
Fax: (781) 338-3394
E-Mail: eschaefer@doe.mass.edu
Web site: www.doe.mass.edu

Michigan

Lindy Buch
Supervisor, School Development Unit
Michigan Department of Education
P.O. Box 30008
Lansing, MI 48909
Phone: (517) 373-9962
Fax: (517) 335-0592
E-Mail: buchl@state.mi.us
Web site: www.mde.state.mi.us

Minnesota

Debbykay Peterson
Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning
1500 Highway 36 West
Roseville, MN 55113-4266
Phone: (651) 582-8426
Fax: (651) 582-8494
E-Mail: debbykay.peterson@state.mn.us
Web site: <http://cfl.state.mn.us/ecfi>

Mississippi

Carla Dearman
Director, Reading/Early Childhood/Language Arts Division
Mississippi Department of Education
Suite 231-B, Central High School
P.O. Box 771
Jackson, MS 39205
Phone: (601) 359-3778
Fax: (601) 359-1818
E-mail: cdearman@mde.k12.ms.us
Web site: www.mde.k12.ms.us/acad/id/laer/idla.htm

Missouri

Ruth Flynn
Director, Early Childhood Education
Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education
P.O. Box 480
Jefferson City, MO 65102-0480
Phone: (573) 751-2095
Fax: (573) 751-9434
E-Mail: rflynn@mail.dese.state.mo.us
Web site: www.dese.state.mo.us/divinstr/fedprog/earlychild

Montana

Joan Morris
Montana Office of Public Instruction
P.O. Box 202501
Helena, MT 59620-2501
Phone: (406) 444-3095
E-mail: Jmorris@state.mt.us
Web site: www.metnet.state.mt.us

Nebraska

Harriet Egertson
Administrator, Office of Children and Families
Nebraska Department of Education
301 Centennial Mall South
Lincoln, NE 68509-4987
Phone: (402) 471-6518
Fax: (402) 471-0117
E-Mail: egertson@edneb.org
Web site: www.edneb.org/ECH/ECH.html

New Jersey

Margretta Reid Fairweather
Assistant Commissioner, Division of Early Childhood Education
New Jersey Department of Education
Phone: (609) 777-2074
Fax: (690) 341-2763
Web site: www.state.nj.us/njded/ece/

Nevada

Sharon Rogers
Early Childhood Education Consultant
Nevada Department of Education
700 East Fifth Street, Suite 113
Carson City, NV 89701-5096
Phone: (775) 687-9145
Fax: (775) 687-9120
E-Mail: srogers@nsn.k12.nv.us
Web site: www.nsn.k12.nv.us/nvdoe/

New Hampshire

Helen Schotanus
Curriculum Supervisor
New Hampshire Department of Education
101 Pleasant Street
Concord, NH 03301
Phone: (603) 271-3841
Fax: (602) 271-1953
E-Mail: hschotanus@ed.state.nh.us
Web site: www.state.nh.us/dese

New Mexico

Toni Nolan-Trujillo
New Mexico Department of Education
300 Don Gaspar
Santa Fe, NM 87501-2786
Phone: (505) 827-3876
Fax: (505) 827-6696
E-mail: ttrujillo@sde.state.nm.us
Web site: <http://sde.state.nm.us/divisions/learningservices>

New York

Kathryn Sue Updike
Early Childhood Education Associate
New York State Education Department
Room 461 Eba
Albany, NY 12234
Phone: (518) 474-5923
Fax: (518) 473-0858
E-Mail: kupdike@mail.nysed.gov
Web site: www.nysed.gov

North Carolina

Lucy Roberts
Chief Consultant, Early Childhood, Division of Instructional Services
North Carolina Department of Education
301 North Wilmington Street
Raleigh, NC 27601-2825
Phone: (919) 715-1497
Fax: (919) 715-0517
E-Mail: lroberts@dpi.state.nc.us
Web site: www.dpi.state.nc.us/

North Dakota

David Larson
Director, Early Childhood Tracking
North Dakota Department of Public Instruction
Capitol Building, 600 E. Boulevard Avenue, Department 201, Floors 9, 10, and 11
Bismarck, ND 58505-0440
Phone: (701) 328-2371
E-mail: dlarson@mail.dpi.state.nd.us
Web site: www.dpi.state.nd.us/

Ohio

Jane Wiechel
Director, Early Childhood Education
Ohio Department of Education
65 S Front Street, Room 309
Columbus, OH 43215-4138
Phone: (614) 466-0224
Fax: (614) 728-2338
E-Mail: jwiechel@ecentsoz.ode.state.oh.us
Web site: www.ode.state.oh.us/sfc/

