Developments

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Studies Examine ECI

Children Thrived in Education Initiative That Never Reached Predicted Heights

The Early Childhood Initiative's mission to bring quality early care and education to thousands of at-risk Allegheny County children proved to be as complex as it was bold, recent studies report. On one hand, low enrollment, high costs, and the fact that only two sites remain open in the county have cast the initiative as a high-profile disappointment. Yet, reported gains in children's cognitive development and behavior suggest the ECI model, when fully implemented, gives disadvantaged children a much better chance to be successful in school than they would otherwise be expected to have.

ECI, launched in 1996 with significant foundation and corporate support, was one of the most ambitious early childhood education initiatives ever attempted with stated goals of using a community-driven approach to provide high-quality services to 7,600 children and ultimately convincing the state government to sustain it with public funds.

After five years, ECI had not come close to reaching the scale organizers had hoped for, and state officials showed little interest in assuming its estimated $26 million cost.

Last year, the initiative was trimmed to a demonstration project, and management was transferred from the United Way of Allegheny County to the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development. The demonstration project, called ECI-DP,

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University Research Collaborative Aids Early Childhood Task Force

Governor Mark Schweiker's recently-appointed task force on early childhood care and education in Pennsylvania is expected to base its recommendations on best practices research, statewide survey data, and other information provided by a university research collaborative that includes the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development.

The governor signed an order in April creating a 33-member Early Childhood Care and Education Task Force to produce a comprehensive blueprint with recommendations that the next administration can use when making public policy decisions on programs, delivery systems, and services for children ages birth to 8 years.

"From preschools to Head Starts to home-based care, this new Task Force will determine how to help improve the places where our children are getting their educational start," Gov. Schweiker said when announcing the Task Force.

"No time is more important in the development of children than the years before they ever set foot in a school. And that's why this Task Force will evaluate how Pennsylvania should expand its already strong commitment to school readiness."

The University Children's Policy Collaborative (UCPC) was asked to provide information to the Task Force in a series of reports, the first of which is due in September. The three-year-old collaborative is composed of

extends the opportunity to measure outcomes and study the program model, while continuing to provide quality early education services to some 300 children in five Allegheny County communities.

Two recently released studies funded by The Heinz Endowments shed light on the early years of ECI, its successes, shortcomings, and the impact it had on the young children and families involved.

Children Reap Benefits

The most heartening news is found among the outcomes of 834 ECI children who were tracked by Scaling Progress in Early Childhood Settings (SPECS), a collaborative research team from the Early Childhood Partnerships program of Children's Hospital and the University Community Leaders and Individuals with Disabilities (UCLID) Center at the University of Pittsburgh.

Through observation and other data-gathering methods, SPECS followed children's progress, focusing on their thinking, language, social, behavioral, and play skills. The children ranged in age from 2 weeks to 5 ½ years, and the median family income was $13,204. Poverty, low parent education, and other factors placed them at risk of school failure and other gloomy outcomes. Studies suggest the development of such at-risk children begins to decline before age 3 and they are far behind their peers by the time they start school.

No child was denied ECI enrollment for the purpose of defining a control group to measure the outcomes of ECI children against. Instead, comparisons were made with Head Start children from a rural, central Pennsylvania community with a high rate of poverty.

What SPECS found was that most ECI children not only avoided expected skill losses, but they learned at accelerated rates, and eventually performed at average levels – accomplishments not often produced by previous intervention programs conducted elsewhere.

Children were taught a range of skills, including numbers and counting, everyday problem-solving, how to express themselves with words and sentences, take turns, cooperate with others, make friends, and show respect.

Among the most striking outcomes were those found among children with the most serious developmental delays. Nearly 14% of the ECI children studied had delays serious enough to qualify them for early intervention special education in Pennsylvania when they enrolled in the program. None received those services. Instead, they were enrolled in ECI and most thrived.

"They were in these high-quality (ECI) programs that were creative and getting better. What we found was that after a three-year period of time, these kids were no longer delayed," said Stephen J. Bagnato, Ed.D, Professor of Pediatrics and Psychology at the University of Pittsburgh, and the Director of Early Childhood Partnerships at The UCLID Center.

Nearly 100 ECI children had reached kindergarten and first grade by October 2000. This small initial sample yielded even more encouraging outcomes:

• Fewer than 2% of the ECI children had to be held back a grade in school districts in which the average primary grade retention rate was 23%.

• And fewer than 1% of ECI children were placed in special education in districts in which the average placement rate was 21%.

