

COMMUNICATIONS CONSORTIUM MEDIA CENTER

Moderator: Phil Sparks
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Operator: Good day and welcome to the Getting Ready Report conference call. Today's conference is being recorded.

And at this time, I would like to turn it over to Mr. Phil Sparks. Please go ahead, sir.

Phil Sparks: Thank you, operator. As the operator said, I'm Phil Sparks, and on behalf of the School Readiness Indicators Initiative, I want to welcome you to today's press briefing.

Today we're releasing the project's national report Getting Ready. This report is the result of a multi-year 17-state partnership of various state-based organizations that have now developed indicators at the state level to track school readiness for children from birth through age eight. The project was sponsored by funding from the (David & Lucille Packard) Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the (Kaufman) Foundation.

We'll have two opening speakers, and then we'll take questions from the press. In addition, you can find a copy of the report, an executive summary, a press release, and state-by-state media contracts by going to the project's Web site at www.gettingready -- all one word -- gettingready.org.

Now let me introduce the first speaker, Elizabeth Burke-Bryant. Elizabeth is the coordinator of the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative, and in her day job she's the Rhode Island Kids Count Coordinator, a children's policy organization. Elizabeth.

Elizabeth Burke-Bryant: Thank you, Phil. I think I'll begin by saying that when reporters click on the Web site, because there are a lot of graphics in this report, when you click on the full report it will take a couple of minutes to come up.

I'm Elizabeth Burke-Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island Kids Count, and as Phil Sparks said I've been coordinating the National Social Readiness Indicators Initiative, which is today releasing the final report of the findings of this three-year effort.

As all of the states around the country are working to improve educational outcomes and ensure that all children are reading proficiently by fourth grade and are successful in school beyond, it's so important that we take action well before a child enters kindergarten to be sure that they are ready for school and school-ready, as we say. Much of the research that has been underway during the past several years shows that far too many young children enter kindergarten with physical, social, emotional and cognitive deficits that could have been minimized or eliminated through early intervention. We know from studies that have been recently conducted that at least half of the educational achievement gaps that we see between poor and non-poor children already exist at kindergarten entry. So if we can get in earlier in terms of key policies and programs that try to level the playing field, we will have much more successful outcomes when children do reach the K through 12 school system.

Fortunately, as I said, we have a tremendous research base from which to work, which we'll be hearing about in a few minutes from Dr. Ross Thompson. But with regard to this study and why it's important that we're releasing it today, today is the first time we have a report that reflects the work of a critical mass of states. Seventeen total states got together three years ago to develop a

set of measures that start at the birth of a child and address all aspects of young children's development from birth to age eight. The new report is called "Getting Ready: Findings From The National School Readiness Indicators Initiative," and it shows how identifying indicators of school readiness and tracking progress on those measures can lead to more effective policies and investments in early childhood.

The report highlights 23 what we call core or critical indicators, everything from measures having to do with the children themselves to their families, to their communities, and schools and key services. The indicators also address what I'll refer to as the multiple dimensions of school readiness, including children's physical health, literacy and social and emotional development.

Just a few final points before we go on. I think that while it is very true that there are many policy makers across the country that recognize the importance of early learning as school readiness, we know they need measurable indicators that enable them to track progress. The 23 measures of school readiness that are presented in this report, they focus on the full range of things that need to be in place for young children so that we know they have the best possible start when they do get to kindergarten.

The final – finally, I want to just say that the goal of the School Readiness Indicators Initiative in the 17 states was to develop indicators not just for data's sake but to really inform and influence policy decisions to improve school readiness for young children.

Phil Sparks: Thank you, Elizabeth. Now let me introduce our second speaker, Dr. Ross Thompson – T-H-O-M-P-S-O-N. Ross is a professor of psychology at the University of California Davis. Dr. Thompson is a well-known expert in child development and in the public policy implications of child development initiatives. Dr. Thompson.

Ross Thompson: Thank you, Phil. As somebody who works in the scientific world and also tries to bring what we know in science to bear on public policy issues, I'm terribly impressed that 17 state teams could reach consensus on a collection of measurably indicators of school readiness. I think it's remarkable that each of these teams included representatives of both the public and the private sectors. And the importance of their collaborative work is reflected in the fact that they – that they created a set of core indicators that can be implemented using both existing data and – as well as new data collection effort. And they also identified a set of emergent indicators that I think reflect cutting edges in our new thinking about how we might better assess school readiness even in the future.

I especially applaud their awareness that indicators have to reflect not only what we can measure but also what we care about as predictors of school readiness and as targets of community change and improvement.

