

PROCEEDINGS OF THE FIFTH NATIONAL MEETING

School Readiness Indicators Initiative: Making Progress for Young Children

The Boston Marriott Long Wharf Hotel
Boston, Massachusetts

December 2nd – 4th, 2003

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 Fifth National Meeting of the 17-state School Readiness Indicators Initiative to use child well-being indicators to improve school readiness and ensure early school success. Over the first two and a half years of the Initiative, states have worked individually and collectively to develop comprehensive sets of measures to monitor the physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and economic well-being of young children. Between this meeting and the final national meeting of this initiative in May of 2004, states will select a set of indicators that reflect state policy goals and state investments in programs and policies for young children and families as well as child outcomes. States will also put in place communications strategies to share their selected set of indicators with policymakers, opinion leaders, and the public in order to improve school readiness in their states

Meeting Objectives:

- To share state strategies and plans for the final six months of the initiative, including ideas for written indicator products, progress in collecting and analyzing data, communication strategies for the release of school readiness indicators, and plans to continue to build an early childhood agenda in the state.
- To explore and develop policy strategies for early childhood programs and systems.
- To consider information from the Birth to Three Indicators Residency Roundtable as states develop their set of school readiness indicators.
- To highlight data successes and to share ideas for solving data challenges in critical policy areas.

- To provide opportunities for participants to meet in state and cross-state teams to apply information from experts and initiative colleagues to their own state work.

Tuesday, December 2, 2003

Welcome and Opening Remarks: “Putting the Pieces Together”

Elizabeth Burke Bryant
Executive Director
Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

Ms Burke Bryant welcomed the participants to the Fifth National Meeting of the School Readiness Indicators Initiative. She stated that the meeting was the most important to date because it would be spent giving life to the indicators by crafting them into a policy agenda. Indicators need the meaning and context of a policy agenda to have an impact.

She explained that the meeting would be spent examining the intersection between Indicators, Policy and Communications. This will be a working meeting that will provide speakers and peer-to-peer interaction to help your team plan for the next six months. You will work with your teams to plan how to package your indicators, how to release them at a high profile event and how to work with your state agency and community colleagues to make the indicators stick.

The state team coordinators introduced their teams and our national colleagues and SECPTAN partners introduced themselves.

Orientation to the Meeting

Jolie Pillsbury
Facilitator

Ms. Pillsbury introduced herself and described her role. She noted that this meeting is one away from a crescendo and the agenda was carefully crafted to make it as useful as possible. She encouraged the participants to fill out their evaluation forms and turn them in. She then described the agenda for the meeting.

Findings from the Birth to Three Residency Roundtable

Theresa Hancock
Policy Associate
Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

Ms. Hancock provided an overview of the Birth to Three School Readiness Residency Roundtable. She summarized the presentations and reviewed a selection of the prioritized indicators that were developed.

Ms. Hancock’s presentation “Residency Roundtable: Birth to Three” is attached.

Questions and Comments

Sue Wilson (Connecticut) noted that one item sticks out from Joan Lombardi’s presentation at the Birth to Three Residency Roundtable: if we take babies out of the mix, we get a very different look at early care and get on the road to cognitive development very quickly. The

presenters at the Roundtable also stressed the predictive nature of indicators. We do not always have to measure the exact domains as much as look at constellation of indicators that let us know a child is on the right trajectory.

From Neurons to Neighborhoods: What Policymakers Should Know About Child Development

Jack Shonkoff, M.D.
Dean of The Heller School for Social Policy and Management
Brandeis University

Dr. Jack Shonkoff is an experienced pediatrician, researcher and professor with a long history of contributions in the national public policy arena. Dr. Shonkoff reflected on the major highlights and recommendations from the groundbreaking report, *Neurons to Neighborhoods*. He shared insights into the progress and challenges in early childhood policy since this groundbreaking report was released by the Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development of the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine. The convergence of advancing scientific knowledge and changing circumstances for young children and their families calls for a fundamental reexamination of the nation's responses to the needs of young children and their families, many of which were formulated several decades ago and revised only incrementally since then. It demands that scientists, policy makers, business and community leaders, practitioners and parents work together to sustain policies and practices that are effective and to generate new strategies to replace those that are not achieving their objectives.

Ann Segal, President of Action Strategies, introduced Mr. Shonkoff. She noted that when she met Mr. Shonkoff, he was working on issues for children with disabilities, and knew that what happened in doctor's offices was only a small part of what effected children. Ms. Segal described her work with Mr. Shonkoff during the early 1990s as the concept for *Neurons to Neighborhoods* was developed. During a brainstorming session with Lee Schorr, Deborah Phillips, and Julie Richards about what would be valuable for the field, they came to the conclusion that a document that tied research to policy and practice and was simple enough for policymakers and practitioners to use would be best. After becoming Chair of the Children, Youth and Families Board the National Academies of Science, Mr. Shonkoff was able to develop support for the concept. *Neurons to Neighborhoods* was born in 2000. This extremely valuable tool became the bible. It is not just a research anthology, but goes the extra step to translate into policy and practice.

Mr. Shonkoff's presentation "From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development" is attached.

Major Points

Putting *Neurons to Neighborhoods* into Context

The mid-1960s was the start of a revolution. There was an explosion of knowledge in neurobiology and the behavioral and social sciences. The basic concept hasn't changed, but more empirical knowledge and better understanding of how to make linkages across the system have changed our perspective.

There were marked transformations in the social and economic circumstances under which families are raising young children. We had increasing knowledge about children with

disabilities and the systemic discrimination and social exclusion that existed for children of color. Increasingly, a high school diploma was not enough to raise a family and there were increasing numbers of single-parent families and families with both parents working.

At present, there is an unacceptably wide gap between what we have learned and what we do to promote healthy development in early childhood.

Take-Home Messages

The traditional nature versus nurture debate is simplistic and scientifically obsolete. At this point, we all agree that the two cannot be separated. The final nail in the coffin of the debate was the molecular biology work of the Human Genome Project. After that work was completed, we knew that the functions of DNA were influenced by environment. When evaluating research on this subject, the litmus test is peer-reviewed journals.

Environmental influences clearly affect brain development, beginning well before birth and continuing long into adulthood. Some early childhood people are not interested in the science of brain development, but they should be because the brain is actually changing as a result of experience. Because development occurs on a continuum, we should not attempt to segment the developmental agenda by age. There is no evidence that any single period is the “critical period” for development, including birth to three. Instead, we should use the term “sensitive period”. When development lags, there is some ability to catch up, but the plasticity and adaptability of the brain decreases with age. We should remember that much of the opportunity for development is over at birth; that 0-3 is the period of most rapid brain development; and some additional development can occur in middle childhood and adolescence.

