

PROCEEDINGS OF THE THIRD NATIONAL MEETING

School Readiness Indicators Initiative: Making Progress for Young Children

The Westin Providence
Providence, Rhode Island

November 13th – 14th, 2002

Sponsored by:

The David and Lucile Packard Foundation
The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation
The Ford Foundation

Hosted by:

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

Participating States:

Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Ohio, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, Wisconsin

Purpose:

This was the Third National Meeting of the 17-state initiative to use child well-being indicators to improve school readiness and ensure early school success. Over the course of the Initiative, states will work individually and collectively to develop a comprehensive set of measures to monitor the physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and economic well-being of young children. Indicators will reflect state investments in programs and policies for young children and families as well as child outcomes. States will develop policy goals and communications strategies to improve school readiness in their states.

Meeting Objectives:

- To link indicators of school readiness to policy and communications strategies.
- To highlight state work on school readiness policy issues and kindergarten assessment strategies.
- To present outcomes from the second Residency Roundtable on indicators of language and literacy development.
- To share strategies for communicating with policymakers, community leaders and the public in order to create policy change to improve school readiness.
- To reflect on the first year of the Initiative and plan long-term strategies.

Wednesday, November 13, 2002

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Elizabeth Burke Bryant
Executive Director
Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
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Lisa Klein
Vice President of Early Education
The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation
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Marie Young
Senior Program Manager
The David and Lucile Packard Foundation
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Karen Finn
Consultant
FinnCORE, Inc.

Ms. Burke Bryant opened the Third National Meeting of the School Readiness Indicators Initiative by acknowledging that we are celebrating our first anniversary as a national initiative using school readiness indicators to move early childhood policy forward in our states. Our 16-state initiative has grown into a 17-state initiative with the recent addition of Ohio.

Recent changes in state administrations have added a new piece of work to the Initiative. We have the task of using school readiness indicators to create an accountability system that transcends administrations. While it can be challenging to build new relationships with new partners, our opportunity is to guide new administrations to build school readiness indicators for young children that truly impact policy.

Ms. Burke Bryant reviewed the three main pieces of work in the School Readiness Indicators Initiative: indicators, communications, and policy. The Third National Meeting will focus on two of these areas: communications and policy. Continuing our history of bringing national-level experts to inform our work, the highlights of this meeting include a keynote address from Sharon Lynn Kagan discussing policy and accountability as well as communications ideas from Susan Nall Bales and Phil Sparks.

For the first time since we started meeting in October 2001, we invited a professional facilitator to join us for this conference. Karen Finn (FinnCORE, Inc.) introduced herself to the participants and explained the ground rules and procedures she would utilize during the meeting. Ms. Finn has 10 years of facilitation experience and has worked with the state of Maryland on their school readiness project.

Lisa Klein (The Kauffman Foundation) shared her excitement for the meeting. While foundations offer invaluable support to the Initiative, state teams have the task of doing the ground level work with their Governor's offices and other partners. The recent elections were difficult, but they raised the opportunity to elevate the importance of our work.

Marie Young (The Packard Foundation) shared her enthusiasm for this timely meeting with such a rich agenda and list of speakers. She was pleased that states would have opportunities to deeply discuss the work they are doing and the effects of the recent election. She also acknowledged the work of Nancy Sconyers, formerly of The Ford Foundation and a current member of the New Jersey state team.

State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network: Update

Charles Bruner
Director
Child and Family Policy Center
www.cfpciowa.org

Mr. Bruner updated the participants on the work of the State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network (SECPTAN). SECPTAN's technical assistance focuses on states' policy needs while the School Readiness Indicators Initiative's technical assistance supports states' work in indicator development, data and communications as tools to inform state policy decisions.

Mr. Bruner's presentation is attached in section 3.

Additional points:

SECPTAN began nine months ago with a mission to offer customized technical assistance to states needing expertise and guidance to inform state policy and policymakers. Senior Associates have visited nearly every state in the Initiative to meet the people doing this important work and to assess individual state's needs.

Highlights of SECPTAN's efforts to date include:

- Colorado – conducted background research on creating a vulnerable child index
- New Hampshire – did an evaluability assessment of 21st Century Learning Centers
- Arizona - helped develop and plan the School Readiness Board Development

SECPTAN also compiles resources and bibliographies to aid states in the research process. Examples of these resources include:

- *School Readiness Baselines and Benchmarks*

- *A Compendium of Multi-State Early Childhood Initiatives*
- *Options in Developing Indices Related to Child Vulnerability*
- *Linking Child Welfare and School Readiness – Policy Options*
- *Linking Child Health Care and School Readiness – Policy Options*
- *Six Things Legislatures Should Know About School Readiness*
- *The State of the Field in Early Childhood Research: A Context for Action Research and Policy Making*

All SECPTAN resources can be obtained by contacting Sheri Floyd at the Child and Family Policy Center (p: 515-280-9027, f: 515-244-8997, e: sheriff@cfpciowa.org).