I'm a developmental scientist, and so, you know, most of what I want to tell you is that these indicators are also consistent with what we know about the origins of school readiness and early childhood development. And there are at least three ways in which the science of early childhood development is apparent in these indicators.

First of all, the indicators reflect the fact that school readiness involves both cognitive and social and emotional preparation that both of these dimensions of children's development are important and neither can be neglected. I think the indicators reflect the fact that young children must have the intellectual skills they need to succeed in the classroom, and that is really indisputable. But what they also reflect is that children must have the social capabilities, to get along with peers, to know how to respond to and cooperate with a teacher. Because we all recognize that learning in classrooms is a social activity, and therefore the children's social and scholastic lives are connected, beginning from the first day they enter a kindergarten classroom.

The indicators reflect that children must have the self-control necessary to manage their emotions, their behavior, and their attention appropriately to group learning, that they must have the physical health to be able to attend school regularly, to be able to pay attention undistracted by physical needs. And perhaps most of all, children have to have the self-confidence and curiosity to value learning and what the classroom can offer them. That school readiness really is a multi-faceted quality. And this reflected in the indicators. It's the clear study – it's the clear evidence of developmental research. But you don't even have to take the scientific record for your evidence, just talk to kindergarten teachers. In study after study when they're asked what are the reasons that children in their classrooms are unready for school, most kindergarten teachers comment on children's lack of self-control, their inadequate ability to get along with other children, their lack of self-confidence or curiosity. They talk about these factors much more than they talk about children not knowing their letters or their numbers skills.

In the words of one kindergarten teacher, the kids are mad, sad, and bad, it's not that they can't add. And I think what this reflects is that school readiness is a preparation of the mind, but also of the heart for school.

I think a second way in which these indicators reflect the scientific evidence concerning early childhood development is their realization that school readiness is not just in the child, but it's also in the preparation of their families, their schools, and the communities who assist them. This reflects the reality and the evidence of science that young children who are most at risk for being behind even at the beginning of kindergarten are those who are coming from the troubled families and deprived communities, and those who carry with them the legacy of poor health care, inadequate child care, family instability and poverty.

These indicators reflect, therefore, the evidence that schools vary not only in broad quality indicators but also in how effectively they can help children in the transition to school. And I think one of the greatest contributions of this report is the multi-dimensional approach they take to

assessing school readiness, not just within the child but also in the environment in which the child is growing up, including the schools.

And then, thirdly, I think the indicators reflect the science that shows us that school readiness begins early, even earlier than age four. Indeed, many of the influences that can put school readiness at risk for children, such as those that arise in troubled families and poor child care, inadequate health care, and in child neglect, these things begin in infancy. And this is consistent, of course, with what we know about early brain development and about the importance of supportive relationships to healthy cognitive and social development.

And the important thing is that these early influences on school readiness are especially true for children coming from the backgrounds that put their life-long school success at greatest risk. (And) the children who at greatest danger of starting off behind and in – and in becoming more and more behind as their school careers proceed are the ones for whom we need to be most concerned about detecting their early vulnerability as early as we can.

I think we all agree that efforts to improve school readiness require accountability. But what this report underscores for us is that without valid and meaningful indicators of the predictors of school readiness, accountability is lacking. These indicators reflect therefore I think the best of our understanding from developmental science about what contributes to young children becoming ready to benefit from their first experiences in a classroom. And it gives us measurable markers of our progress towards helping to ensure that no child reaches school unprepared to learn.

Phil Sparks: Thank you, Dr. Thompson. Now I'll ask the operator to give instructions for questions and answers. Operator.

Operator: Thank you, Mr. Sparks. Today's question and answer session will be conducted electronically.

If you would like to ask a question, please do so by pressing the star key followed by the digit one on your touch-tone telephone. Just a reminder if you're on a speakerphone, please make sure that you're mute function is turned off to allow your signal to reach our equipment. Once again, that's star one if you'd like to ask a question. And we'll pause a moment to allow everyone an opportunity to signal.

Phil Sparks: And while we're queuing up here, a couple of things. If a particular – one of the speakers you want to direct your question to that person, just let us know. That'll be Elizabeth Burke-Bryant and Dr. Thompson. Otherwise as the moderator I'll switch the questions around. Secondly, would you please give your name and media organization as you ask your question.

Operator, first question, please.

Operator: Our first question comes from Gina Macris, with "The Providence Journal."