Early intervention programs can improve the odds for vulnerable children, but those that work are rarely simple, inexpensive, or easy to implement. Problems with quality often arise when programs attempt to scale up, due to lack of training and resources. Early intervention services must tailor their approach and intensity to the specific problems of the client. For example, a home visit by a well-meaning, but poorly trained person will not be effective for a mother with depression.

How young children feel is as important as how they think, and how they are treated is as important as what they are taught, particularly with regard to their readiness to succeed in school. The implication of this fact is that we cannot focus on cognitive development to the exclusion of social-emotional development. We must draw from the rich, deep science we have on children’s social-emotional development to develop effective services.

Healthy early development depends on nurturing and dependable relationships. We need to pay attention to both environment and experience. The important factors are quality and stability of relationships, whether with parents, other family members, neighbors, or day care providers. As a result, staff turnover in child care has negative effect on healthy development.

Culture influences all aspects of early development through child-rearing beliefs and practices. In a monoculture, cultural difference in child-rearing are invisible; in multi-cultural environments, the difference becomes visible. Studies show that there is no basis for a hierarchical ranking of different practices. No method is better than another because child-rearing is all about socialization. In the United States, independence and autonomy are the dominant modes. Other cultures promote interconnectedness instead. Culture is constantly changing between generations, making it a moving target.

There is no scientific evidence that special “stimulation” activities, beyond normal growth-promoting experiences, lead to “advanced” brain development. Brain research has nothing to offer in terms of producing “super smart kids”. It has focused on deprivation rather than stimulation. When brain research is made public before it is fully developed and understood, we see things like right-brain and left-brain classrooms in elementary schools or the Mozart Effect.

Substantial scientific evidence indicates that poor nutrition, infections, neurotoxins, and chronic stress can harm the developing brain. We have a substantial agenda of prevention. Good prenatal care and economic security may do more for school readiness than interventions such as tutoring.

Significant parental mental health problems, substance abuse, and family violence impose heavy developmental burdens on young children. Treatment and intervention for parents results in improved outcomes for children.

Implications for Policy and Practice

If we really want to secure a promising economic, social, and political future for our country, then we must enhance the value of our investments in early childhood development. Central to a prudent investment strategy is a well balanced portfolio that combines effective supports for parents and a serious commitment to expanded training and enhanced compensation for non-family providers of early care and education. We cannot get into the trap of individual versus societal responsibility. We need effective supports for families as well as better training and compensation for early care providers.

If we really want to enhance children's readiness to succeed in school, then we must pay as much attention to their emotional health and social competence as we do to their cognitive abilities and academic skills. Early literacy is clearly important, but knowing the alphabet is not enough if you can't sit still or control your temper in the classroom. We face an uphill battle in the political arena, where powerful forces are promoting cognition and literacy. We need to base our arguments in the research and take social-emotional development from a family issue to a public issue.

If we really want to break the cycle of intergenerational dependence on public assistance, then we must measure the success of welfare reform beyond its impact on labor force participation. A significant number of working mothers with young children still have incomes below the poverty level, and research indicates that early childhood poverty is a strong predictor of later academic difficulties and failure to complete high school. Welfare reform was implemented during an economic boom, and even then, 1/3 of welfare recipients were not better off economically and 1/3 were worse off. We can take advantage of knowing which welfare recipients have difficulty maintaining employment because of mental health problems, domestic violence or substance abuse, by identifying their children as very high risk.

If we really want to reduce the economic, political, and social costs of violent crime, then we must confront its early roots. Effective treatments are available for young children who have been victimized by abuse, neglect, or early exposure to violence, yet most of these emotionally traumatized and extremely vulnerable youngsters receive little or no professional mental health services. We do not have a bad children's mental health system or a broken one, we simply don't have one. We can make a difference if we connect the mandated reporting system to mandated early intervention screening and mandated Part C services.

If we really want to support families and promote healthy adult-child relationships, then we must create more viable choices for working parents. Much can be learned from other

industrialized nations that provide both subsidized parental leave for those who wish to stay at home with their babies and affordable, decent quality, early care and education for the children of those who choose or are compelled to return to work.

Interactions Among Science, Policy, and Practice Demand Dramatic Rethinking

- Need for substantial commitment to workforce development to assure delivery of knowledge-based services.
- Need to confront the indefensible fragmentation of early childhood policies and programs.
- Need to change the politicized context of program evaluation which results in a high stakes environment that undermines quality improvement. At this point, the field is being hurt by the lack of high quality evaluation. We need to get beyond collecting data to prove our programs have a positive impact and begin to use research to identify gaps and prioritize.

Urgent Need for a New Public Dialogue

- Moving beyond blaming parents, communities, business, or government. We know that there are some things only a family can do (nurture children, provide socialization) and some things only the government can do (eliminate poverty, enforce standards in early care programs).
- Rethinking the appropriate balance between individual (private) and shared (public) responsibility for children.

Imperative to Move Beyond Four Non-Productive Polarizations

- Nature versus nurture-it's both.
- Cognition/literacy versus social and emotional development-it's both.
- Family versus government responsibility for children-it's both.
- Moral obligation versus economic investment-it's both.

Compelling Search for Common Ground

- Need for a broad-based approach to early childhood policies and programs that is guided by the complementary contributions of science, values, and economic value.

Questions and Comments

Suzanne Johnson (Virginia) asked about dealing with legislators who do not believe scientific data that is not based in state research. How would you respond in a political environment where legislators do not think science from North Carolina is valid in Virginia? At the same time, the Governor is claiming big gains for minute changes in policy.

Mr. Shonkoff responded that scientists always say more research is needed, because they never have to make a decision, but policymakers have to decide. When determining whether existing research can answer new questions, remember that some questions

must be answered locally, but for other questions, it would be wasteful to duplicate existing research. Some studies are generalizable, but contrasts between rural and urban or among racial and ethnic groups often require individualized, specific research.

Charlie Bruner remarked that we are evaluating programs, but not the relationships within those programs. Effective formation and development of relationships between providers and children are the attributes of good programs.

Mr. Shonkoff responded that the relationship issue is a key component in determining whether a program is effective or ineffective, but empirical knowledge about relationships is lacking. The Early Intervention Collaborative Study tried to measure the quality of the relationship between service providers and clients, but didn't get variability. Measurement technology and expense are important limitations on measuring relationships.

Ann Segal noted that funders are sometimes faced with outcomes that weren't expected or desired. For example, in the Comprehensive Child Development Center Program, both the control and experimental groups received poor services, even after tweaking the variables.

Mr. Shonkoff replied that the important thing is to learn something. In this particular study, we learned that the criteria were bad. Three encounters in the first two years was considered enrolled.

Valerie Ricker (Maine) commented on the issue of doing more research. She said that it is difficult to get policymakers to evaluate programs. For example, it was very difficult to convince them to include an evaluation component in Home Visiting, even though it doubles as quality improvement.

Mr. Shonkoff replied that, in the political environment, a good anecdote trumps a study. As a result, we cannot count on science to make the case for policymakers. Instead, we can use the science to figure out how to maximize our investments.