Children's social skills and behavior also improved. Many children were already showing delays in social skills, such as making friends and taking turns, when they enrolled in ECI. As many as 18% of ECI children started with social skills delays and behavioral problems severe enough warrant a mental health diagnosis in the county. Dr. Bagnato said behavior problems were so bad among some children that based on national norms they would have fallen within the 99th percentile. "We're talking about kids who are extremely aggressive – kicking, biting, swearing, threatening – kids who seemed to have a mental health problem."

But by the end of nearly three years of ECI, these children were demonstrating social skills and behavior patterns typical for their ages. "What you often find makes sense: as you build social skills, behavioral problems go down. We found that here," Dr. Bagnato said. "The children no longer qualified for a mental health diagnosis."

At home, improvements in knowledge and skills important to supporting healthy child development were seen among parents of ECI children, according to the SPECS study. Most parents developed more effective nurturing skills. Parents also learned ways to encourage early reading

Welfare Reform Reauthorization Includes Child Well-Being Among Issues

Proposals for the reauthorization of the 1996 federal welfare reform law do not represent a dramatic departure in policy, but, for the first time, acknowledges the well-being of children whose parents are leaving welfare for work as a key issue to address within the new legislation.

Although the impact on children is still uncertain, studies to date found no evidence to suggest welfare-to-work policies seriously diminish children's health, development, and overall well-being. Significant gains have not been reported among children, either.

When welfare-to-work has been associated with improvements among children – better school performance, in most cases – the gains tended to be modest and limited to families in states that try to "make work pay" by supplementing low job earnings with cash payments that help lift families out of poverty.

"Before welfare reform, we knew it was poverty that hurt kids, not being on AFDC (Aid for Families with Dependent Children)," said Robert B. McCall, Ph.D, Co-Director of the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development. "After welfare reform, the children who improve are those whose families have gotten out of poverty."

The 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, including the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant, must be reauthorized before September 30, 2002. In addition to TANF, several other programs are expected to be debated, including the Child Care Development Block Grant and food stamps.

As of the writing of this article, a proposal by the Bush Administration and several reauthorization bills in Congress had been offered, but early debate had not reconciled any of the major issues.

White House Plan

The 1996 reform law brought profound changes to welfare, including a time limit for receiving cash assistance, and capped nearly three decades of efforts to limit benefits to low-income Americans, reduce dependency, encourage employment, and cut government costs.

In February, President George W. Bush released details of the Administration's welfare reform reauthorization proposal, which does not significantly change the intent or any of the principle features of the original law.

The 1996 law strongly emphasized moving welfare recipients to work and was very successful in doing so. Between August 1996 and June 2000, the nation's TANF caseloads fell 53% to 5.8 million cash subsidy recipients, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Pennsylvania's TANF caseload dropped 56% during this same period.

Moving welfare recipients to work remains a focus in the Administration's proposal. For example:

• States would be required to move 70% of their welfare caseload into jobs within five years. The law as it stands today sets a work participation rate of 50%.

• Welfare recipients would be required to work 40 hours a week, 10 more hours than are required under the current law. However, recipients would be allowed to spend 16 hours of required weekly hours on education, training and other work-related activities as defined by each state.

Key funding levels remain unchanged in the administration's proposal.

The basic TANF block grant would continue to be funded at $16.6 billion for fiscal years 2003-2007. Federal TANF funds, together with the required state maintenance-of-effort funds, finance welfare reform. The National Governors Association has argued that even with reduced welfare caseloads, states need TANF funding to at least remain at current levels so that states would be able to finance services that help families succeed in the workplace.

The Administration proposal would also continue to fund childcare at $4.8 billion a year through the Child Care and Development Block Grant.

Children and Families

The Administration proposal states that it "encourages states to increase efforts to promote child well-being and healthy marriages." "Healthy marriages" generally refers to two-parent marriages. Proposals for reaching those goals include the following:

• Language would be changed in the law so that the overarching purpose of TANF will be to improve the well-being of children.

• A $100 million-a-year fund would be established to conduct research and demonstration projects, and to provide technical assistance on family formation and health marriage activities.

• A $100 million competitive matching grant program would be created with redirected funds to develop innovative approaches to promoting healthy marriages and reducing out-of-wedlock births.

• States would be encouraged to provide equitable treatment of two-parent married families under state TANF programs.

In the House, Rep. Wally Herger (R-Calif.), chairman of the House Human Resources Subcommittee, introduced H.R. 4090, which largely reflects the basic elements of the Administration's proposal.