Gina Macris: Hello. I'm Gina Macris with "The Providence Journal." And I wanted to know probably from Elizabeth what will be done to ensure that these indicators actually do become part of public policy conversations both at the state and the national level. Because I noticed that there – at least in Rhode Island, there are some recommendations for expanding early Head Start. So that's my question.

Phil Sparks: OK, Elizabeth, why don't you start on this one.

Elizabeth Burke-Bryant: Excellent question, Gina. I think I'd like to reaffirm what Mr. Sparks said a little bit earlier and Ross Thompson. We went into this initiative knowing that we would need broad-base involvement by both key policy makers in state governments in these 17 states as well as other community leaders that have a tremendous interest in the well-being of children. So the

state teams were really designed to be sure that once these indicators were crafted that they would have a way to really stick in states to be part of the school – many of the states are housing these indicators in school readiness commissions that have come – begin created in the last couple of years. Others, like in Rhode Island, are key indicators for our children's cabinet. They need to be and they are being placed in very visible places within state government so that they can help to set the policy agenda and help everyone who cares about young children in that state, find out how we're doing in that state in terms of getting to these goals for young children.

At the national level, I think the point that I made earlier I would like to restate, which is that having 17 states come together and say what is the most important set of measures if we want our kids to be school ready, and having this set of 23 measures really bubble up from the states, setting the agenda for young children, these common set of indicators really came to the fore. I think becomes a very important part of the national conversation, because you have so many states agreeing that these are the measures that are important.

So as we release this report today at 2:00 o'clock at an event in the U.S. Capitol, I think the message is that we have worked with a critical mass of states, with a research base that Dr. Thompson mentioned, to say what is important in terms of ensuring a set of policies that will make our kids arrive at school ready to learn. And many of those kinds of things that are outlined in this report are very, very connected to what's happening at the federal level as well. You mentioned early Head Start. That's a program that has very good outcomes, that has – it has been studied and evaluated. It makes a great difference for young children who are starting out with a lot of odds stacked against them. It is a program that has been started by the federal government, many states are starting to replicate it. But in many instances investments in programs for young children tend to be a federal and partnership, and so it really is an important report for both of those policy arenas.

Phil Sparks: And of course, what Elizabeth was referring to is the immediately after this call she's going to – because she's in Washington – to do a Congressional briefing at the U.S. Capitol for members of Congress, Senators and their aides, to bring them up to date on the report and talk about the federal angles.

Operator, next question, please.

Operator: We'll go next to Kara Arundel, with "The Education Daily."

Kara Arundel: Yes. Hello. My name is Kara Arundel, with "Education Daily." And my question is similar to the last question. I'm wondering if you could give me an example or several examples of how the indicators would influence a policy.

Phil Sparks: And let's have both do this one. Elizabeth, why don't you go first, and then Dr. Thompson second.

Elizabeth Burke-Bryant: OK. In terms of how specific indicators would influence state policy, I think almost anywhere you look there are – the report basically outlines the core indicators and then shows the – some of the policy options that state could choose from that have been shown to move that indicator in the right direction. We just mentioned early Head Start, which is a program that gets in early and tries to give children and parents a head start in life by having the kind of parent support and education and early learning opportunities for young children prior to the time that they enter Head Start.

Other possible policy links to the indicators would be in the area of adult literacy, adult education, and English as a second language programs. We know from Dr. Thompson and others' research base that the educational level of the mother in particular, because that's the most studied, has a tremendous impact on a child's school readiness. And so trying to increase the educational level

of parents to have that influence and have a good effect on a child's readiness for school is something else that would matter.

Another key policy that Dr. Thompson referred to is of course when we are investing as states in early childhood education programs, we know it's absolutely essential that to really have it matter in a positive direction for the young children most at risk, we absolutely have to be sure that the early childhood education programs and child care opportunities are of the best possible quality. And, finally, a policy that has been in the news a lot lately because I think of the tremendous gains that we've made in recent years is that no child can be ready for school if that child is not healthy. And so access to a regular primary health care setting is an essential school readiness policy even though people might not think of it off the top of their head when they're thinking child care quality and other more early childhood programs such as child care. But that would be another one that I would throw out.

Phil Sparks: And, Dr. Thompson, additional comments?

Ross Thompson: Well, I think that Elizabeth did a wonderful job of highlighting the fact that, you know, what we care about we measure, and what we measure we tend to pay attention to. And so I think that one of the things that these indicators do is by providing measurable, identifiable indicators based on scientific evidence of the predictors of school readiness for children we draw attention to the factors that really do make a difference in the lives of children. Questions like health insurance coverage, like class sizes in schools, like the numbers of kids who are in accredited child care centers or have access to child care subsidies. Like the percentage of children showing positive social behaviors when interacting their peers. And I think that when you are able to provide evidence, particularly on a year-to-year basis of how children in a particular state are faring on these important predictors of school readiness, it draws our attention to what are the factors that are contributing children being able to be successful in the classroom and

helps to generate public support for improving these predictors if we really care about how children do in school.