Sue Wilson (Connecticut) asked what policymakers mean when they talk about accountability. They seem to think that increased testing will tell them what they want to know.

Mr. Shonkoff replied that, if people like a policy, they don't require accountability. If they don't like a policy, they demand accountability as a defense maneuver. The field developed with evaluation as an enemy and data can be interpreted to show good results or bad results. For example, Part H passed in 1986 in one session due to the efforts of disability advocates, despite the Department of Education lobbying against it. Advocates used the Perry Preschool study to justify early intervention services, but may have overstretched or over promised what those services could produce.

Ruth Solomon (Arizona) stated that she has been a legislator for 14 years and has chaired the budget committee. In her experience, state data is critical, even when national data is available. In addition, even if she loved a program, she demanded evaluation which sometimes led to midcourse corrections in programs.

Mr. Shonkoff acknowledged her point, but noted that some data collections is expensive, difficult, and time consuming, and therefore hard to do across states.

Ms. Solomon also asked about the science on resiliency.

Mr. Shonkoff replied that there is a huge amount of resiliency data from studies of war zones, poverty, and serious illness. Two dimensions have emerged as critical to resiliency. First, children with a certain temperament, positive, easy going, adaptive, intelligent, do better than kids without it. Second, children with strong relationships with caring adults, whether it is a parent, coach, or teacher do better.

Lisa Klein noted that some of the people in the room have been doing this work since the 1960s. What are the 1 or 2 key take away messages for them? What should this group of policymakers and advocates do so that we are not here 30 years from now?

Mr. Shonkoff gave three suggestions.

- It is a question of implementing the knowledge we already have. We are not using what we already know. We need to confront the unevenness in implementation.
- Workforce development is a problem. We need to figure out how to recruit, train and keep people to effectively implement programs that we know work.
- Evaluation is also very important. Forty years of research shows that short term gains on specific developmental measures fade out over time and do not have a long lasting impact on larger issues such as grade retention and high school graduation, teen pregnancy, special education, and employment. We are trying to milk out small difference in cognitive, language or other measures when the important changes that programs make are in a child's trajectory.

Catherine Walsh (Rhode Island) asked about the impact of poverty on child development and school readiness.

Mr. Shonkoff responded that the science base does not tell us much about poverty. There is no question that poverty is a huge predictor, but we cannot pinpoint exactly what about poverty leads to bad outcomes. *If policymakers ask what about poverty leads to risk, we can tell them that we know poverty has impacts on nutrition, family stress, parental stress, and untreated mental health problems, all of which show linkage to poor outcomes.*

Wednesday, December 3, 2003

Technical Assistance

**Charles Bruner, Child and Family Policy Center
Theresa Hancock, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
Jessica McMaken, Education Commission of the States**

Mr. Bruner reported on the Finance and Kindergarten Assessment meetings sponsored by the State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network (SECPTAN) and highlighted new SECPTAN products. Ms. Hancock shared technical assistance opportunities to support the work of the School Readiness Indicator states. Ms. McMaken discussed the Education Commission of the States' conference call series on No Child Left Behind.

Mr. Bruner's presentation "From Indicators to Policy: A Framework and Resources for School Readiness" is attached.

Major Points

The School Readiness Equation:
Parents Ready for Children
Systems Ready for Children
Schools Ready for Children
Communities Ready for Children

For parents to be ready for children, they need general parenting information (public information campaigns), universally available support (Parents as Teachers) and Focused services and supports for first time and vulnerable parents (Healthy Families, Home Visiting, and Family Resource Centers).

A variety of community systems must be ready for children as well:

- Family Leave Provisions
- Economic Supports
- Early Care and Education
- Health Care
- Early Intervention
- Child Welfare
- Mental Health

For communities to be ready for children, they need to address public and environmental safety, early childhood infrastructure, transportation, and special supports for disinvested neighborhoods.

For schools to be ready for children, they must develop transition plans and services, school-community partnerships and coordination with other systems.

Relevant SECPTAN Publications (available at www.finebynine.org) include:

- *Child Welfare and School Readiness*
- *Health Care and School Readiness*
- *School Readiness Policy and Budgeting: Template for Collecting Baseline Information*

Questions and Comments

Phil Baimas (Massachusetts) asked for suggestions on getting the health care community connected to early care and education.

Mr. Bruner responded that there has been tremendous movement around that issue through nurses made available through federal and state incentives and support. They provide outreach on health care issues and train providers on how to identify health issues and run a healthy child care center.

Sue Wilson (Connecticut) states that her team struggles with system coordination. The big issue is how to make systems work for children and families. It requires assessments, transitions, sharing of information, and cross-training. How can we approach that in a more productive way to tease out the big issues?

Mr. Bruner responded that, his experience is that beleaguered systems have trouble collaborating and collaboration needs to happen at all levels of an agency. People can collaborate or coordinate at the top of a system, but it does not mean anything lower down. In order to get systems to share resources, we need people at both the policy level and the frontline practice level. It should be a diffusion model rather than imposition by rule or regulation.

Ms. Wilson also noted that The Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems grants that all states have received attempt to bring silos together. As a result, coordination issues will become even more important. She remarked that, in her experience with state agencies, you should get the middle folks to get it because they have the most longevity. People at the top and the bottom are constantly churning, so they must be reeducated.

David Murphey (Vermont) said that he liked Mr. Bruner's equation for school readiness, but it had a few gaps. The parents ready for children section should address wanted/intended children, so should include something on family planning. Schools ready for children needs to address instructional practices and staff development

Sue Werley (Wisconsin) wondered if there are any states that have policies on coordination between the state and local levels.

Mr Bruner responded that a number of states have developed local collaboration structures. The type of direction and support the local structures receive is critical to their success. Local collaboratives that have developed more integrated systems have created synergy across systems statewide.

Phil Baimas (Massachusetts) noted that we often do a bad job of bringing pilots to scale, and it is especially difficult when resources are scarce in tough budget times. Should we serve a few children well or many children poorly?

Mr. Bruner responded that the Perry Preschool project cost \$13,000 per student annually. We are not funding programs anywhere near that level, but we still use the Perry research on return on investment. When striving to implement a model program, we need to remember that even if we cannot hire a full complement of staff that has passion, dedication and commitment, we must be sure that at least the management team has those qualities.

Yasmine Daniel (New Jersey) noted that there is a great deal of confusion in the field between assessment and screening. In New Jersey, we are trying to integrate Head Start and Pre-Kindergarten. Head Start requires evaluation 3 times each year based on outcomes, in addition to a state assessment and a local school district assessment, which may or may not be developmentally appropriate. The assessments are not linked to continuous improvement, and as a result, detract from the learning process rather than contribute to it. She suggested focusing on assessment coordination at the state level.