Keynote Address: Providing Children With What They Need to Succeed in School

Sharon Lynn Kagan, Ed.D.
Co-Director
Center for Children and Families
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The School Readiness Indicators Initiative is working on a topic that is finally sparking the interest of parents, teachers, and policymakers. People are realizing that indicators are important in and of themselves.

Testing, standards and policies are high-stakes endeavors for a wide range of stakeholders: parents, policymakers, businesses, and communities.

Growing numbers of policymakers are concerned that the policies they are enacting are not producing the results they intended while advocates are concerned that policies are not making the kinds of gains for children and families that they should. The Casey Foundation is considering launching a new initiative called *Policy Counts*. This initiative will hold states accountable for the policies they enact and the results these policies achieve. Young children and their school readiness is part of this work.

Indicators are related to high consequences. They are not benign; they are developed to spark a response, action or change. As we know through our work, there are different kinds of indicators. We cannot discuss only one kind of indicator without looking at the full range of measures that describe the well-being of children and families.

Indicators can be place into several “buckets” (i.e. types).

Bucket 1: What Children Know and Can Do

This bucket describes what children know and can do based on their actions. These indicators include the five dimensions of readiness and can be gathered by observing children’s behaviors:

- *Physical and Motor Development:* jumps, walks a balance beam, does puzzles;
- *Social and Emotional Development:* accepts responsibility, forms and sustains relationships;

- *Language Usage*: initiates and sustains conversation, follows verbal directions, tells a story from a picture;
- *Cognition and General Knowledge*: matches and sorts objects;
- *Approaches Toward Learning*: takes risks, persists on tasks, demonstrates curiosity.

Other terms for these indicators commonly used today are child-based outcomes, learning standards, and learning outcomes. The standards are very different in different states, often focusing on language and cognition. Some states have mandatory standards, others make them optional. This is a problem because we are setting up different standards for different programs, exacerbating the differences between services. So in some ways, the indicators have the potential to be used to further divide programs, rather than as instruments for bringing programs and services into greater alignment. Another problem is that conflicting indicators can cause further division. For example, a Head Start program offering a pre-kindergarten program might have to account for both Head Start outcomes and state early learning standards. We have to guard against using indicators as a way to divide programs and instead use them to work toward common goals for children.

People in early care and education have very clear concerns regarding indicators. Many see these indicators as the prelude to increased performance expectations, more scrutiny, and greater accountability. Others fear that starting with standards means taking the focus off of children's interests and place it on externally imposed requirements. Another concern is that standardized testing would enter early education classrooms. We need to be sure that we discern between testing and assessment, looking at portfolios, documentation, and other approaches.

Bucket 2: Child and Family Conditions

This bucket describes the conditions that surround what children know and can do. This information can be gathered from documents, including health records, interviews and direct observations. Examples include:

- *Child Health Conditions*: low birth-weight infants; immunization rates; children with functional limitations;
- *Family Income Conditions*: children living in poverty; single parent families; families enrolled in welfare programs;
- *Family Life Conditions*: children born to teen mothers or substance-using parents; child abuse; children living in foster care; neighborhood crime rates.

Bucket 3: Service Provision, Access, and Quality

This bucket characterizes the services that exist or those to which children and families have access. This bucket is connected to Bucket 2 because often these services are only available to people with certain conditions. Examples include:

- *Health Services*: prevalence of pregnant women who have access to prenatal care; prevalence of children who have access to vision and hearing screening; prevalence of children who receive well baby care;
- *Parenting Education*: prevalence of parents who have access to parenting classes and social supports;

- *Child Care and Preschool*: prevalence of low-income, English language learners, or children with disabilities who have access to child care or pre-school, or prevalence of children who have access to full-day preschool;
- *Ready Schools*: prevalence of children who have access to schools with rich learning environments, high expectations for children, provide opportunities for in-service development, have continuous curriculum with pre-school.

Bucket 4: Policy (New)

Previous “bucket” frameworks did not include a policy bucket. However, a step is necessary between services and systems. We need to know about the policies that contribute to systems. This bucket describes which policies it takes to create systems that effectively support early care and education.

The Casey Foundation is exploring *Policy Counts* in six different areas: Readiness for School, School Success, Youth Engagement, Family Economic Success, Healthy Families, and Strong Families. The eight policy areas of Readiness for School are:

- Amount of Investment in early care and education;
- Nature of Investment in early care and education;
- Licensing and Accreditation;
- Professional Development/Compensation;
- Systems Development;
- Early Learning Standards and Assessment;
- Facilities/Capital Investments;
- Kindergarten Quality and Ready Schools.