Also in the House, Rep. Ben Cardin (D-Md.), introduced H.R. 3625, which calls for increases in both TANF and the Child Care Development Block Grant funding. The Cardin bill includes reducing child poverty as a goal of TANF and would give states funding and incentives to bring down the number of poor children.

Living in Poverty

Studies have long reported that it is poverty, not receiving welfare, that threatens the healthy development of children. Among them are national studies by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation based on early welfare reform in several states that adopted features such as mandatory work rules and time-limited benefits.

Family income consistently predicts a child's academic and cognitive performance. Low-income children are more likely to have behavior and health problems than children of more affluent families. Poverty is also associated with low birth weight; delayed physical, cognitive, and social development; school dropout; and teenage pregnancy.

Not surprisingly, research suggests that welfare reform is more likely to improve child well-being when it lifts families out of poverty rather than simply move parents into jobs to reduce caseloads. Studies of welfare programs in six U.S. states and two Canadian provinces that featured earnings supplements to elevate welfare-to-work families above poverty levels reported gains in student school achievement scores of 10% to 15%, and slight reductions in measures of problem behaviors.

Sources for this article include the Bush Administration reauthorization proposal as outlined in the document, "Working Toward Independence," available online at www.whitehouse.gov.; legislative summaries and position statements provided by the

National Governor's Association (www.nga.org); and the following references:

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Announcements . . .

Free OCD Parenting Columns
Well Suited For Newsletters

Dispensing parenting advice, long the domain of grandmothers and other family relations, is drawing more attention from policymakers and others looking for ways to strengthen families and communities – and for good reason. Studies show effective parenting improves a child's chances of healthy development.

Sound parenting advice on more than 50 topics is now available free of charge in a series of columns written by Robert B. McCall, Ph.D., Co-Director of the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development and former columnist for *Parents* magazine.

The columns, well-suited for newsletters and community newspapers, provide clear, concise and accurate information on topics such as dealing with a child's lying, how to toilet train, what to do about nightmares, discipline and finicky eaters, and how to recognize and address grief in children.

OCD offers the columns free of charge as Microsoft Word documents, which can be viewed and downloaded from the Internet at: www.pitt.edu/~ocdweb/columns.htm

The public service initiative is made possible by the Frank and Theresa Caplan Fund for Early Childhood Development and Parenting Education, whose contributions support production of the columns and other Office of Child Development projects. ∎

Kindergarten Readiness: An Overview of Issues and Assessment

University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development
Serving Children and Families By Promoting
Interdisciplinary Education and Research • University-Community Programs • Dissemination

By Kelly E. Mehaffie
and
Robert B. McCall

Assessing school readiness is important to the education of young children. Assessments help measure the current state of children's development and knowledge and can be used to guide classroom and individual kindergarten programming. This report outlines key readiness and assessment issues and offers summaries of common assessment tools.

What Is the Definition of School Readiness?

School readiness is a combination of readiness in five key dimensions of a child's early development and learning as well as readiness in school, family, and community supports.

Although different state and project definitions may stress various aspects of child development, environment, and school involvement in their definitions, the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) definition seems to encompass these variations and be the most complete and widely accepted definition. The NEGP Goal 1 Resource and Technical Planning Groups identified five dimensions of early development and learning that are important for school readiness: physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches toward learning, language development, and cognition and general knowledge. In addition, Congress defined three key elements of school readiness in their Goals 2000: Educate America Act. Specifically, readiness in children (includes the dimensions listed above), readiness in schools (includes smooth transition between home/early childhood programs and school), and family and community supports (including access to high quality programs, parents who support children's learning, and communities that support and train parents).

What Predicts Academic and Social-Behavioral Success in Grade School?

Although many factors influence a child's success in school, parental education seems to be the best single predictor.

Parental education seems to be the best predictor of academic and social-behavioral success in grade school. More parental education is associated with a home environment that is more favorable to education, better financial security, and fewer social or environmental risk factors for children.

What Types of Readiness Tests Are There?

Assessment procedures stem from four broad theories or conceptions of readiness: idealist/nativist, empiricist/environmental, social constructivist, and interactionist. Based on these perspectives, readiness tests come in four types: skill tests, developmental assessments, quick samplings, and performance-based assessments.