Theresa Hancock, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

Major Points

Ms. Hancock stated that after an assessment of the remaining School Readiness Indicators Initiative Technical Assistance budget, states may request up to \$20,000 each for assistance in their work on indicators and communications. She noted that she would be available during the rest of the meeting for questions.

Questions and Comments

Sue Wilson (Connecticut) asked whether the funding could be used for cash, staff time, or a combination of both. Ms. Hancock responded that the grants would be flexible and designated to specific projects that support each state's policy, indicators and communications strategy.

Jessica McMaken, Education Commission of the States

Major Points

Ms. McMaken described a series of conference calls that would address No Child Left Behind's impact on the school readiness community and facilitate a proactive response. Initial topics included Adequate Yearly Progress, professional development, and literacy. She asked for additional suggestions for call topics and feedback on what states are already doing about No Child Left Behind.

Making It Stick: Communications Strategies for Policy Change

Elizabeth Burke Bryant
Executive Director
Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

Ms. Bryant shared her thoughts on how to connect school readiness indicators to state policy agenda, how to package information, and how to release the states' School Readiness Indicators Initiative work with the most impact. A facilitated discussion exploring how to effectively use communications strategies to make progress in moving an early childhood agenda in the states followed.

Major Points

Ms. Bryant told the participants that the session was meant to be interactive to share ideas about how the triad of indicators, policy and communications is playing out in all of our states.

The first question is what do you care about enough to measure and track? Then you must determine whether it is measurable. Indicators that are important as well as measurable can become a policy agenda, but you still need a communications strategy to be able to talk about the data with your governor and legislature.

In Rhode Island, we try to shape indicators that make people think about real kids. When we approached childhood lead poisoning, we wanted to craft an indicator that went beyond the numbers to create an image. Instead of simply reporting children poisoned each year, we framed the indicator as “Children Entering Kindergarten with a History of Lead Poisoning”. As a result, when we reported that 40% of children in Providence were entering kindergarten with lead poisoning, legislators could envision 10 children at the kindergarten door and 4 of them damaged. It connected the statistics to real kids and real futures.

In another example, we were working on child care capacity at the same time welfare reform was happening. To make the case for funding to increase the number of slots, we compared the number of children in families receiving welfare to the total number of child care slots in the state. We showed that even if every child care slot in the state went to a child whose mother was transitioning off welfare, there still would not be enough slots to allow welfare reform to succeed. As a result, the development of the Starting Right bill began with very compelling imagery.

It can be very exciting to think about all of the possibilities for indicators, but remember, less is better. People can only focus on so many things at once, so indicators must be used strategically. Think about what measure is most important for the policy change you want to make.

Sometimes I get confused because we are working on so many different levels at once. I remind myself that outcomes are the goals at the top, indicators describe whether you are reaching your goal, and programs are tools to make the indicators go in the right direction to get to the outcomes. One major reason to keep it straight and keep work in spherical compartments, is that you have to be clear on categorizing levels of school readiness and grouping indicators under outcomes when you talk with legislators or state department heads. Then you can talk about real kids, real achievements and real policy changes.

From the beginning, the School Readiness Indicators Initiative has included a communications component. Now, states are on a glide path to May when we will share our indicators and products with the group. As you put the finishing touches on your products, policy agenda and communications strategy, here are a few things to keep in mind:

Be ready for showtime.

Our messages are important and we must ensure that they are not lost among all of the other ideas competing for the attention of policymakers. Our messages must have compelling packaging so that people will want to pick up our products and read them. I stole the idea of giant pictures of children from Hillary Clinton’s Child Care Summit, and they have been very useful for evoking the images we want in people’s minds as we present our data.

You can’t be too lofty.

I think of events as the Academy Awards. It is OK to be bigger than your britches, to get the Governor and senators to come, and to make it like an unveiling. That's what makes your event and your product newsworthy.

Work inside-outside.

Be a connector between state departments and advocacy groups. Perhaps assist an agency that needs outside help with meeting planning or offer to convene a group of providers for a focus group with state department leaders.

Cultivate relationships with a few reporters who get it.

Find media contacts that understand the issues and are willing to use your lofty language and images of what we want for our children. I once used the term "clarion call for action" with a reporter and it made it into the paper.

Questions and Comments

Suzanne Johnson (Virginia) focused on the words "our indicators". She said that Virginia's school readiness indicators cannot just belong to one organization, the Kids Count grantee. They must belong to the Governor and have his buy-in because he is releasing them. She mentioned that her team is currently dealing with the communications staff in the Governor's office that is not familiar with the field, so they must make compromises.

Phil Baimas (Massachusetts) noted that one of the movers behind Massachusetts' indicators is the coordination issue. In a recent victory, the school readiness team got the secretaries of all of the relevant state departments to sign off on school readiness and an initial thirty indicators. The indicators have been billed as a "starting point" and have brought everyone to a common threshold so we can move forward on the issue. The chief strength of this indicator project is its alignment of state agencies with the school readiness missions of the public and private agencies.

Kerrie Ocasio (New Jersey) said that her team had pared down its indicator list and then sent it to John Love at Mathematica to get a research perspective on the strongest indicators. They are trying to get the list down to 15 or 20 indicators that are moveable and measurable. It is challenging because some of the best predictors are not measurable or cannot be moved. We need to work on communicating about that disconnect.

Fran Basche (Massachusetts) suggested including the meaning of the data at the local level in a school readiness communications plan. She suggested having local data ready for state people to distribute.

Peter Antal (New Hampshire) mentioned that his team is dealing with a withdrawal of support for school readiness. Two years ago, a state-wide school readiness effort nearly passed. It had the Governor's support, the Kids Cabinet's support and backing from a wide variety of partners. It did not pass, and now the state has a new governor and the Kids Cabinet has disbanded. In New Hampshire, there is a big emphasis on local control and no taxation. The

school readiness team is changing the environment by doing local site visits and providing local data.

Sue Wilson (Connecticut) noted that the discussion was very timely. Her team has struggled with their authority to create a set of indicators and a policy agenda for the state. The team has come up with a wishy-washy way to find homes for indicators. The Kids Count book will add some early childhood indicators and Maternal and Family Health will own some indicators. It seems that they are creating a new table with every new initiative.

Lisa Klein said that she really appreciates the discussion of multiple levels. She noted that each state has its own policy climate and the indicators will be different in each state. However, a core set will evolve and all of the participating states are contributing to that core. She suggested that states use a doable/reasonable test when selecting indicators. They should ask whether there is data on an issue and whether there is political momentum on an issue. Although picking an indicator means leaving something else out, school readiness is a dynamic issue that will change over time. The important thing to consider now is what has traction.

Charlie Bruner said that he is very enthusiastic about this process. He has already begun showing off Arizona's product and looks forward to the other 16. When information on school readiness is put into a publication, it is no longer "soft". It then becomes real and important. He also said that he liked Ms. Bryant's example of powerful language and suggested using the terms "opportunity" and crisis to get others invested. When they are invested in the problem, you can offer a solution and ask for their backing. We have to think about different messages for different groups. School readiness is a medical issue, a cost issue, or a No Child Left Behind issue, depending on the audience. The indicators and data presented should be tailored to the audience as well.