As an example, in the area of Standards and Assessments *Policy Counts* has six key policy features. One of the key features is that the state pre-kindergarten program has learning standards that include the National Education Goals Panel’s five dimensions.

More information on *Policy Counts* can be found in section 10.

Bucket 5: Systems

This bucket defines how services are linked. Examples include:

- *Systemic Efficiency*: degree to which the system is using its resources—fiscal, human, technical, and technological—efficiently and effectively;
- *Systemic Infrastructure*: degree to which the infrastructure (training, financing, data-gathering) supports effective service delivery;
- *Systemic Accountability*: degree to which accountability is dispersed across systems and the degree to which it is coordinated.

When these five buckets are put together, the possibilities for impacting children’s lives are limitless. A system of readiness indicators needs to be developed. An ideal indicators system would:

- Collect data in all five buckets;
- Be designed in one swoop, but could be implemented incrementally;
- Provide usable data to parents, teachers, policymakers and bureaucrats;
- Consider each bucket independently, then find links;
- Collect data uniformly across departments.

The National Education Goals Panel identified four purposes of assessment. These are:

- *Improve instruction*: we can collect data on what children know and can do at different points in time. Collecting something on each child is critical;
- *Screen for services*: examples include hearing and vision. Detailed follow-up is a necessity;
- *Monitor program effectiveness*: there are several ways to know if an intervention is effective;
- *Determine high-stakes accountability*: using high standards of rigor with reliable instruments.

The early childhood field has no unified learning or content standards for children. Learning standards need to be developed that transcend individual programs and apply to all children regardless of what type of early childhood program. The instruments used to measure children's progress must be appropriate and well-resourced.

Questions and comments:

Teresa Myers (National Conference of State Legislatures) commented that NCSL is working with legislatures on results-based decision making. The process helps policymakers think about what they want to accomplish. She referred to the article *Focusing on Results for Kids* (attached, Section 5) as a guide on how to make connections for policymakers.

Ellen Shemitz (New Hampshire) expressed the concern that advocating for clarity is often difficult. Deciding on purposes can be challenging because there are always covert and overt purposes. Also, there is concern about privacy of information. Dr. Kagan said that the higher the stakes, the greater the need for scientifically-defendable data. Elizabeth Burke Bryant (Rhode Island) shared that Rhode Island runs into the confidentiality issue when discussing the use of a single student identifier number across departments. We have the technology to cover individual names and addresses, but the concern still remains. David Murphey (Vermont) referred to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, the law which protects student educational records. The No Child Left Behind Act makes it easier to collect information for the purpose of tracking educational quality and progress.

Susan Wilson (Connecticut) shared that her state keeps running into other indicator efforts from different places such as mental health and juvenile justice prevention. Often systems do not collaborate and do not take advantage of our collective expertise and experience. Anna Lovejoy (National Governors Association) offered that NGA is starting a gubernatorial task force looking at the needs of children ages 0-5. The report from this task force, due in the summer, can help guide state efforts. She then asked what governors and policymakers need to know about early childhood and school readiness policy. Dr. Kagan stressed the importance of understanding the complexity of what indicators mean. Policymakers must have an intended purpose for collecting data and an understanding of how data will be used. Leadership from Governor's offices can greatly strengthen data collection and indicator development as well as pave the way to implementation.

Ruth Flynn (Missouri) asked for examples of reporting data for teachers and policymakers. Dr. Kagan did not have state-level information to answer this. However, she mentioned that districts and localities tend to do a good job of reporting data for teachers and policymakers.

Patricia de Cos (California) commented that the federal government has a role to play in getting children ready for school. The work of the National Education Goals Panel brought the early childhood debate to the forefront of the country's attention.

Patricia Skelton (California) shared that she brought the California *First 5* book, a collection of over 100 indicators collected from California's counties. The next step will be to take the work from the counties and create a set of core indicators for California.

Dr. Kagan asked the participants for their input on creating policy indicators. Phil Baimas (Massachusetts) said that policy indicators are a natural outgrowth of our work. Massachusetts had always planned on looking at policies. Lisa Klein (The Kauffman Foundation) shared that linking indicators to policy has always been a focus of the School Readiness Indicators Initiative.

Dr. Kagan then asked if participants thought The Casey Foundation should do a KIDS COUNT-style report on state policies. Amy Rossi (Arkansas) shared a concern that this report would rank states against each other. Poor states might be forced into policies that are unattainable. Too often national priorities are by the federal government without input from states. Dr. Kagan added that rich states have the downside of looking like there is no more work to do.