Elizabeth talked about early Head Start as it relates to Rhode Island. I've been involved with the California Children and Families Commission that is involved in the dispersment of the Proposition 10 funds to supporting early childhood development throughout the state of California. And I know that we have looked at these school readiness indicators as one reflection of the impact of these public investments and private investments on the fate of California's school children. And in many respects the indicators have helped to draw attention to aspects of children's readiness and un-readiness and their vulnerability that we hadn't known about before. And I think that could have a powerful public policy impact.

Phil Sparks: Thank you, Dr. Thompson. Operator, next question, please.

Operator: We'll go next to Leslie Brodey with the "Bergen Record Newspaper."

Leslie Brodey: Hi, thanks. This is Leslie Brodey at the "Record." First on a technical matter, I have trouble typing as fast as you all read your statements, and I wondered if they were written statements if you might be able to e-mail us all the opening remarks by Mr. Thompson and Elizabeth as well please.

I also wonder if there's a way short of going into each individual state's report and printing them out and lining them up if there's a easier centralized way here to try to compare the states and see which ones are doing a better job overall.

Phil Sparks: Let's do the first one first. I think Elizabeth and Ross were probably both speaking from some semi-prepared notes. If you give Elizabeth and Ross your e-mail address, they might be able to send you something. And then we'll come to your second question.

Leslie Brodey: OK, on the – on the comparing the different –

Phil Sparks: Yes, we'll go to that one in a second. But why don't you give them your e-mail address.

Maybe they can direct something to you in terms of their opening remarks.

Leslie Brodey: Thanks. It's Brodey – B-R-O-D-E-Y -- @northjersey.com. And North Jersey is – just pretend it's one word, please.

Phil Sparks: Got that, Ross and Elizabeth?

Elizabeth Burke-Bryant: Yes.

Ross Thompson: I do.

Phil Sparks: OK.

Leslie Brodey: Thank you.

Phil Sparks: Now, on the point of state to states. Let's have Elizabeth do that one.

Elizabeth Burke-Bryant: Were you – was your question about how states are doing in terms of the data and the particular indicators we're suggesting that they measure?

Leslie Brodey: Well, I just think some of our editors might come and say, well, how's New Jersey stacking up in school readiness compared to the other states involved. And I could go in and look at each particular figure, you know, poverty or, you know, health insurance.

Elizabeth Burke-Bryant: Right.

Leslie Brodey: And I wondered if you had an overall sense which states you've looked at are more the model for getting kids ready and which are lagging behind.

Elizabeth Burke-Bryant: Well, we are presenting today really the framework of indicators, the package of things that we're saying we need to measure state by state in order to have a true picture of whether children are ready for school. Two things I would say to you. There is a contact for New Jersey ...

Leslie Brodey: Right.

Elizabeth Burke-Bryant: ... in this project ...

Leslie Brodey: Right.

Elizabeth Burke-Bryant: ... who would have a handle on what some of those data points are for New Jersey at this point. Because we are just releasing this framework of indicators, we don't have, at least for this whole set, a baseline of comparable data from state to state. The exciting thing is now we will be able to do that, because we are both launching this set of indicators in the 17 states and there's tremendous interest from states that weren't able to participate but are really raring to go on getting the data, the indicators out there in their state and measured on a very regular basis. There are some – a couple of links I can send you to that have been tracking for years some of the key data that – some of which come up as part of the indicators report. And one of those is the Kids Count site.

Leslie Brodey: Right.

Elizabeth Burke-Bryant: And I think you probably have that link ...

Leslie Brodey: Sure, thanks.

Elizabeth Burke-Bryant: ... or I can give it to you if you want. And the other thing is there are some states who – Dr. Thompson just mentioned California. In North Carolina there's been a great amount of investment in recent years through the Smart Start initiative. And there is a link to UNC and their Smart Start reports on what they've been doing in their state. Would that be helpful to you?

Leslie Brodey: Sure, thanks. I just wondered if you had a few suggestions, but it sounds like it's too complex, there's too many apples and oranges in these ((inaudible))

Phil Sparks: Yes. But I would say that the New Jersey contract I think can put it in context for you.

Leslie Brodey: OK. Thank you.