The *idealist/nativist* view asserts that readiness is determined by the level of maturity that develops within the child, not from external influences. Those who embrace this view often feel that repeating kindergarten or attending pre-kindergarten programs is appropriate for children who do not seem to be ready for kindergarten. These programs are thought to bide the child time to mature enough for kindergarten. The *empiricist/environmental* perspective defines readiness as characteristics of the child's behaviors that encompass skills which lead to mastery of goals like knowing colors, shapes, how to spell one's own name, etc. Readiness, in this theory, is something that lies outside the child or something that can be changed by an intervention. The *social constructivist* view shifts the focus of readiness from the child to the community and believes that whether a child is ready or not is determined by the community standards of readiness, which are relative. The *interactionist* perspective is that readiness is a bi-directional concept in which children must be internally ready for schools and schools must be ready for children. This view emphasizes that a child must be capable of learning and that schools must be ready to support and teach children, regardless of the skills the child carries to school with him.

Readiness tests come in four types: skill oriented tests, developmental assessments, quick samplings, and performance-based assessments. *Skills oriented tests* are usually paper and pencil tests which are given to the class as a group test at the beginning or the end of the kindergarten year (e.g., Metropolitan Readiness Test). *Developmental assessments* rely on evaluating children in terms of set expectations for development at a particular age (e.g., Gesell

School Readiness Screening Test). *Quick samplings* are used to assess children's language skills, motor ability, number skills, body awareness, and auditory and visual discrimination (e.g., Brigance K & 1 Screen for Kindergarten and First Grade). *Performance-based assessment*s use learning portfolios including teacher records and samples of a child's work that provide a description of a child's progress over time (e.g., Work Sampling System).

Which Specific Assessments Are Used Most Frequently?

Some assessment instruments are used because they have been recommended by national experts, and some are more likely to be used because they were included in national evaluations or studies.

A national panel of experts recommended to the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation the following assessments of school readiness by category:

· **Language and Literacy:** Social Skills Rating System (SSRS), Early Screening Inventory (ESI), Project Construct Literacy Assessment, and Reynell Language Development Scales.

· **Social-Emotional Development:** Social Behavior Ratings, Social Skills Rating System (SSRS), Howes Peer Interaction, and Personal Maturity Scale.

· **Numeracy:** Woodcock-Johnson Revised (WJ-R) and Project Construct "Flip" Math Assessment.

· **Overall Child Development:** Child Assessment Profile (Chicago Longitudinal Study), Kindergarten Assessment (Chicago Longitudinal Study), Bracken School Readiness, IRT Assessment, and Project Construct "Pretend Party" Conventional.

· **General Teacher/Classroom:** Arnett Caregiver Interaction Scale, School Readiness Rating Scale, Head Start Teacher Survey, Kindergarten Teacher Survey, Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS), Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME), and Observational Record of Caregiving Environment (ORCE).

Some assessment tools have become more commonly used because they have been included in national evaluations or in batteries of large-scale projects. Others are more popular because of greater use in the fields of psychology, education, and early childhood education .

What Can Readiness Tests Predict And How Should They Be Used?

Readiness tests provide information on the current state of children's development and knowledge, but they do not predict school success two or three years into the future. Therefore, scores should be used for programming for the current year only.

None of these types has a strong research basis to demonstrate validity or prediction of school readiness. However, some are reliable and probably do represent a child's current or very short-term status, but they do not tend to predict long-term success in school. Therefore, good readiness tests probably <u>do</u> reflect a child's readiness for <u>kindergarten</u>, but not beyond. Thus, they can be used to indicate the skills a child possesses and those needing more attention in kindergarten. But children learn so much in kindergarten and develop so fast during this age period that they need to be reassessed at the end of kindergarten or the beginning of first grade. Also, if the assessments can show the current state of children, then the results can be used to inform teachers and administrators of how to match the kindergarten program to the particular group of children or individual children.

Readiness tests can be used for accountability of early childhood programs.

Readiness tests can measure the extent that early childhood programs prepare children for school. Quality early childhood programs in terms of developmentally appropriate practice, physical environment, teacher qualifications, and director qualifications are critical to adequately prepare a child for school. Quality programs ensure that children (especially low-income children) are getting the experiences needed to succeed in kindergarten and the early school years.·

What is the Effectiveness of Repeating Kindergarten or Delaying Entry?

Repeating or delaying entry into kindergarten is often inappropriate.

Repeating kindergarten or delaying entry to kindergarten does not seem to help children and may actually be detrimental.· Kindergarten curricula and classroom space are established for children of a certain age and are inappropriate for children older than 5-6 years. Some studies have found that holding children out of kindergarten for a year may be associated with negative effects, such as increased behavior problems attributed to being older than their peers and problems in social and emotional development.· On the other hand, if the kindergarten curriculum is adjusted to match the needs of the older children, younger children in the class may experience problems.