Suzanne Johnson (Virginia) said that she appreciated the discussion about having two sets of indicators. She thinks it is important to look at trends, even on additional indicators.

Cheryl Mitchell (Vermont) mentioned that she is interested in the possibility of using websites to get the data out. In Vermont, they send a letter to each of the local communities that presents the data as well as the story behind it, and discusses trends, what is improving and what needs work.

Judy Walruff (Arizona) mentioned that the state school readiness board is looking at the early education issue to determine what needs to be done. Indicators and the domain framework will be part of that process.

State Team Time

States used the time to make continued progress on identifying policy goals, selecting indicators, identifying data sources and shaping a communication strategy for their School Readiness Indicators product.

Turning Data into Policy: Doing What It Takes To Get It Right for Kids

Christine Ferguson

**Commissioner of Public Health and Interim Commissioner of Health Care and Policy
Massachusetts Department of Health and Human Services**

Ms. Ferguson shared her candid views on how to build an early childhood system, including her perspectives on the use of data in policymaking and on doing what it takes to get it right for kids. Commissioner Ferguson has more than 20 years experience in health care policy and administration at both the state and federal levels. She has had an influential role in system building from many vantage points – as Senior Staff to U.S. Senator John Chafee, as Director of the Rhode Island Department of Human Services and currently as Commissioner of Public Health in Massachusetts. Her work has influenced many child-serving systems, and she has been nationally recognized for her leadership in both health care and child care.

Major Points

Cultural competence works both ways. We are trained to be culturally sensitive to whatever group is in power. The power structure is predominantly white, male, over 50, middle class, and grew up with a stay at home mom.

In order to reach this group, to be culturally sensitive to them, we need to frame our arguments in terms of economic impact. For example, instead of saying that investing in child care is good for children’s development, say that investing in child care allows poor mothers to go to work.

We also need to think about separating various populations for communications purposes. We will be much more successful if we advocate for benefits for the working poor separately from benefits for groups considered “undeserving”, such as substance abusers. It may not be politically correct to think that way, but the power structure does. Talking about what they are interested in is cultural competence.

One example of translating data for an audience is inter-birth intervals. Inter-birth intervals are the gaps between births. Mothers and babies are healthier when intervals are longer, at least 18 months. When Rhode Island women using Medicaid were switched to managed care, it only took 18 months for the gap between the length of their inter-birth intervals and those of middle class women with private health insurance to close almost entirely. The women were healthier, their children were healthier, and some of them even decided not to have another child. We translated this data into economic savings and argued that when health care is equalized, women make the same good choices. That argument helped save RIte Care.

In this environment, when everything is at risk due to budget problems, there is nothing more important for advocates than using the data strategically. Sometimes the first step is getting the data to begin with. Then, you must extract the three or four points that are most critical to your case. Being culturally sensitive to the power brokers means putting the data into bite-sized pieces for them.

The logical extension of economic arguments during tough budget times is efficiency. We cannot ask for more money before showing that what we already received was efficiently spent.

Questions and Comments

Joyce Cussimano (Kansas) asked whether the medical homes in managed care ensured that women had access to birth control. Did that have an effect on inter-birth intervals?

Ms. Ferguson replied that the provision of birth control was definitely a factor. In addition improved prenatal care provided contact with a physician for 9 months. During that time, women could establish a relationship with the nurse or doctor, which led to the increased use of birth control, which for many women, involved standing up to their partner.

Kerrie Ocasio (New Jersey) asked for advice on packaging the message. She wondered if there are any red flag phrases that should not be used.

Ms. Ferguson replied that it is not only critical to be culturally sensitive to racial and economic differences among legislators and policymakers, but to geographic differences as well. For example, legislators from western Massachusetts think differently than those from eastern Massachusetts, even if they are both Hispanic. Make sure that you keep the data local.

Case Study: North Carolina Smart Start

Karen Ponder
Executive Director
North Carolina Partnership for Children

Donna Bryant
Senior Scientist and Associate Director
Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

North Carolina's Smart Start program is a premier example of a decade's worth of state investment in early childhood development. It combines several key principles of importance to the School Readiness Indicators Initiative: a clear policy agenda, effective use of data, and a sophisticated communications strategy. Ms. Karen Ponder and Ms. Donna Bryant presented a case study that highlights successes, lessons learned, and possibilities for the future which was followed by a facilitated discussion. For more information, go to www.smartstart-nc.org.

Karen Ponder, North Carolina Partnership for Children

Ms. Ponder's presentation "Smart Start: Building Brighter Futures" is attached.

Major Points

Smart Start's vision is: every child in North Carolina will arrive at school healthy and ready for success.

In 1993, when Smart Start began, economic, health, and educational outcomes for children and families were dire. In response, Governor Jim Hunt created Smart Start, a planning and funding initiative made up of 82 public-private partnerships focused on linking local decision-making to outcomes for young children. The public-private partnerships have generally included businesses. The Initiative became a movement throughout the state and involved key leaders from every community.

The key concepts of Smart Start include:

- A comprehensive approach
- Local flexibility and design
- Integrated, high-quality services
- Family involvement at all levels
- Public-private partnerships

A focus of the Smart Start collaboration was “Bringing Everyone to the Table”. Partnerships included representatives from business, community colleges, libraries, child care, mental health, city and county governments, Head Start, the Department of Social Services, schools, the Health Department, and churches. A board was created in each community that consisted of agency heads and individuals with connections to other funding sources.

Since its inception, Smart Start has faced numerous political challenges. Because it was Governor Hunt’s first priority, it was the opposing party’s number one target. In addition, there were significant changes in legislative leadership and a new Governor. As a result of work by advocates, a new bipartisan leadership group has been created in the legislature and the new governor is on board.

Smart Start has employed Performance Standards for the Early Childhood System. The Performance Standards set a minimum standard for each county; sets a high performing standard, which is tied to incentives; uses statewide databases, and sets mandatory requirements and optional requirements. The programs do not self-report on the standards, so policymakers cannot question the results.

The components of the Performance Standards include administration, family support, health, and child care/education. In administration, agencies are highly accountable for public funds and must have a clean audit. Family Support is the most challenging area because there were no standard databases. The Standards started with subsidies and the program is now trying to measure post-intervention behavior. Health involves the early identification of children with special needs and decreasing lead poisoning. Child care and education focuses on quality ratings and teacher credentials.

The Smart Start initiative has resulted in many positive outcomes. Early education teachers are better educated and receive higher salaries. The number of high quality programs has increased and children receiving subsidies are more likely to be in those programs. Usage of primary health care and developmental needs are being identified earlier.