Elizabeth Burke-Bryant: And I think that's a good point. Can I just add to that?

Leslie Brodey: Sure.

Elizabeth Burke-Bryant: ((inaudible)) that when you do talk to your New Jersey contract, they are very used to comparing New Jersey to the rest of the country based on some of these other comparable measures, some of which are a part of this report.

Leslie Brodey: OK. Thank you.

Phil Sparks: Sure. Operator, next question, please.

Operator: We'll go next to Mara Williams with the "Kansas City Star."

Phil Sparks: Hi, Mara. You there?

Operator: One moment, please. Mara, your line is open now.

Phil Sparks: OK.

Mara Williams: OK.

Phil Sparks: Hi, Mara.

Mara Williams: Hi. My question is similar to the last question. Actually, I was wondering if there was some overall data that could tell us how we're doing as a nation in terms of school readiness. And it sounds like that's what this is all about, in trying to find out just how we're doing. I was wondering if, you know, is there 25 percent of the kids who come to kindergarten, are they not ready or is it, you know, 10 percent.

Phil Sparks: Right.

Mara Williams: But I – it sounds like that doesn't exist at this time.

Phil Sparks: Perhaps not. But maybe both Elizabeth and Ross could give at least a generic overview of where the nation is in terms of these indicators in school readiness, starting with Elizabeth.

Elizabeth Burke-Bryant: I'll start it and then Ross can take over. The reason this initiative was so important is because there has been for many years a gap in information between the infants indicators, like infant mortality and in low birth weight babies, clear on up to fourth grade reading

scores. That is – part of the reason for that is that young children are hard to find and measure. So you have to work very hard to both identify indicators that matter and then find out how to get the data to measure young children who are in a variety of settings, like children at birth and children in fourth grade. So this is a major step forward in filling that data gap between the babies that are just born and the baby – and the young children in the early elementary years.

But I think that Ross can kind of take over with some of the national studies that have been done comparing relative school readiness, particularly based on circumstances of a child's life such as economic status.

Phil Sparks: Dr. Thompson.

Ross Thompson: Yes, well, that's really very important. You know, we actually do a need report card.

And I think that report card, if it were to be written today, would say that on a national level because we are attending more to school readiness, informed in part by the work on early brain development, we are improving, but there is wide, wide variability in how prepared children are, depending in part on the circumstances in which they're growing up. And I think our greatest concern is, as the indicators report reflects, has to be for the children who are growing up in the most vulnerable communities and troubled family circumstances.

I think for me as somebody who studies social and emotional development, I become really concerned about the national reports I'm hearing, about not only children who are actually being asked to be put into special classrooms or special circumstances but kindergarten because of their inability to control themselves, to get along with others, but, kids who are actually being excluded and kicked out, as they say, of their child care settings because they simply cannot be managed, because they cannot get along with other kids and cannot pay attention. It is telling me that things are happening in children's lives that are putting them at risk in their social capabilities,

in their abilities to manage their own behaviors that are going to say very challenging things about ability to benefit from a classroom.

Many of these vulnerabilities arise from the conditions associated with poverty. Children who have not had adequate health care, in part because they don't have adequate insurance, children who are in circumstances where the quality of child care is at best custodial, children whose family turmoil, in part because there may be parents with mental health problems, are placing the children emotionally at risk.

So I think the bottom line is partly because of our national attention we are – we are improving. But in part because school readiness tends to be still conceptualized as the preparation of the mind, we're missing a lot of the wide variability in other factors that contribute to school readiness that are making a lot of children unready for school when they reach kindergarten.

Is that helpful?

Phil Sparks: Yes.

Mara Williams: Yes.

Phil Sparks: Thanks, Dr. Thompson. Operator, next question, please.

Operator: We'll go next to Marykay Reinhart with "East Valley Tribune."

Marykay Reinhart: Hi, this is Marykay Reinhart with the "East Valley & Scottsdale Tribune," in Arizona.

Can you address the concern that these issues, as broad, sweeping as they are – poverty and health care and child care – and as huge an investment as they individually require much less, you know, taken all together, how do you not – address the, you know, the issue of state policy

makers, particularly, you know, here in Arizona being reluctant to invest even in pieces of these problems, much less, you know, really take on an issue as broad as this, even though it has, as you say, become part of the national conversation. We've got a school readiness board here for the first time. Over the last couple of years we've been talking about it more, but still these indicators, here in Arizona anyway, don't appear to be improving very much and in some cases are even worsening. So how do we tackle something this broad or do – is it better for the policy makers to take pieces of it, do you think?

