

Herr Research Center for Children and Social Policy at Erikson Institute

ILLINOIS' BIRTH TO FIVE EVALUATION PROJECT

Fact Sheet – March 2009

Over the past decade, much attention has been paid to the need for public funding of early education and intervention programs to support the healthy development of children birth to age five and their families. The persistent achievement gap for children from low-income families, coupled with federal and state mandates for educational accountability, have created greater incentives for public programs to provide positive and enriching experiences during the critically formative early years of development. Illinois currently is the only state in the nation that has funds specifically designated for birth-to-three programs, enabling investigation of the full spectrum along the birth-to-prekindergarten continuum. Yet, in a decade when public investments in early childhood education programs have reached an all-time high, the question remains: *How do we know what works, for whom it works, and how it works?* The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG) Evaluation, commonly referred to as Illinois' Birth to Five Evaluation, offers a unique and important opportunity to investigate a number of questions about how best to deliver early childhood services for children birth to age five, and how those services relate to later educational and developmental outcomes. This fact sheet provides details about Illinois' early childhood block grant programs and the Birth to Five Evaluation.

Early Childhood Block Grant Programs

ISBE's Early Childhood Block Grant funds four programs for children birth to age five. The primary objectives of the ECBG initiatives are to improve the school readiness and outcomes of children, support at-risk families, and provide quality early childhood services to reach these goals. These programs are spread across Illinois' 102 counties and are situated within scores of different school districts, community-based organizations, and other entities.

- ***Preschool for All*** programs provide early education opportunities for children between the ages of three and five. Early implementation prioritizes admitting low-income children and those who are determined to be at-risk because of home and community factors, though Preschool for All is intended to expand preschool access to all children in Illinois.
- ***Prekindergarten Program for Children at Risk of Academic Failure*** focuses exclusively on serving children who were identified as being at risk of academic failure. Since 2006, this program operates only on continuing funds. New funding is available only through Preschool for All.
- ***Prevention Initiative*** serves at-risk children from birth to three years and their families, providing early intervention, parent education, and case management services.
- ***Parental Training*** provides parent education for families with children from birth to five years, including prenatal instruction and information. Parental Training is intended for all families in Illinois, and is funded as part of a Preschool for All or Prevention Initiative grant.

About the Birth to Five Evaluation:

Sponsored by ISBE, the purpose of this three-year evaluation is to examine aspects of ECBG program access, quality, and outcomes, focusing on several **key research questions**:

- What are the characteristics of the participating children, programs, and staff?
- What services are provided and what is the level and range of service quality across programs?
- Do programs produce the expected outcomes, and how are program and staff characteristics related to these outcomes?
- What are the relationships among participation rates, level and range of services, and child outcomes across 0-3 and 3-5 programs?

Data sources that may be used over the course of this multi-year study may include public documents, state-wide program surveys, stakeholder interviews, site visits, teacher interviews, and child and family surveys.

Contact Information:

The evaluation is led by Eboni C. Howard, director of the Herr Research Center for Children and Social Policy at Erikson Institute. Donna Spiker leads work related to this project for SRI International, Inc., subcontractor on the evaluation. For additional information on the Birth to Five Evaluation please visit the project website at www.erikson.edu/hrc/birth2five. You may also contact Birth to Five Evaluation staff at birth2five@erikson.edu or 312-893-7206.

About the Herr Research Center

The Herr Research Center for Children and Social Policy informs, guides, and supports effective early childhood policy in the Great Lakes region. Unique in its regional approach, the center brings together perspectives from policy and research to promote the well-being of young children from zero to age eight and their families. Our researchers design and conduct original research, evaluations, and analysis. We then channel this knowledge to participants in the policy process to improve the overall effectiveness of programs and policies for young children and their families. The Herr Research Center builds on the work of an applied research center established at Erikson in 1997 with a generous gift from the Jeffrey Herr family. The center expanded its mission in 2005 with additional funding from the Herr family and from the McCormick, Joyce, and Spencer Foundations and the Children's Initiative, a project of the Pritzker Family Foundation.