Language and Literacy: Results from the Residency Roundtable

Catherine B. Walsh
Deputy Director
Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
www.rikidscount.org

Ms. Walsh shared the highlights of the Residency Roundtable on language and literacy development. She also gave ideas on how the indicator lists developed at the roundtable can be used in the states. The proceedings of the Residency Roundtable are available at www.GettingReady.org.

Ms. Walsh's presentation and the Residency Roundtable Meeting Summary are attached in section 4.

Additional points:

The Residency Roundtable brought together participants from nearly every state in the School Readiness Indicators Initiative. The meeting benefited from presentations by

three national experts in the field of language and literacy. Kristie Kauerz (Education Commission of the States) presented how state literacy initiatives were being impacted by No Child Left Behind, Reading First and Early Reading First. Dr. Dorothy Strickland (Rutgers University) shared highlights of her extensive research focusing on how children acquire language. Dr. David Dickinson (Boston College) presented on the components of literacy and how they relate to educational settings.

We need to be asking ourselves whether we are paying enough attention to communities, services, and the other important pieces of our work for children and families. Our work must cross services, systems, and departments.

The Roundtable demonstrated how indicators of social and emotional development are closely linked to language and literacy indicators. Language acquisition requires a caring, nurturing environment and the ability to form relationships.

David Dickinson of Boston College presented many important findings on language and literacy in preschool environments. He noted how indicators of program quality often do not include literacy measures. Programs rated as “high quality” often had low quality language and literacy components.

Recognizing a child’s primary language is essential. Parents should use their strongest language to build their child’s language skills.

2002 Elections: Challenges and Opportunities

Elizabeth Burke Bryant
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Karen Ortiz
Senior Program Associate
Children’s Action Alliance
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The purpose of this discussion panel was to look at the impact of the November elections on state government. Panelists consisted of state advocates who discussed the elections from the state perspective and School Readiness Indicators Initiative national partners who discussed the issue at the national level.

Elizabeth Burke Bryant discussed changes in Rhode Island. The work on indicators of school readiness has never been more important in light of the need to work with a new governor who has expressed openness and interest in collaboration and in light of a shift in the state legislature, which retains a Democrat majority but has been reduced in size by 25%. Some champions of children's issues lost their seats, but there is an opportunity to educate new members.

Karen Ortiz reported that Arizona will also have newcomers, including a new governor who is expected to support early care and education issues. In the legislature, Arizona lost some champions and kept others. She preferred to see the glass as half full.

Anna Lovejoy noted that close to one-half of states will have new governors, an opportunity to engage and educate both new and continuing governors in the early childhood agenda. It is important to link to other priorities, including education and the *No Child Left Behind Act*. Several national groups, including the National League of Cities, the National Association of Counties, NGA and other groups also have new leadership and increasing interest in the early care and education field. Other opportunities to raise these issues include reauthorization of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Head Start at the federal level. This should be viewed as a time to plan and educate for a sunnier (fiscal) day.

Teresa Myers pointed out that more than 84% of legislators were up for reelection this year. Republicans now control 21 state legislatures, up from last year. In many state legislatures, members are term limited. Now is the time to educate legislators even if there are no new monies to spend. Even if we are not asking for additional funds, we must prepare for when there will be funds to spend. Also, we need to help legislators protect existing programs by providing cost-benefit information.

A question was raised on the issue of the NGA task force working on early care and education. Ms. Lovejoy responded by noting that Governor Patton of Kentucky is the chair of NGA and that Governor Dirk Kempthorne of Idaho, who has an interest in early childhood, will head this task force. The goal is to provide broad guidance and recommendations to government officials, with a focus on 0-5, building on the work of the National Education Goals Panel and incorporating school readiness, families and communities. The process is in the early stages.

Other questions from the audience concerned analysis of recent election results, including whether there was a coattails effect for the Republican Party in light of September 11th. Teresa Myers responded with analysis that there was most likely a strong coattails effect giving added momentum to Republican campaigns.

Ms. Myers' handouts are attached in section 5.

FrameWorks: Talking School Readiness

Susan Nall Bales
President
FrameWorks Institute
www.FrameWorksInstitute.org

Ms. Bales shared the results of recent focus group research on the ways the public interprets messages about school readiness issues. She provided participants with two background papers: *Opening Up the Black Box: A Case Study in Simplifying Models* and *Talking School Readiness and Early Child Development: A FrameWorks Message Memo*.

Ms. Bales presentation and background papers are attached in section 6.

Additional points:

A frame is “the way a story is told – its selective use of particular symbols, metaphors, and messengers – which, in turn, triggers the shared and durable cultural models that people use to make sense of the world.” For example, some frames for young children are “mini-adults,” “vessels waiting to be filled,” and “sponges that absorb the world around them.”

Helpful reframes of early care and education are nurturance, community benefits and the good of the future.