Phil Sparks: Elizabeth, I'll have you answer that question.

Elizabeth Burke-Bryant: I think it's a great question. And I think that, first of all, I think what we see when we really look at the research base of what children need to thrive, the worst part – possible scenario would be to invest heavily in one area to the exclusion of some of these others that we know matter very, very much. So it's looking at all of these areas of school readiness and really trying to make the kind of incremental progress by your investments and by your tracking of them that matter over time.

To the issue of the – when you put them all together, they are, you know, major areas of children's development and children's circumstances. I think that the research base is also very compelling. And I'm sure that Dr. Thompson can address this as well. That what we stand in pay in our individual states and as a country later on if we fail to make these investments is just incredibly expensive, increasing cost in special ed, in the juvenile justice system, and in all of those high-end systems that we have to figure out a way to pay for if these other things aren't in place for children to be able to thrive and to enter school ready to learn.

So I know that we've made – that we have paid attention to this issue of this cost benefit issue before, but I think it's incredibly important when you – when you see the kind of success you can have if you put some of these things in place for young children the kind of results you get later.

It's really nothing less than the future workforce that we're talking about, the future people who will lead our communities. And whether they're ready to take on that challenge or is not greatly dependent upon what we are able to in place in the early years.

Phil Sparks: Thank you. Operator, next question, please.

Operator: Once again, it's star one for questions. And we'll go next to John Mooney with the "Newark Star Ledger."

Phil Sparks: Hi, John.

John Mooney: Hello. John Mooney, "Star Ledger" in Newark, New Jersey. Another New Jersey reporter on this one. I guess – and hopefully don't take the question wrong – but my question is what disputable in this? In that we – a lot of these issues have been raised in the past as certainly critical to school readiness, and New Jersey has implemented a pretty far-reaching pre-K program to address a lot of them even, ranging from health to certainly the pre-school quality. Talk a little about what where – you know, given that these are generally agreed upon, where have we fallen short most and what – you know, if there's one or two areas that this country or a state like New Jersey can pinpoint, as previously reporters have asked, it's pretty far reaching and there's an awful lot here. Can you – can you put some kind of priorities on some of these issues?

Phil Sparks: Let's start this one with Dr. Thompson. Ross.

Ross Thompson: That's a wonderful question. And I think just the right question to ask. So what's new news about this report? Well, it really depends on where we think our attention has been focused on thus far and where it needs to go. Certainly I think that to the extent to which we have thought about school readiness primarily as intellectual preparation, these indicators certainly challenge

that view by arguing that intellectual preparation but other kinds of preparation are equally important.

To the extent to which we thought that school readiness is a matter of preparing the child for school, certainly these indicators indicate that that's so, but they also indicate that preparing the family, preparing the community, preparing the schools for children is very important. To the extent to which we've seen school readiness as something that begins at age four, particularly with many state-wide efforts to institute pre-kindergarten programs, these indicators indicate – show us, as is consistent with the scientific evidence, that really the origins of school readiness begin very, very early. And it's not that we have to start thinking about school for infants, but rather that we have to start thinking about the factors in a child's life that contributes to in a cascading sense the factors – the characteristics that are going to make children ready or not ready by the time they reach the school-age door.

If you're asking about cutting edge issues, I think a lot of it depends on what the complexion of programs and policies are within one particularly jurisdiction. But I'll just highlight one thing that I find most provocative and thoughtful about this. And that is the question about in what ways do we provide transitional processes to help children make their way into an academic setting that is represented by a kindergarten or first grade classroom, in what ways do we help children who have not had an academic experience before begin to understand what a classroom is, who they are in a classroom, and to feel confident about themselves as learners.

There are people – there are researchers who study school readiness who are argue that much of what is going on that is going to predict a child's school success happens in that important transition that can take place during the first few weeks as it is supported by a lot of what has gone on beforehand.

So that might be one part of the take-home message. But part of it I think also is that we have to look at the relationships that children have had, not only with their – with their parents but also with other caregivers who have valued or not, who have encouraged the child's curiosity and self-confidence as a learner or not in the experiences leading up to kindergarten.

Is that helpful?

Phil Sparks: Yes? Operator, next question, please.

Operator: We'll go next to Judy Lyden with Scripts Howard.

Judy Lyden: This is Judy Lyden with Scripts Howard. I'm also a teacher. I teach children ages three through seven in a small independent school in Southwestern Indiana. And our biggest stumbling block is the parent. When parents are on cue or on target, so is the child. When they're not, they're not – the child isn't. My question is what kind of interest did you find that young parents have in learning to be better parents when you did the study.