Conclusions and Recommendations

· Encourage the Pittsburgh region and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to formally adopt the national definition of school readiness (*a combination of readiness in five key dimensions of a child's early development and learning {physical well being and motor develop-*

ment, social and emotional development, approaches toward learning, language development, and cognition and general knowledge}, as well as readiness in school, family, and community supports) so that the region and state can move forward in developing a state-wide plan for school readiness assessment.

• School readiness assessments should be used to guide classroom and individual kindergarten programming but not for holding children back, tracking them into different classrooms, or placing them beyond kindergarten (children should be reassessed at the end of kindergarten or the beginning of first grade).

• Developmental screening tools should only be used to screen children for developmental delay and referral for more intensive developmental testing if necessary. They should <u>not</u> be used as the sole measure for school readiness.

• Children who do not score well on readiness tests should be given more individualized attention and an individualized education plan rather than delaying or repeating kindergarten. Resources should be invested in smaller class sizes or more teacher aides in the early grades for more individualized instruction.

Assessment Instruments

Below is a brief overview of some common assessment tools that have been used in batteries of large-scale projects or on their own, as well as a description of an integrated assessment method.

Batteries

➤**Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES)** – University of North Carolina's FACES consists of a variety of measures to perform individual assessments and observations of children, interview parents and teachers, and observe the classroom. Some of the more widely used measures within the battery include:

• **Social Skills Rating System (SSRS)** – The SSRS measures social and emotional development. It has been used by Smart Start and other Frank Porter Graham Center studies, as well as the Pittsburgh SPECS Evaluation of the Early Childhood Initiative Demonstration Project (ECIDP).
• **Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test III (PPVT-III)** – The PPVT-III is a very-well established tool that measures a child's receptive/listening vocabulary. It was used by the New Jersey Abbott Schools Project, Smart Start and other Frank Porter Graham Center studies.
• **Woodcock-Johnson-Revised (WJ-R)** – The WJ-R measures children's achievement. It was also used by the NICHD Study of Early Child Care and was recommended by national experts to the Ewing Marion Kauffman

Foundation to measure numeracy.

➤**Smart Start Battery** - North Carolina's Smart Start Program is a comprehensive, community-based initiative for North Carolina children 0 to 6 years old and their families. The program's overarching goal is to prepare children to enter school healthy and ready to learn. One of the more widely used measurement tools contained in the battery is:

• **Arnett Caregiver Interaction Scale** – The Arnett is a rating scale of teacher behavior toward children in the class. It is also used in some of the Head Start evaluations and was recommended by national experts to measure general teacher/classroom quality.

➤**Scaling Progress in Early Childhood Settings (SPECS) Evaluation of the Pittsburgh Early Childhood Initiative Demonstration Project (ECIDP)** – The Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania SPECS evaluation measures the outcomes of children participating in ECI child care programs in the Pittsburgh area. Widely used measurement tools include:

• **Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS)** – The ECERS is a standardized measure of preschool classroom structure and process. The revised version is ECERS-R. It is used in a Head Start Evaluation Battery, the New Jersey Abbott Schools Project, the NICHD Early Child Care Research Study, and by the Smart Start evaluation team.
• **Infant Toddler Environmental Rating Scale (ITERS)** – The ITERS is similar to ECERS except it is for use with infant care and education rather than preschool classrooms. It is recommended by Philadelphia's Early to Rise Report.
• **Family Day Care Rating Scale (FDCRS)** – The FDCRS is used to measure global child care quality in the family care setting. It is also used by the Smart Start team.

Individual Assessments

➤**Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning (DIAL) – T**he DIAL is a screening tool that provides a general assessment of children's developmental readiness in motor, concepts, language, self-help, and social development. The revised version is DIAL-R. It is used by some school districts in Indiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, and South Carolina and was approved by the state of Louisiana as a Kindergarten Developmental Readiness Screening Program assessment tool.

➤**Early Screening Inventory (ESI)** – The ESI measures visual-motor/adaptive, language and cognition, and gross-motor/body awareness skills. The revised version

is ESI-R. It was used with the Developmental Profile-II in the New Jersey Abbott Schools Project, and by some school districts in Minnesota and Missouri. It is recommended by national experts to the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation for measurement of language/literacy.