Ms. Ponder recommends beginning with a vision and bringing accountability into the program’s design. She suggests creating a legislative strategy that includes business leaders as well as parents and recognizing that programs can become very politically charged.

Donna Bryant, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute

Ms. Bryant's presentation "Evaluating Smart Start" is attached.

Major Points

From 1993-2003, the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute was the evaluator of Smart Start. Budget cuts have made evaluation a low priority item, so the evaluations will not continue. Ten years of data may be enough, but there is concern that ceasing evaluation will harm the program in the future.

At the beginning of the evaluation process, a theory of change model was developed to guide the evaluation. It clearly stated all expected outcomes, including short-, medium- and long-term, and linked the process to outcomes.

The theories of change underlying Smart Start were implicit from the conversations that occurred as the program was developed. Early evaluation focused on documenting the achievement of short-term goals, including:

- Better child care
- Better family functioning
- More children taking advantage of a greater array of health services
- More and different people involved in making decisions about the provision of services

Long-term changes which were measured later included more "ready" children at age 5; healthier children at school entry; and coordinated service systems that strengthen children and families.

It is important to measure and track service counts. Even though counts are not outcomes, they can still tell the taxpayer how many were served. Because outcomes take time to change, service counts are especially significant in the beginning of an implementation process. Service counts are also important when you do have outcome change because they allow you to make the link between increased services and better outcomes.

During the evaluation process, child care quality ratings were changed from an A/AA system to a multi-tiered system. The additional information the new system provided allowed evaluators to find that participation in Smart Start was correlated with higher program quality. These findings were used to advocate for increased funding for Smart Start.

Researchers used qualitative studies to find out why Smart Start participation improved program quality. Qualitative questions focused on how quality was improved, which activities were effective, and how technical assistance factored in. They found that there was no magic bullet for improving program quality, that many factors were involved. The qualitative results were not very useful to policymakers, but very helpful to the programs.

The collection of various types of data, indicators, service counts, and qualitative information, complemented each other and created a full picture of the Smart start program.

A study of Smart Star participation's influence on skills at kindergarten entry showed that participation was highly predictive of the acquisition of several skills that were predictors of school success, including receptive language, book awareness and knowledge, and applied math skills.

Lessons Learned from the Smart Start evaluation include:

- Keep expectations reasonable. Do not oversell your program

- One study will not answer all of you questions about the program.
- Acknowledge outside experts.
- Objectively report your findings. Stretching data will result in a loss of credibility.
- Learn to produce short, flashy reports.

Questions and Comments

Dianne Jenkins (Wisconsin) asked how Ms. Bryant learned to translate research findings into short, flashy publications.

Ms. Bryant responded that she took the core numerical values and translated them into sentences. For example “Being in a high quality childcare setting makes a difference in a child’s readiness for school.” Ms. Ponder added that having a researcher do the translating is helpful to gain credibility for the data as “research” and to protect the advocates from saying something wrong.

Lisa Roy (Colorado) asked how much intervention a child needs to see results.

Ms. Bryant responded that their research did not address that question, but it is helpful to make whatever families choose higher in quality. Ms. Ponder noted that they had mixed results on whether a half day or full day was better.

Suzanne Johnson (Virginia) asked how critical Jim Hunt’s knowledge was to Smart Start’s success. Virginia is looking at doing Smart Start in a less expensive version and they need to know how important governor buy-in is.

Ms. Ponder responded that the governor was very critical in increasing funding from \$20 million to \$220 million. Governor Hunt came around to early childhood after being an education leader in his first two terms. When he asked why his interventions were not working, teachers told him the children were not ready to learn. Now we are seeding both parties’ gubernatorial candidates.

Elizabeth Burke Bryant (Rhode Island) asked about the effects of the five star rating system.

Ms. Ponder remarked that they were very glad they instituted a more sophisticated system because it gave parents more information. All of the licenses that were issued had five stars, so parents could see the scale, but the stars were only colored in according to the setting’s rating. The improvement in quality would not have happened without the incentives that were put in place and working before Smart Start began. After the incentives were institutionalized, standards could be raised.

Cheryl Mitchell (Vermont) asked who does the rating and how often it takes place.

Ms Bryant responded that settings are rated every three years by an independent university.

Ann Segal related her experience in South Carolina where they have a four star system. She was shocked to find that many low quality settings expected to receive 4 stars. They need a great deal of education on what quality consists of.

Ms. Ponder agreed and suggested that technical assistance education on quality was very important. In North Carolina, they also give providers US environmental rating scales as a guide before the raters arrive.

Thabiti Anyabwile asked the presenters to talk about the two or three best policy solutions in Smart Start.

Donna Bryant answered that in the beginning, Smart Start funded a broad array of work. It may have been better to start more narrowly with quality child care, but that would have been tougher to sell to policymakers. Karen Ponder added that developing new public-private partnerships was critical. Many argued that it would be beneficial to rely on an existing organization that already had infrastructure in place, but the governor insisted that the work could not be owned by the community if there was a lead agency.

Peter Antal (New Hampshire) noted that the overall state policy requires assessment. In some places, state policy is broad enough for local entities to set their own goals and establish their own programs.

State Team Time: A Treasure Hunt for Early Childhood Policies that Promote School Readiness

This session provided an opportunity for participants to work within their state teams to consider the specific policy options contained in the set of *Policy Matters' Discussion Papers*, with particular attention to those that are relevant to their state's early childhood policy agenda. The work was an important preparation for a deeper presentation on policy options held on Thursday morning.

Judy Walruff (Arizona) reported that her group found a lot of things that looked familiar:

- align policies with No Child Left Behind
- provide incentives for managed care providers to meet EPDST screening requirements
- decrease unemployment rates
- perform a domestic violence risk assessment on all incidents
- provide affordable safe housing (city/county incentives, tax incentives)
- employers with less than 50 staff provide family leave
- provide paid family leave
- create work incentives for adult education by blending funding streams

The Kansas team reported that they found two policy indicators around quality, one with articulation agreements. They also liked loan forgiveness after a certain number of years teaching. They also highlighted oral health care and policies to encourage dentist to serve children 0-3 or 0-5 and increasing the Medicaid patients doctors will see.

Kathy Thornburg reported that the Missouri team favored indicators around dentist, maximize EDPST, CHP/ MEDICAID, etc. One indicator they did not find was decreasing the number of training clock hours per day and using funds to hold 2-3 day workshops instead. The team also picked developing a coordinating board for child policy.

Evie Hudak (Colorado) noted that her team discussed how a recent Supreme Court ruling making vouchers unconstitutional will effect her team's policy indicators. They also looked at economic success and agreed that they are important, even though not many are being measured now.

The Maine team identified policies that reinforced their indicators. Ended with two groups. Looked at lead poisoning and abatement – have an indicator around lead levels and have program to remediate areas when children test positive. Program looking at when more than one home visit a year. They noted that many of the policies in the Healthy Families logic model are already being addressed in their state. In child care, they chose to look at staff salary, including parity and skill-based/certification bonuses.