Some important framing recommendations for early child development:

- Prime the discussion with values like nurturance and community.
- Use the language of ordinary people: heads, hearts, minds.
- Use examples that are not specifically cognitive and observable.
- Use an exchange or future model (i.e. give to children now and they will give back to you later)
- Talk about the shared pleasures of raising children.
- Position preschool as an opportunity for stimulation that all children should have access to regardless of income.
- Make community actors visible.
- Connect child’s issues to children’s environments.

Questions and comments:

Kathy Thornburg (Missouri) asked about how to finally transition out the term “day care” and start popularizing language used in the field. Ms. Bales replied that the term “early education” is far better than “day care” or “child care.” The challenge is to broaden the

public's understanding of what early education is all about. Early Education is more than just the domains of literacy and cognition.

Susan Wilson (Connecticut) made a connection to the book *Moral Politics*. The book talks about conservative and liberal thoughts and puts them in metaphors of families. Many of the frames surrounding school readiness and early education tend to be conservative, "strict father" in nature. Are we ever going to be able to push over and attract people who have this framework in their heads? Ms. Bales responded by saying that adults who see children as little adults tend to have that "strict father" thinking. We as activists have not done a good job of being clear about the messages we are sending. When we talk about nurturing it tend to sound like permissiveness because we have not adequately explained the full range of children's needs that need to be nurtured.

Phil Baimas (Massachusetts) asked whether there was a gradual process to change a frame that already exists or do whether we have to build a frame-changing strategy ourselves. Ms. Bales suggested that what needs to be done is to stop repeating frames that we know set up a different way of thinking than the one we want. Every time we use a bad frame we lose valuable ground.

Teresa Myers (National Conference of State Legislatures) asked whether the FrameWorks Institute had encountered any resistance to messages about parents' nurturing. A client once accused the nurturing program as being "indulgent." How do you reframe such strong attitudes? Ms. Bales emphasized that you cannot argue with a frame. You will get backlashes from people. Instead, give people positive cues and alternate frames. The way you frame the issue yourself is key. That is why framing is an art.

John Bonds (New Hampshire) asked if there were frames that are especially appealing to business leaders. Ms. Bales replied that business leaders have a hard time focusing on children when they are very young. This is an opportunity to work with business leaders, especially since they can be such powerful messengers on this issue.

A participant inquired about messages that frame well with specific races and cultures. Ms. Bales referenced a report on the FrameWorks Institute website that focuses on this issue. While there are always going to be differences in frames across groups, the similarities are substantial. You must look at the values of specific cultures and build opportunities to make connections to what is important to everyone.

Thursday, November 14

Communications Power: Building a Communications Strategy to Promote Policies for Children

Phil Sparks
Vice President
Communications Consortium Media Center
www.ccmc.org

Mr. Sparks provided another important perspective on the field of communications in child and family policy. There were some differences in the way Mr. Sparks and the Communications Consortium Media Center (CCMC) promote communications strategies and messages compared to The FrameWorks Institute. A presenter at our First National Meeting in October 2001, Mr. Sparks outlined some important communications themes as well as suggestions for messages and language.

Mr. Spark's presentation is attached in section 7.

Additional points:

Communication is a vital part of each states struggle to work on Early Care and Education.

The Early Care and Education Collaborative, a public will building initiative that is designing and implementing strategic public education strategies to expand both the supply and the quality of early care and education resources, began 2 years ago. The eight states working in the Collaborative are Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Missouri, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. *More information on the Collaborative and other selected early childhood initiatives is available in section 9.*

Any communications/media strategy that does not utilize grassroots input and an informed research strategy is doomed. This is true no matter how important or relevant the message is. Creating a specific workplan for your communications strategy is important.

“School Readiness” is not a term widely used outside the field of early childhood. From our research, we know the concept of “School Readiness” as it relates to the importance of early care is the key way in which you start the dialogue. This has been consistent in each state in the Collaborative.

The public wants to see that early childhood and family programs work for their own neighborhoods. Local messages tend to have more power.

Consider the role of parents when planning a media strategy. Parents should be part of the process. For example, parents generally see a relationship between the quality of teachers and the quality of an overall early childhood program. As far as parents are concerned, well-trained, well-certified teachers provide quality.

Get rid of the words “day care” and “child care.” These terms are often misinterpreted by the public. We can use them with our own audiences but beyond that the message becomes corrupted. You cannot start communication in a positive way with these two words.

Business leaders work with policymakers because that is where the power is in many states.

Questions and Comments

Cheryl Mitchell (Vermont) asked about messages that can be powerful for incoming Republican governors. Mr. Sparks replied that both Republican and Democratic candidates across the country seem to have an early education platform. Over the last five years, Republicans have come to understand that they need to be thinking hard about this issue. Republican governors are also interested in parent education.