Performance-Based Assessment

➢ **Work Sampling System (WSS)** – The Work Sampling System is a curriculum-integrated performance-based assessment system stemming from the interactionist perspective. WSS documents and assesses children's knowledge, skills, behavior, and accomplishments based on daily activities in the classroom over the course of the school year. Teachers continually and systematically record and evaluate student's work using three elements: 1) developmental guidelines and checklists, 2) collections of children's work in portfolios, and 3) summary reports that integrate the information from the checklists and portfolios. WSS is used in Maryland and in Connecticut.

Recommended by National Experts to the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation

➢ **Language and Literacy**
· Social Skills Rating System (SSRS)
· Early Screening Inventory (ESI)
· Project Construct Literacy Assessment
· Reynell Language Development Scales

➢ **Social-Emotional Development**
· Social Behavior Ratings
· Social Skills Rating System (SSRS)
· Howes Peer Interaction
· Personal Maturity Scale

➢ **Numeracy**
· Woodcock-Johnson Revised (WJ-R)
· Project Construct "Flip" Math Assessment

➢ **Overall Child Development**
· Child Assessment Profile (Chicago Longitudinal Study)
· Kindergarten Assessment (Chicago Longitudinal Study)
· Bracken School Readiness
· IRT Assessment
· Project Construct "Pretend Party" conventional knowledge

➢ **General Teacher/Classroom**
· Arnett Caregiver Interaction Scale
· School Readiness Rating Scale
· Head Start Teacher Survey
· Kindergarten Teacher Survey
· Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS)
· Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME)
· Observational Record of Caregiving Environment (ORCE)

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and reported that they set expectations for learning.

A Model That Works

The emphasis on local community involvement and planning meant ECI tended to look different from neighborhood to neighborhood. Some, for example, included new early childhood centers; others, existing providers. Head Start, family support centers, family child care homes and other settings were also included in ECI programs.

All 11 approved ECI programs, however, shared certain basic features: weekly mentoring to improve quality, ways to encourage parents to participate, regular child assessment and feedback, and a community-driven approach to program design and implementation.

The model proved effective when fully implemented. Although researchers are still sorting out precisely why, regular mentoring for teachers and administrators on issues from curricula to educational practices appears to play a critical role, Dr. Bagnato said. "The belief is that mentoring toward quality – this weekly visitation, modeling, weekly coaching, and advising – is what makes the difference in the end, because it brings all these providers and teachers relatively up to the same skill level."

Half of the ECI programs met the quality standards for National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation within two years, and 70% of teachers improved their child development knowledge and practices.

Missteps and Miscalculations

The administration of ECI, however, was beset by a number of problems and setbacks. ECI plans were approved in only 11 communities, and several had been operational for only two years or less when the initiative was pared to a demonstration project. Enrollment, predicted to rise beyond 7,000 children, never reached 700 at any time during ECI's first five years.

The initiative was undermined by a cumbersome organizational design, unrealistic estimates of costs and service demand, and other problems, according to a recent RAND Corporation study of the ECI vision, organization, administration, and operation.

ECI eventually incurred per-child costs of $13,612. Although such costs were not out of line with some other quality early childhood education interventions in the U.S., they were three times higher than what was projected in the original ECI business plan.

The RAND study found that two assumptions in ECI's original business plan raised costs and weakened ECI's ability to achieve the envisioned enrollments and sustain itself over the long term.

• The ECI business plan assumed that 71% of children would be served in low-cost, part-day programs, many with existing providers. In fact, most children were served in full-day programs, most in new child-care centers. Several factors contributed to the miscalculation, including misjudging the number of children whose mothers were working, particularly after Pennsylvania's welfare-to-work legislation became law.

• The original business plan's cost per child was based on the average cost of a fully-enrolled center. But many centers were not fully enrolled, particularly at start-up.

RAND also reported that it took an inordinate amount of time for some programs to get up and running. The Sto-Rox plan, for example, was submitted in March 1998 after 15 months of planning. Over the next five months, the plan had to revised four times before it was approved, it took another 10 months before it was operational.

In several other cases, programs were delayed when organizers had trouble finding adequate buildings in the community that could be converted to early childhood centers at a reasonable cost.

Finally, ECI failed to win the support of state government. The RAND study suggests several reasons why. For example:

• State officials were ambivalent about funding programs like ECI and were not given a "full, substantive and early role in the design process."

• When demand shifted to full-day services, ECI was seen as a child-care initiative, not an education program, and came into conflict with welfare-to-work reform. "ECI's primary goal was to provide high-quality early education to low-income children – regardless of whether their parents were working," RAND stated. "The primary goal of the state child-care subsidy system, by contrast, is to provide incentives and means for parents receiving public assistance to move into the workforce."