The Wisconsin team had reviewed the school readiness policy publications at a recent meeting and assessed each policy. They have an early care and education state coordinating body in place. Certain low-income, low-performing schools have class size limits. Officially, the Fetal Alcohol Syndrome rate is < 1%, but unofficially it is much higher, so they are looking at mental health and substance abuse parity for mothers. In addition, they want free and reduced price lunches to abide by nutritional requirements.

The California team noted that most of the policy indicators they chose spin off of school readiness indicators they are developing. They chose requirements for primary care physicians to do child development screenings and parental mental health screenings at every well-baby visit. In addition, they favored increasing access to dental care for children under 6, developing a process to provide quality incentives to early care and education providers, and developing standards of care for EPSDT providers.

The Rhode Island team said that they looked at the logic model and how it aligns outcomes, indicators and state policy. They focused on mental health services for children and focused on parity and collocating mental health providers at primary health care sites.

The Vermont team focused on a few specific policies:

- improve child care quality through a star rating system
- develop a comprehensive process for construction/renovation of child care facilities
- make the reimbursement schools get for providing pre-K services more equitable
- implement a uniform screen for maternal depression
- inform parents that they can refuse inappropriate assessments

The Massachusetts team chose:

- mandate coordination for more comprehensive services

- link early detection of developmental problems to specialized care
- make connections between pediatricians, mental health providers, and the early care community
- provide staff development and retention incentives, such as tuition forgiveness and loan forgiveness.

The Connecticut team decided that the best way to measure quality is through accreditation evaluation, rather than reading into licensing standards

Thursday, December 4, 2003

Policy Development Strategies

Thabiti Anyabwile
Policy Matters
Center for the Study of Social Policy

Suzanne Clark Johnson
Executive Director
Voices for Virginia's Children

Thabiti Anyabwile, Policy Matters, Center for the Study of Social Policy

Mr. Anyabwile discussed the research base for evaluating and developing state policy goals to improve school readiness. He facilitated a discussion among participants of the set of policy strategies identified by Policy Matters based on work with state policymakers, child advocates, and the research community.

Mr. Anyabwile's presentation "State School Readiness Policy: A Broad View" is attached.

Major Points

"Readiness is understood as a *match* between the readiness (preparedness) of the *child* and the *environments* that serve young children. Thus, the contemporary understanding of readiness acknowledges that the sources of readiness are not only the *child's* emotional, cognitive, linguistic, and social abilities, but also the *contexts* in which children live and interact with adults, teachers, and other community members. "

School readiness includes the five domains of child readiness: physical and motor development, social and emotional, approaches to learning, language development, and cognition and general knowledge. School readiness also involves the contexts affecting family, early care and education settings, school and neighborhoods.

We need to be explicit that kids grow up in families and that is their context. As a result, outcomes and inputs must include ready families.

Ready Family Policy Recommendations

- Health Insurance Coverage: many parents are working but still do not have health insurance. Eligibility levels should be between 200% and 250% of poverty.
- Marriage, 2-Parent and Birth Supports: Birth is a good time to intervene around family formation because there is a high level of optimism and romantic involvement. Home visiting policies can build on that momentum.
- Child Support: Child support can be up to 26% of family income when they receive it. To get child support into family incomes and keep it there, use pass through allowances; disregard child support income in other programs; place caps on arrearages and interest penalties to incentivize non-custodial fathers to enter work force.

- **Minimum Wage:** In many places, a wage of \$22-23 per hour is necessary to afford basic things. For a single parent, it is a huge mountain to climb, even after adding government supports. Minimum wage should be indexed to inflation, de-coupled from the federal standard.
- **Taxes:** Most states have raised regressive taxes rather than income taxes. We should increase the refundability of the Earned Income Tax Credit rather than adding additional credits for food and clothing that can be difficult to compute accurately.
- **Food Security:** States need replacement programs for immigrants who are income-eligible but barred from receiving benefits due to their immigration status.

Ready Early Care and Education Requirements

- **Quality enhancements:** States should implement a quality set-aside and develop reimbursement structures based on quality ratings.
- **Graduated licensing:** The fine gradations in North Carolina's rating system are ideal.
- **Subsidy**
- **Teacher Education & Compensation**

Ready School Recommendations

- **Teacher quality**
- **Teacher location:** Distribute high-quality teachers equitably and provide bonuses and incentives to change the distribution.
- **Elementary and Secondary Funding:** States should target funding to high-poverty schools and provide full funding for nontraditional and charter schools.

Ready Community Recommendations

- **Housing affordability and location:** Encourage vouchers rather than projects-based public housing.
- **Community-Based Mental Health:** Create parity and provide a wide range of services in every community.

Suzanne Clark Johnson, Voices for Virginia's Children

Ms. Johnson shared her work with the new Governor of Virginia to develop a set of policy strategies for young children. She reflected on how the Policy Matters framework can be a resource to state agency staff and child advocates

Major Points

The perfect is the enemy of good.

Separate research from advocacy. For example, the research base of Policy Matters is separate from the value system.

Out of state experts can be extremely valuable in educating and getting buy-in. Have someone from outside the state come in and speak the truth.

We forget the big picture and the structure when we focus on programs.

In Virginia, the governor can only serve one consecutive term, so there is a great deal of turnover. It is essential that the governor understand early childhood and support it, so we worked both sides of the aisle during the last campaign. Fortunately for us, the candidate who understood it best won the election. Unfortunately, no one in his administration understood early childhood. As a result, we got some very strange questions, like what do third grade reading scores have to do with school readiness? The staff had good intentions but no knowledge of the subject. We need the governor's office to "wash" the indicators, so we are sacrificing intellectual purity for his ownership.

We tried to figure out what we needed to move and build so that the next governor would pay attention to early childhood. We decided that the policies needed something to stick to, so we worked on pieces of the big structure. We knew that early childhood messages coming from an advocacy organization would be much weaker than coming from the governor. We also knew that we had to carefully craft our messages about issues that did not talk directly about kids, such as poverty, without sounding like flaming liberals.

Questions and Comments

Elizabeth Burke Bryant (Rhode Island) noted that governors come and go, so states may want to consider developing a school readiness entity that stands apart from the administration. We have broken down regional data in meetings with the business community and had a meeting with a local foundation to discuss early childhood. Continuity through political change can be found in the business community. Advocates need to be organized enough for business people who are not experts in this field.

Charlie Bruner cautioned the group not to let a lack of proof prevent implementation of programs. In addition, states can do a lot without legislation. For example, we know that EPSDT and Part C have tremendous capacity to address the most vulnerable kids. States can beef up those services through changes at the administrative and practice levels.

Mr. Anyabwile responded that, in the real world, practice matters. He agreed that there are numerous federal policies with tremendous opportunities. In terms of Policy Matters, the bias is toward state policies that are already on the books. The assumption is that there are enough policies on the books to do right by kids.