Catherine Walsh (Rhode Island) was interested in exploring multi-issue communications strategies. How do we handle the reality that the work we do for School Readiness is so critical to early care and education but also to issues such as health insurance and health care access? We cannot put ourselves in the situation of pitting one issue against another. Mr. Sparks replied that the public understands that a well-nourished, healthy child has to be part of the equation for early care and education. It would be to our advantage to work with the coalitions that are engaged in the dialogue and not get chopped off in the debate.

Suzanne Johnson (Virginia) said that since their governor is limited to one term, the involvement of business leaders is all the more critical. These leaders tend to understand K-12 issues, but we had a great deal of difficulty getting that translated into early care and education. Mr. Sparks responded by saying that partners who have been successful at the state level in recruiting business leaders have done it through peer-to-peer recruitment. Find a business leader and have that person lead you to another business leader. Regulated businesses are a good target: bankers, utilities, financial institutions and insurance companies. Community business leaders are more likely to be interested than others since they are already doing a substantial amount of business at the state capital.

Charles Bruner (Child and Family Policy Center) said that the public believes that infants and toddlers do not need “education” in the way older children do. Others are concerned that this will do detriment to the infant and toddler system of care. What types of communication strategies support infant and toddler early education? Mr. Sparks agreed that while you can track public support for early education for 4 and 5 year-olds, messages about infants and toddlers link to the role of the parent rather than a community need. There is a disconnect in the public’s mind. It’s likely that about 40% of the public may never support early education for children ages 0-3. People have a value that parents must raise their young children.

Patricia de Cos (California) asked about work done by the Communications Consortium Media Center that focused on ethnic groups. Mr. Sparks answered that they have done a lot of work in this area in terms of their own outreach and advertising campaign. Based on their research, African Americans are less receptive to early care, whereas Hispanics

are more receptive. Rural versus urban areas tend to have different views on early care and education.

David Illig (California) referred back to the comments about the public's beliefs of children aged 0-3 and the essential role of parents. However we know that many low-income families, particularly single mothers, need to work and therefore require child care. How do we create this message? Mr. Sparks replied that, in many cases, you can't. Some groups simply oppose early care and education and will never change their minds. Understand that you may not get very far with some groups. In terms of messages, use words like "cognitive," "emotional," "learning skills" and "life skills."

Patricia Skelton asked for comments on parents who believe a child's ability is fixed at birth. Mr. Sparks suggested focusing on messages on developing children's potential and providing children with the full array of life's possibilities. There are success stories across the country to draw from.

Barbara Gardner (Massachusetts) brought up the issue of child care quality. Some parents do not have the information to make informed choices about appropriate early care and education environments for their children. Unless you have a system, it is difficult for parents to make a determination of quality. Mr. Sparks agreed that this is an issue for families. No parent would knowingly send a child to a low quality program. Affordability and accessibility tend to be higher priorities for parents when selecting an early care and education program.

Susan Wilson (Connecticut) asked for more information about developing data and communicating it effectively. Mr. Sparks emphasized that "facts" are more powerful when they are coupled with a personalized story. You can find a family that feels comfortable talking to media and is willing to share how the numbers impact the reality of their lives. Another trick is to get an excellent spokesperson to talk to reporters. These spokespersons can make the point that early childhood issues affect the entire community.

Lisa Klein (The Kauffman Foundation) recognized that there is a lot of data out there. What methods of data collection and reporting are most cost effective with the greatest impact? Mr. Sparks replied that many methodologies of data collection exist that work quite well. The hard part is reporting the data. Make sure your reports are broken down into a language that a wide audience can understand.

Charles Bruner (Child and Family Policy Center) asked for ways to add messages about sustaining services to communications strategies. Mr. Sparks suggested that when funds have to be allocated, child care should be seen as part of the overall education plan for the state. This is where the term "early education" becomes crucial.

Deb Scott (Missouri) reported that legislators in her state tend to see any young children's issue as the responsibility of parents. How can we broaden the conversation to continue the parent education piece but look beyond it as well? Mr. Sparks replied that respecting people's values is essential, but people can always use more information. Early care and education strengthens families and assists working parents. Feel comfortable with the language you use, and relate to people's values so we do not lose them in the discussion.

Kindergarten Assessments as a Tool to Measure Community Progress in Developing Children's School Readiness

Charles Bruner
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www.cfpciowa.org

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Director, Early Childhood Education
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Kim Townley
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<http://gov.state.ky.us/ecd>

This panel looked at kindergarten assessment strategies across states. Charlie Bruner reported results from a paper he co-authored with Abby Copeman titled "Measuring Children's School Readiness: Options for Developing State Baselines and Benchmarks" (attached). Ruth Flynn provided information on Missouri's School Entry Assessment Project. Kim Townley, speaking on behalf of Anna Lovejoy, further discussed the National Governors Association's new task force looking at this issue.