Phil Sparks: Elizabeth.

Judy Lyden: And also what programs can independent child cares and schools get to help parents with becoming better parents?

Phil Sparks: Let's have Elizabeth do that one. Elizabeth.

Elizabeth Burke-Bryant: Well, it's an excellent point. And all of the research has shown that having the involvement of parents in their young children's early learning, parents as their children's first teachers obviously are all very critical in terms of having a child be school-ready and having a child really thrive in any other outside-the-home program that child could ever be exposed to. We

mentioned early Head Start before. That really was created with the youngest children in mind, but it really embraced some of the core principles and values of Head Start, first and foremost being that parents are in this together with early childhood educators and parents are very, very eager to learn more about how they can best be attuned to their children's developmental and health needs and nutritional needs as well as everything that they're supporting in terms of early learning in center-based programs.

So I think that when we were putting together this report, it was really working with the 17 states to say what do you think matters in terms of making sure children arrive at school ready to learn. And you are absolutely right that just like in Indiana we found across the 17 states that people were saying if you don't focus on parents, you really are missing the boat, because it is such an important part of a child's first environment.

So I think that people really hit home this point, because, as you can imagine, trying to measure specific parent involvement programs is a more difficult task to undertake than measuring children in outside-the-home programs. But you will see that for both some of the core indicators and some of the emerging ones there is a major focus on parent involvement.

Maybe Dr. Thompson has more to add to that.

Ross Thompson: No, I think you've covered it. I particularly liked your reference to early Head Start. But there are a number of parenting programs that are out there. And I think that – I think part of what has changed in public discourse and thinking about young children is attributable in part to brain development research that has shown us how important these early influences are in some respects in shaping the potential and capacities of a child's thinking and reasoning skills. And I think that parents have picked up that message, too. And part of the – part of the challenge is simply putting in their hands tools that they can implement.

Phil Sparks: Thanks, Dr. Thompson. Operator, next question, please.

Operator: We'll go next to Carolyn Bower with the "St. Louis Dispatch."

Carolyn Bower: Hi, this is Carolyn Bower, at the "St. Louis Post Dispatch." I'd like to ask about the next steps. After appointing commissions at a time when a lot of states are facing budget challenges, does that mean there is not hope or do there need to be some more innovative solutions?

Phil Sparks: Let's have Elizabeth start that one. Elizabeth.

Elizabeth Burke-Bryant: Well, that's an – that's an excellent question, and helps me make a point to a question earlier. And that is we really consider today to be a very exciting day, because we are getting this report out across the nation. We have a dissemination strategy plan, not just with our in-state teams but also with a set of national partners who have been working on this all along with us, including the National Governors Association, the Education Commission of the States, the National Conference of State Legislatures, and the (Chief State School Officers), who – which is the Association State Education Commissioners. So we have a lot of different networks, as well as NAEYC, which, as you know, is the early childhood National Association for the Education of Young Children group. So we have national partners that are going to be taking this information and using it as a school with all of those nationally based policy making group as well as a major dissemination effort in states that weren't involved in this initiative. We know that there are challenges to states right now across the country in terms of state budgets.

From what our response has been so far, this kind of report is very welcome. Because in tight financial times states more than ever want to be secure that their investments matter. And this really lays out a road map of practical policy options that are very linked to and based on the research base in early childhood that will make a difference. It is a lot to take on this whole agenda all at the same time. But what we have seen in the states that have made the most

progress are that they look across the landscape of what matters and they make incremental steps to being sure the children have what they need in terms of high quality programs, in terms of some of these supports for parents, and they do it one step at a time but in a broad enough way to really make a difference in all of these areas that really come through in this report as being critical to young children's success.

Phil Sparks: Thanks, Elizabeth. Operator, next question, please.

Operator: We'll go next to Dale Vincent with the "Union Leader Newspaper."

Dale Vincent: This is Dale Vincent at the "Union Leader" in New Hampshire. I'm curious. I haven't had a chance to read everything that's on the various Web sites. But how does the issue of learning disabilities fit into your evaluations of kids' readiness for school?

Phil Sparks: Why doesn't Dr. Thompson take that one? Ross.

Ross Thompson: Well, I think part of the story of learning disabilities – and a variety of special vulnerabilities that children can carry with them into a school is both what happens when they get to school in terms of the readiness of the institution, of the classroom, of the teacher to accommodate those, but also what is happening beforehand. And I think part of the concern about – for example, one of the indicators reflecting the proportion of children under age six without health insurance. You know, health insurance is not in itself the big story. Health insurance is a marker of other broader things that happen in a child's life that have to do with the likelihood of early difficulties and disabilities being identified early in such a way that assistance can be enlisted far sooner than a child might be discovered in a classroom to be lacking the, you know, an essential capability for recognizing and being able to use letters, for instance.