Today's ECI-DP

The problems that contributed to ECI's failure to achieve its grand scope, the RAND report states, "should not obscure the positive aspects of its legacy." The report points out, for example, that ECI helped 20 Head Start programs obtain licenses to provide full-day services and contributed to the development of early childhood services in several neighborhoods, such as Braddock, where five licensed early childhood centers were established.

Perhaps most importantly, the ECI model has been

found to be effective in helping at-risk children develop skills important to their success in school and later in life.

In April 2001, the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development agreed to oversee ECI-DP, a demonstration project that consists of ECI programs based in Braddock and Wilkinsburg. Christina Groark, Co-Director of OCD, oversees the demonstration project, which is under the leadership of Ernie Dettore, ECI-DP Director, and Laurie Mulvey, OCD's Director of Service Demonstrations. The lead agency of the Braddock-based program is the Heritage Health Foundation, Robert Grom, CEO. In Wilkinsburg, the lead agency is Hosanna House, Leon Haynes, Executive Director.

Nearly 300 young children are enrolled in ECI-DP programs. They receive services at a number of sites. The Heritage Health Foundation program, for example, has six family child care homes. It also has classrooms in a center in Braddock and at sites in the neighboring communities of Swissvale, Rankin, and East Pittsburgh. The Hosanna House program has classrooms in a center on Wallace Avenue in Wilkinsburg and has five family child care homes in the community.

The demonstration project is expected to deepen the understanding of the ECI model and its implementation.

"We are hoping to learn several things," said OCD Co-Director Groark. "One is what works to produce the positive outcomes that are being seen – to identify the components of ECI that makes these kids do so well, document those components, and analyze them. We are also looking closely at expenditures to get a better sense of the cost of this level of quality.

"In the end, we would like to see what can be replicated in other neighborhoods."

A number of steps have been taken toward strengthening and sustaining the two ECI-DP programs, according to a OCD progress report covering the first year of ECI-DP. For example:

• A system of assessing and enhancing program quality is in place.

• A monitoring strategy has been developed to assess the level of quality in each center and home-based program using nationally-recognized standardized measurements.

• Program improvement plans were developed and implemented with both lead agencies.

• Administrative strategies that monitor and improve fiscal management are in place and are contributing to program sustainability through analyses and fiscal efficiency.

Researchers are not limiting their study to Allegheny County's early childhood programs. ECI programs were recently established in Erie, York, and Lancaster with the support of The Heinz Endowments.

Mentoring and staff training remain topics of particular interest to researchers. Successful ways of raising the skills of child care staff is an important issue across Pennsylvania, where child care provided by relatives, friends, or neighbors is widespread. In Allegheny County, SPECS reported, half of ECI staff had a high school education and few had training in early childhood development.

SPECS, working with ECI-DP, continues to monitor the outcomes of children in the Allegheny County programs as more enter kindergarten and later grades. "The hope is that we can really look at these kids, particularly through middle school," Dr. Bagnato said.

Copies of the executive summary of the SPECS study, Quality Early Learning – Key to School Success, by Dr. Stephen J. Bagnato, can be found at the Heinz Endowments website at http://www.heinz.org/files/eciresearch.pdf

The RAND Corporation study, A "Noble Bet" in Early Care and Education: Lessons from One Community's Experience, by Brian P. Gill, Jacob W. Dembosky, and Jonathan P. Caulkins, is available on the RAND website at www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR1544/

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the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development (OCD), Pennsylvania State University's College of Health and Human Development, and Temple University's Center for Public Policy.

Blueprint for Policy

Gov. Schweiker's order calls for the Task Force to take a comprehensive look at early childhood care and education, including programs, costs, effectiveness, an assessment of need within the state, and other issues.

Information requested by the Governor's Office includes an outline of programs and services provided in Pennsylvania; current and projected statistics related to the population of children ages birth to age 8 years; statistics on licensed and regulated facilities, including the number of children served; training and educational resources available to early-childhood professionals; and information on evidence-based programs and best practices in the field, including early childhood models used in other states.

The first comprehensive, observational study of early care and education quality in Pennsylvania will be done as part of the Task Force project and is expected to include on-site assessments of existing programs, including Head Start, regulated child care, family child care, relative/neighbor child care, and preschools.

University Partnership

Each of the three university groups will explore a different component of the project.