All participants were provided with a copy of the Kindergarten Assessment Briefing Binder, a compendium of resources related to the topic including materials from Missouri and Vermont. These materials are also available at www.GettingReady.org.

Mr. Bruner's paper is attached in section 8.

Additional points:

Charles Bruner

Policymakers are constantly asking us questions: What do our children look like when they enter school? Are our investments paying off? How do we know? Assessments can help us answer these questions.

As Sharon Kagan pointed out, there are four purposes for assessment:

- to support learning
- to identify special needs
- to evaluate programs and monitor trends
- high stakes accountability

Assessments must be age-appropriate and naturalistic. They must be given to children at multiple points over the course of a year.

Questions and comments:

Catherine Walsh (Rhode Island) said that a challenge in Rhode Island is the need to assess individual children well to understand and meet their needs. She also asked if there are sets of indicators in each domain that communicate well to policymakers. Mr. Bruner noted that the Approaches to Learning had a “common sense feel” that communicates well with policymakers. Ms. Flynn said that personal accounts with real children’s stories often help tell the full story of why investments are critical.

Ruth Flynn

In Missouri in the 1990’s, the Parents As Teachers Program was well-established in school districts. Every child had the opportunity for voluntary developmental screenings through this program. In the mid-90’s the state formed an early childhood interagency team with representation from Education, Health, Mental Health and Social Services (Head Start was later added). This served as a model for future state collaboration.

After the formation of the interagency team, the governor pulled together a commission for early care and education. This commission made several recommendations, including appointing a committee to look at observational assessment methods. This is how the School Entry Assessment Project (SEAP) began.

The assessment is done by teachers. Teachers are given a one day training to learn how to use the assessment tool. The measures fall primarily into Sharon Lynn Kagan’s “bucket one” of what children know and can do. A parent survey (with a 90% return rate) includes some “bucket two” indicators such as health insurance coverage, immunizations, health screenings, reading at home, etc. One of the criticisms of the parent survey is that parents may not always have enough information to answer a question well (e.g. the quality of their child’s child care setting).

During the first year of SEAP, the project assessed 3,500 kids in about 80 schools. Teachers needed to be convinced that observational methods were a viable method of assessing children. One of the interesting results after the first year of SEAP was that teachers found the information not only useful for assessment purposes but also as helpful talking points during parent conferences.

Information gathered in the SEAP is used in different ways:

- to help answer the question “What do children need to know when they enter school?”.
- as a point of reference as the state further develops pre-kindergarten standards.

- to influence early childhood policy.
- as a measurement tool for the school readiness indicator list.

Future steps include formally linking the assessment with state learning standards and finding ways to look at data on local levels rather than only statewide.

Questions and comments:

Patricia de Cos (California) asked if there was a process to build in a way of assessing ready schools. Ms. Flynn said there were no plans for that at this time. However, Vermont has a model that could be used in the future. Ms. de Cos also shared a concern that observations depend heavily on individual's perception. Do teachers performing the assessment have training in early childhood development? How does the assessment account for human bias? Ms. Flynn agreed that observations have a human component. The teachers do have early childhood certification. The one day training is short, but it does focus on the objective criteria of the assessment. Mr. Bruner added that the criteria for any observational assessment must be as clear and objective as possible.

Elizabeth Burke Bryant (Rhode Island) asked whether assessment results were tracked at the individual child level. This data could be used to track a children's history and look at how specific investments (such as child care) are paying off. Ms. Flynn thought this would also be a good next step.

Susan Wilson (Connecticut) if any states are looking at "buckets 2-4" with their assessments. Ms. Flynn said that the parent survey gets at that information. Mr. Bruner said that Vermont has good models for collecting that data. Karen Finn (FinnCORE) said that the work Maryland does includes bucket 2 indicators.

Cindy D'Ercole (Kansas) asked about strategies that work well when policymakers need to be pushed with data. Ms. Flynn said that it has been done successfully in the past. Deborah Scott (Missouri) added that it is instrumental to have some kind of a baseline comparison, such as "ready" versus "unready."

Kim Townley

Kentucky Governor Paul Patton, chair of NGA, has an interest in closing the school performance gap. He understands that this work necessarily includes early childhood. The newly formed early childhood task force will take on this work.

Early childhood experts will meet in December 2002 to clarify definitions of school readiness. The task force will then look closely at developmentally appropriate assessments for young children. A report will be released in Summer 2003.

With so many new governors entering office in 2003, NGA will continue its tradition of informing the work of the School Readiness Indicators Initiative.