And so part of what these indicators do is also try to provide methods of early screening and tracking so that as these things can be identified and addressed, children can be assisted to be as school-ready as possible.

Phil Sparks: Thank you, Dr. Thompson. Operator, next question, please.

Operator: We'll go next to Bruce Ferrell with the North Carolina News Network.

Bruce Ferrell: Yes, this is Bruce Ferrell from the North Carolina News Network. I want to – this question may have already been asked. Maybe some comments from either one of you about North Carolina specifically. I'm guessing, first of all, is North Carolina one of the 17 states, and, secondly, are there any things that – I know Smart Start has been around for some time. Are there things that we're doing here that you can point to and say this is a good example that some of the other states should follow as they try to deal with student readiness.

Phil Sparks: Yes, I'm going to have Elizabeth Burke-Bryant take that one.

Elizabeth Burke-Bryant: We have worked closely with some key researchers in your state, including (Donna Bryant), from UNC Chapel Hill, who has been the researcher really doing a lot of the evaluation work on Smart Start and those investments. What we can report is that on a very critical issue of the quality of North Carolina's pre-school child care, the increase in the numbers of high-quality and medium-quality centers compared to low-quality centers has been very significant since the Smart Start investments started happening right around 1995. So that information is available on the UNC Smart Start Web site, which is www.fpg.unc.edu/smartstart/reports/child_care_qualityth.

Phil Sparks: And Elizabeth, you might want to give your e-mail address in case the reporter wants to get that mouthful down again.

Elizabeth Burke-Bryant: Don't you love these links? My e-mail is EBB@rikidscount.org.

Phil Sparks: Great.

Bruce Ferrell: Thank you and a quick follow-up. As I'm looking at the list, I see that North Carolina, at least according to this list I have, is not part of this initiative. Is there a reason why considering that a lot of the folks down here consider what we're doing down here as some of the, you know, kind of pace setting kind of things?

Elizabeth Burke-Bryant: Well, good question. North Carolina was not one of the 17 states, and it was – it was a real loss, because North Carolina has been a tremendous leader in this. We wish this could have been a 50-state initiative. And we're going to be working through our dissemination and our going out with this report to try to make it into a 50-state initiative immediately. North Carolina has been a key partner in this because of all of the work that has been done through the Smart Start initiative. So they have been advisers on this initiative, coming to our national meetings. The state itself did not have a state team in this, and that's why you don't see a state contact there.

Bruce Ferrell: OK. Why did they not have a state team? Is it something they ((inaudible))

Elizabeth Burke-Bryant: No, it was a question of we had the ability to have a finite number of states be able to participate based on the funding for this initiative. And a selection of states representing the different geographic areas of the country were able to come aboard thanks to the sponsorship of some of the foundations that were involved. So it was not at all because of North Carolina not being a real star in this particular arena.

Bruce Ferrell: Thank you.

Phil Sparks: Operator, next question, please.

Operator: And I'd like to remind everyone it's star one to ask a question. And we'll pause a moment to allow everyone a final opportunity to signal.

Phil Sparks: Right. And this is a good point to remind everybody that the information we've been talking about, again, is at [www.gettingrdy](http://www.gettingrdy.org) -- all one word -- .org. Any final questions, operator?

Operator: We have a final question from Linda Jacobson with "Education Weekly."

Linda Jacobson: Hi. This is Linda Jacobson with "Education Week." My question – and I don't know if this is covered or not – is how much funding has gone towards this project.

Phil Sparks: Elizabeth, you can probably do that one.

Elizabeth Burke-Bryant: With all – with the funding pooled from the three foundations, the effort was about a \$2 million effort over three years.

Linda Jacobson: OK. Great. Thank you.

Phil Sparks: Yes and operator, any additional questions before we ring off?

Operator: We have no more questions in our queue.

Phil Sparks: OK. On behalf of our speakers, on behalf of the Getting Ready Report and the School Readiness Indicators team and Dr. Thompson who joined us today, we want to thank you for

being with us. You've got the Web site address if you want more information and you've got Elizabeth's Web address, e-mail address if you want to talk to her directly.

Thank you all for joining us, and have a good day.

Operator: Ladies and gentlemen, this concludes today's conference call. We thank you for participation.

You may disconnect your phone line at this time.

END