OCD is to provide a review of best practices based on national research literature; a statewide survey of providers of early childhood services; and a survey of colleges and universities that train professionals in early childhood services.

"Our part includes finding all of the evidence-based programs that work and also on programs that have promising practices – practices that are embedded in things we know work," said Christina Groark, Co-Director of OCD.

The Pennsylvania State University team is assessing the quality of early childhood services offered by nearly 400 across the state, and the Temple University team is surveying parents in Pennsylvania who use early childhood services.

Pennsylvania State University's College of Health and Human Development is the primary research contractor. Dr. Mark T. Greenberg, Director of the Prevention Research Center for the Promotion of Human Development at Penn State, will lead the partnership.

OCD staff assisting the project include Co-Directors Groark and Robert McCall; Robert Nelkin, Director of Policy Initiatives; Wendy Etheridge, Project Manager for Policy Initiatives; and graduate student Kelly Mehaffie.

Marilyn Ware, chairman of the board of American Water Works Co.Inc., chairs the task force. Fred Rogers, of Family Communications, Inc. was named honorary chairman.

The Task Force includes directors of state agencies involved in the development, funding, or regulation of early care and education programs, such as Feather O. Houstoun, Secretary of the Department of Public Welfare, and Education Secretary Charles Zogby.

Also on the Task Force are business leaders, child care advocates and providers, early education teachers, school administrators, and others. Task Force members from western Pennsylvania include Karen Wolk Feinstein, President of the Jewish Healthcare Foundation; Murray S. Gerber, President and CEO of Equitable Resources; William Isler, President of Family Communications, Inc.; Alex Matthews, a Pittsburgh School Board Member; and Margaret M. Petruska, Program Director, Children, Youth & Families, The Heinz Endowments.

Announcements . . .

Parenting Guide Series
Available From OCD

The University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development is offering a series of easy-to-use parenting guides offering information and advice on 50 parenting topics. These guides are available free of charge to parents and organizations, agencies and professionals who work with children and families.

The You & Your Child parenting guide series, written and edited by the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development, covers topics ranging from how to deal with children's fears, finicky eating habits, and aggressive behavior to getting a child ready to read, setting rules, and coping with grief.

Each guide is based on current parenting literature and has been reviewed by a panel of child development experts and practitioners. The series is made possible by the Frank and Theresa Caplan Fund for Early Childhood Development and Parenting Education.

To receive a printed set of all 50 guides by mail, send a request along with your name, organization, mailing address and telephone number to:

Parenting Guides, Office of Child Development, UCSUR/ 121 University Place, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA 15260.

The You & Your Child parenting guides are also available on the Internet for downloading as portable document files at: www.pitt.edu/~ocdweb/guides.htm.

Announcements . . .

State Grants Support Child Care Providers

The Pennsylvania Department of Welfare, through its Office of Children, Youth and Families, offers a range of grants for child care providers.

These grants include:

• **Capacity Building Grants**, which provide up to $10,000 to start a new center or to expand the number of children served by a current child care provider.

• **Quality Improvement Grants**, which provide for improvements such as training and supports for family day care homes, accreditation, supports for children with special needs, and specialized services for infants and toddlers.

• **Operational Planning Grants**, which are available one per county to help build a richer array of local child care resources.

Applications for grants are accepted all year. Anyone with eligibility questions should contact the nearest Child Care Resource Developer.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, contact PA Department of Welfare, Health and Welfare Building, Room 333, PO Box 2675, Harrisburg, PA 17105; Western Region, 1-877-349-4850, Central Region, 1-800-436-3020, Northeast Region, 1-800-528-7222; Southeast Region, 1-877-660-2273. ■

Economic Development Grants Offered To Uplift Communities

A range of organizations, including community action groups, are eligible to apply for a state-sponsored program that provides financial and technical support to stimulate economic development and opportunities in Pennsylvania communities who need it the most.

The Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development accepts applications for the Employment and Community Conservation Program (ECC) at any time.

In general, the program seeks to improve the quality of life in communities and to help ease unemployment and other social conditions that contribute to poverty and dependency on government welfare. The program is also interested in:

• Encouraging local government and nonprofit organizations to collaborate on community development initiatives.

• Supporting local, comprehensive initiatives aimed at improving social, physical, and economic infrastructures in communities.

Applicants are encouraged to contact DCED about a project before submitting a proposal.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, contact: Ellen G. Kight, Director, DCED, 413 State Office Building, 300 Liberty Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15222; (412) 565-5002. ■

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