Oklahoma

Alisa Frank
Early Childhood/Family Education Coordinator
Oklahoma Department of Education
2500 North Lincoln Boulevard
Oklahoma City, OK 73105
Phone: (405) 521-3346
Fax: (405) 521-2971
E-Mail: Alisa_Frank@mail.sde.state.ok.us
Web site: <http://sde.state.ok.us>

Oregon

Anita McClanahan
Director, Early Childhood Education
Oregon Department of Education
255 Capitol Street, NE
Salem, OR 97310-0203
Phone: (503) 378-5585 X665
Fax: (503) 373-7968
E-Mail: anita.mcclanahan@state.or.us
Web site: www.ode.state.or.us/stusvc/EarlyChild/index.htm

Pennsylvania

Charlezetta Murry
Early Intervention, Office of Special Education
Pennsylvania Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
333 Market Street, 10th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0353
Phone: (717) 772-2647
Fax: (717) 787-7222
E-mail: oospecial@psupen.psu.edu
Web site: www.pde.psu.edu

Rhode Island

Charlotte Diffendale
Early Childhood Specialist
Rhode Island Department of Education
255 Westminster Street
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 222-4600
Fax: (401) 222-4979
E-Mail: charld@ride.ri.net
Web site: <http://instruct.ride.ri.net/RIDE1/list.html>

South Carolina

Linda C. Mims, Director
Office of Early Childhood Education
South Carolina Department of Education
1429 Senate Street
Columbia, SC 29201
Phone: (803) 734-9052
Fax: (803) 734-4605
E-Mail: Lmims@sde.state.sc.us
Web site: www.state.sc.us/sde

South Dakota

Deborah Barnett
Director, Special Education
South Dakota Department of Education
Phone: (705) 773-3678
Fax: (705) 773-6139
E-mail: deb.barnett@state.sd.us
Web site: www.state.sd.us/deca/SPECIAL/special.htm

Tennessee

Sandra Williamson
Director of Early Childhood Programs
Tennessee Department of Education
7th Floor Andrew Johnson Tower, 7100 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, TN 37243-0375
Phone: (615) 532-9512
Fax: (615) 532-4899
E-Mail: swilliamson@mail.state.tn.us
Web site: www.state.tn.us/education

Texas

Cami Jones
Director, Early Childhood Education
Texas Education Agency
1701 North Congress Avenue
Austin, TX 78701
Phone: (512) 463-9581
Fax: (512) 463-8057
E-Mail: cjones@tmail.tea.state.tx.us
Web site: www.tea.state.tx.us/curriculum/early/index.html

Utah

Brenda Broadbent
Interim Preschool Specialist
Utah State Office of Education
250 E. 500 S.
Salt Lake City, UT 84111
Phone: (801) 538-7500
Fax: (801) 528-7521
E-mail: bbroadbe@usoe.k12.ut.us
Web site: www.usoe.k12.ut.us

Vermont

James Squires
Early Childhood Education Consultant
Vermont Department of Education
120 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05620-2501
Phone: (802) 828-3892
Fax: (802) 828-3146
E-Mail: jsquires@doe.state.vt.us
Web site: www.state.vt.us/educ

Virginia

Kathleen Smith
Early Childhood Specialist
Virginia Department of Education
P.O. Box 2120
Richmond, VA 23218-2120
Phone: (804) 786-5819
Fax: (804) 786-1703
E-mail: ksmith@mail.vak12.ed.edu
Web site: www.pen.k12.va.us/vdoe/Instruction/Elem_M/early.html

Washington

Debra Williams-Appleton
Program Supervisor, Early Childhood Education and Even Start
Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
P.O. Box 47200
Olympia, WA 98504-7200
Phone: (360) 586-2263
Fax: (360) 664-3575
E-Mail: appleton@ospi.wednet.edu
Web site: www.k12.wa.us

West Virginia

Dee Bodkins
Executive Director, Office of Special Education
West Virginia Department of Education
1900 Kanawha Blvd. East, Room 304
Charleston, WV 25305
Phone: (304) 558-2696, extension 241
Fax: (304) 558-3741
E-mail: dbodkins@access.k12.wv.us
Web site: <http://wvde.state.wv.us>

Wisconsin

Monica Notaro
Consultant, Title I/Even State
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
P.O. Box 7841
Madison, WI 53707-7841
Phone: (608) 267-9141
Fax: (603) 267-0367
E-mail: monica.notaro@dpi.state.wi.us
Web site: www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dlsea/titleI

Wyoming

Sara Mofield
Wyoming Department of Education
Hathaway Building, 2300 Capitol Avenue, 2nd Floor
Cheyenne, WY 82002-0050
Phone: (307) 777-6236
Fax: (307) 777-6234
E-Mail: smofie@educ.state.wy.us
Web site: www.k12.wy.us/atrisk/index.htm#earlychild