Suzanne Johnson (Virginia) added that each state has its own challenge. In Virginia, defining quality is an issue. We are able to move on by pointing people to the research to get an objective definition of quality. In addition, we focus on effectiveness at the program level. We try to find out where the dollars are and whether they are being used effectively.

David Illig (California) noted that in his experience, community development involves improving linkages with existing entities, such as redevelopment organization, the CDC and community foundations. For example, around economic security, the minimum wage will

never get to \$22, but we can create linkages between TANF, workforce development, employment agencies, schools, and the unemployment system to address the issue.

Mr. Anyabwile responded that he was not suggesting that the minimum wage should be \$22, but that it is going to be difficult to move most single earners to that level even with government supports.

Fran Basche (Massachusetts) noted that in her state, there is designated funding for school districts to use to promote inclusion and make their programs more inclusive. Some of the funding has been used for early childhood and has helped advance the field through partnerships with community colleges for provider training. In addition, dual certification in early education and special education is required.

Sue Wilson (Connecticut) asked Ms. Johnson about using the business community as a bridge to the new administration. How do you keep the business task force from being overly identified with current governor?

Ms. Johnson replied that in Virginia, the business community is mainly Republican, and the governor is a democrat. Getting quotes from them, not just from democrats, helped make the school readiness issue as bi-partisan as possible.

Cheryl Mitchell (Vermont) noted that in Vermont, the real economic bang is in the tax code, including mortgage interest and tax credits. She wondered if any states have had success embedding supports for low-income workers in the tax code.

Dianne Jenkins (Wisconsin) responded that her state has a generous Earned Income Tax Credit and is working toward a refundable tax credit for early care and education. Carolyn Drugge (Maine) noted that certified child care centers get a double tax credit.

Mr. Anyabwile noted that framing the issue correctly is important when pushing for tax changes in conservative states.

Theresa Hancock (Rhode Island) mentioned that when marriage and 2-parent families were mentioned, she bristled a bit. What are the caveats around framing that issue?

Mr. Anyabwile responded that, on average, research shows that kids with 2 biological married parents do better, so the recommended policies attempt to promote that. Whenever I have this conversation in liberal groups, there is bristling. Why? In too many instances, progressive-liberal folk seem to oppose marriage. When we look at the research, we find that family relationships matter, so we use marriage as a proxy measure for those important relationships. Polling data shows that 90% of people want to be married. Marriage promotion is not about two particular people being forced to marry. Instead, it should be about public education on healthy relationships; behavior-based skill building programs that promote communications and conflict resolution skills and ensuring that state policies do not penalize two-parent families.

Wendell Walker (Ohio) said that he bristled, too, because these conversations often put the onus on the single parent. It is not the mere presence of father that benefits the child, but the quality of the interactions that take place.

Mr. Anyabwile agreed with Mr. Walker's concern about blaming the victim. He stated that when people talk about issue, they need to use a common definition. We need family

supports for all families, but within the broad array there are other possibilities. Father involvement, rather than marriage, is a lever in a number of outcomes. We need to have a more nuanced conversation. Promoting father involvement is important, and marriage is the highest form.

Charlie Bruner stressed that marriage issues will come up when we talk about closing the opportunity gap. In 1964, the Moynihan Report stated that our country was in a crisis because of the breakdown of the Black family. The single parenting rate was 23% and connected to a lack of marriageable males. The single parenting rate among Black families is now 60% and there are more males in prison.

Mr. Anyabwile responded that even before the Moynihan Report, similar changes were predicted on the basis of the movement of Black families from the rural south to the inner city north. The Moynihan Report was contentious, but some would argue that what happens in the Black community is a predictor of trends for the whole society. People marry for many reasons, not all economic. The research shows that men who marry do better economically.

Fran Basche (Massachusetts) noted that the Marriage Family Network Program provides universal support for families with children under 3. The program has been used as part of a match for TANF to draw down funds under the marriage provision. Marriages break up over stress. If we can strengthen families to enjoy parenting, we will probably be supporting relationships.

David Murphey (Vermont) asked how to collect the right data on children's health status at kindergarten entry. We have immunizations data, but it comes from school nurses and there are issues around data quality.

Dianne Jenkins (Wisconsin) suggested looking at health insurance coverage at pre-enrollment. It is a good proxy but does not guarantee that the child has a medical home.

Patricia Flanagan (Rhode Island) mentioned that there is a statewide database called Kids Net, which tracks immunizations, lead poisoning, and other health measures.

Sue Wilson (Connecticut) noted that in her state that data is kept on forms in file cabinets at each school. To access the data, they are considering adding health questions to the school profile report as well as adding health indicators to the student-level data that the Department of Education uploads from school districts three times each year.

Jana Martella (CCSSO) noted that the early childhood section of her organization is working with state agency data directors to develop health indicator data elements in cooperation with the National Center for Education Statistics and welcome any recommendations from participants.

Diane Jenkins (Wisconsin) noted that local control is a barrier to sharing information in her state. She was looking for three key health indicators and asked for suggestions.

Elizabeth Burke Bryant (Rhode Island) suggested using previously undetected vision, hearing, or developmental problems at kindergarten entry, a proxy for medical homes.

Pat Flanagan (Rhode Island) suggested EPSDT participation rates.

Yasmine Daniel (New Jersey) asked whether anyone had analyzed poverty definitions. The Federal Poverty Level is very low.

David Illig (California) suggested looking at living wage studies from the Economic Policy Institute.

Theresa Hancock (Rhode Island) mentioned that the Rhode Island Poverty Institute has developed a standard of need that includes child care, transportation, actual cost of rent, and other factors, which has been a very good communications tool.

Sue Wilson (Connecticut) noted that Connecticut's Permanent Committee on Status of Women has developed a self-sufficiency standard. The state Office of Policy and Management hates it because it takes 350% of the federal poverty level to reach the standard.

Charlie Bruner also suggested looking at the Economic Policy Institute. Their data is broken out by family structures, children's age, and other variables.

Kerrie Ocasio (New Jersey) commented that poverty is a complex question. They have data that accounts for county and age of children. They have also considered using 60% of the state median income, a Department of Human Services estimate that does not include child care or health insurance, and 200% of the federal poverty level.

Thabiti Anyabwile invited the participants to help Policy Matters keep learning how to make this work better. We need a collective sense of core policies and we are trying to pare down the list. Please email me with 4 -6 policy issues that you think are critical to include in the 50 state report. We want to take varying types of families and see how helpful state benefits are for them, so let me know which type of families.

Lunch, Wrap-Up and Next Steps

Jolie Pillsbury, Facilitator

Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

Elizabeth Burke Bryant thanked everyone for coming. She praised their hard work, energy and stick-to-it-ness. She reminded participants that they should not hesitate to contact any of the Rhode Island KIDS COUNT staff members with questions.