State Policy Presentations: New Jersey and Arkansas' Pre-K Models

Nancy Sconyers
Senior Policy Analyst
Association for Children of New Jersey

www.acnj.org

Lorraine Cooke
Public Policy Chair
New Jersey Association for the Education of Young Children
<http://community.nj.com/cc/njaeyc>

Kathy Stegall
Program Administrator
Arkansas Department of Human Services
www.state.ar.us/dhs/homepage.html

Amy Rossi
Executive Director
Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families
www.aradvocates.org

New Jersey

Nancy Sconyers gave a historical context of the Supreme Court decision which resulted in the state preschool program. The court case, *Abbot v. Burke*, used the link between early learning and school success to address issues of financing and adequacy of education for children ages 3-16. The case directed that funding be made available for quality comprehensive preschool programs and that they are equitable between high and low income communities. The program now includes 32 districts mandated to provide publicly funded pre-kindergarten programs. Ms. Sconyers continued saying that the challenge at this point is to make the link to child outcomes and indicators.

Lorraine Cooke explained some of the nuts and bolts of the program statewide, including accomplishments and challenges. Enrollment and waiting lists for the New Jersey program go through the school districts with 70% of services actually provided by community based organizations. Program funding goes from the state to the districts and then on to the agencies providing services. Funding levels vary according to the level of services provided to the child and is often supplemented by funding from the state department of human services.

In order to participate, all teachers had to get a specialized certificate. Scholarships were made available to complete the certificate requirements and 80% of the teachers in the community based organizations have met this requirement. Other requirements of the program include: class sizes under 15 children, use of an approved curriculum, and access to social, health and dental services for families. There have been major

improvements in the salaries of pre-kindergarten teachers in the districts as a result of their participation in the program as well as better access to transportation for families, increased field trips, and improved communication between school districts and community-based preschool providers. Finally, the formation of a coalition of all individuals concerned with early education in the state is now working toward expanding the program so that universal pre-kindergarten will be in all districts in the state in the

future. For more information on this coalition, contact Ceil Zalkind, Executive Director of the Association for Children of New Jersey (p: 973-643-3876, f: 973-643-9153, e: czalkind@acnj.org).

Arkansas

Amy Rossi reported on the movement to create improved quality among public pre-kindergarten programs in Arkansas. Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families was brought in as a facilitator for the conversation of improving quality in the early childhood community. The goal was to come up with a vision of what quality pre-kindergarten looked like in order to go to the legislature with a concrete quality improvement plan. Major points brought up in the process included the need for professional development and the lack of funding streams to cover these costs. The coalition successfully focused on beer tax as a way to raise revenue to improve quality. The early childhood community was able to pull together their constituency to back the proposal and to fight off attempts to divert the new tax revenue to other parts of the budget within the Department of Education.

Kathy Stegall reported on the necessary restructuring of early childhood programming in the state to improve quality. Some of the methods used in Arkansas to improve quality include:

- Increases in salaries for teachers working for community based organizations.
- Adding funds for the provision of fringe benefits including vacation days.
- Including line items for professional development.
- Deciding on a list of pre-approved curriculum tied to developmentally appropriate practices.
- Decreases in the teacher/student ratio.
- Developing ways to continue to work with new providers around quality improvement.
- Producing parent guides which include early learning standards.
- Working on issues around transition.

As the beer tax fades out after one year, there will need to be another legislative push in order for this program to continue to be funded.

Reflections: Where Are We Now and Where Are We Going?

Catherine Walsh (Rhode Island) made the following announcements:

- The Fourth National Meeting will be in May 2003. We will be hosted by the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation in Kansas City, Missouri.

- Our next Residency Roundtable will focus on the domains of Cognition and Approaches to Learning. It will be held in March 2003 in Phoenix. We would be happy to hear any suggestions for presenters or session topics.
- Suggested Residency Roundtable topics: Ready schools, kindergarten assessment, and birth to three issues.
- We will provide participants with more information on the Casey Foundation's *Policy Counts* initiative as it becomes available. To see the initiative's concept paper and a review of the Children Ready for School results, see section 10.

Virginia da Mota (Rhode Island) suggested a need for more discussion on issues of language acquisition. We need to make more links between early education and English language learners.

Phil Baimas (Massachusetts) proposed another indicator worth studying: quality of transitions. Information is often not passed between settings. The system is fragmented for children and families.

Susan Wilson (Connecticut) said that Connecticut is implementing a student database. Certain parts of the database will be uploaded to the state Department of Education. They would like to include data on children ages 0-5. She would be interested in hearing from states doing similar work. Ms. Walsh suggested using the School Readiness Indicators Initiative listserv for networking.

David Murphey (Vermont) said that Susan Bales and Phil Sparks shared wonderful communications strategies. How can we access technical assistance on this? Ms. Walsh instructed him to email a technical assistance proposal to Royce Conner at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT.