

Prekindergarten testing could result in setbacks

▪ An expert on early learning cautions instructors about high-stakes tests.

BY GINNIE GRAHAM
World Staff Writer

Oklahoma stands apart nationally in offering prekindergarten to all children and focusing on quality child care, but trying to push testing into the system could cause major setbacks, according to a leading expert on early learning.

"You've got the opportunity in Oklahoma, now we have to see how well the opportunity you've been given is used," Samuel Meisels, president of the Chicago-based Erikson Institute, told a group of nearly 400 early childhood advocates, teachers and professionals on Thursday.

More than 400 people will be attending the International Infant Toddler Conference being held in Tulsa through Saturday at the Doubletree Hotel Downtown. It is hosted by the Child Care Resource Center, which is a program of the Community Service Council.

Meisels has argued against standardized testing of young children and recently completed research on the validity of the Ounce Scale, which is an observational assessment for infants to 3-year-olds and includes their families.

"You need to conduct program evaluations faithful to teaching and learning and not based on the contexts of those used in high-stakes tests," said Meisels, considered a leading authority on evaluating and assessing young children.

Meisels pointed to the failure of the National Reporting System test used from 2002 to 2007 in Head Start programs. Items were timed, had cultural bias and were given only in English and Spanish, although 98 other languages were used by children in various programs nationally.

In explaining observational assessments, Meisels used the example of watching children playing in a sandbox. Teachers can observe a child's skills in cooperation, scientific thinking, mathematics, speech, communication, fine motor and social.

"As you work with kids in

a sandbox or in other parts of the classroom, you can learn their abilities," he said. "In observing, you have to learn how to do it — observe without bias, while in action with a child and how to take yourself away from a child for observation."

Teachers also must have an easy and accessible way to routinely record observations and have a valid method for interpreting the information into an evaluation. States including Pennsylvania, Minnesota and Maryland have implemented effective evaluations, he said.

Other featured speakers during the conference include Carol Brunson Day, CEO of the National Black Child Development Institute; Elsa Chahin, author of several articles on infant and toddler development and certified as a Spanish interpreter and translator; Peter Mangione, co-director of WestEd's Center for Child and Family Studies; and Anna Tardos, director of the Pikler Institute in Budapest, Hungary and a child psychologist.

Ginnie Graham 918-581-8376
ginnie.graham@tulsaworld.com

