

# Children and Social Policy

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## In This Issue

In this issue of *Children and Social Policy* we highlight key messages and conversations from the Herr Research Center's second annual Midwest Policy Conference and provide additional resources for those interested in thinking more about the issues explored there. The conference, held October 4–5, 2007 in Chicago, brought together key early childhood education stakeholders—advocates, local and state agency administrators and officials, nonprofit directors, foundation staff, and program directors—to share information, ideas, and experiences around issues of quality in publicly-funded preschool programs. Erikson president Samuel J. Meisels interviewed David L. Kirp, professor at the University of California at Berkeley and author of *The Sandbox Investment: The Preschool Movement and Kids-First Politics*, in a public book talk and discussion on the eve of the conference. Professor Kirp also presented a keynote lecture on the politics of universal prekindergarten to frame the conference discussions. Additionally, a panel discussion on the challenges and best practices of monitoring quality state-funded programs was led by Lindy Buch, Ph.D., director of the Office of Early Childhood Education and Family Services of the Michigan Department of Education; Jana Martella, executive director of the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE); and Ellen Wolock, Ed.D., director of the Office of Preschool Education in the New Jersey Department of Education. The articles in this newsletter are derived in part from conference transcripts, including an audience question and answer session at its conclusion.

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# Herr Research Center's Work on Early Care and Education

The Herr Research Center staff is actively engaged in several ongoing projects to inform policy decisions about how to best implement high-quality standards in early care and education programs. Examples include the center's oversight and advisory role in the Chicago Program Evaluation Project, the Family Childcare Network Impact study, and the Illinois Birth to Five Evaluation. Our investigations of quality issues in early childhood care and education began with a literature review of how quality is defined and how it is currently being implemented in programs in the Great Lakes region of Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin. Current research addresses questions about which state policies and practices are best suited for implementing proven program quality components as identified in the literature.

The Herr Research Center serves as project monitor and fiscal agent for the Chicago Program Evaluation Project (C-PEP), a system-level evaluation of the largest school- and center-based early care and education programs operated by the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and Chicago Department of Children and Youth Services (CYS). Director Eboni C. Howard and Erikson president Samuel J. Meisels worked with CPS, CYS, and an advisory committee of leaders in the Chicago early childhood community to develop the research

design, lead the selection process for a contractor to implement the evaluation study (won by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.), and oversee the study and dissemination of research results. Throughout this process, the C-PEP team has retained a primary focus on using evaluation results to maintain high-quality standards in all of the city's prekindergarten programs.

Similarly, Herr Research Center assistant research scientist Juliet Bromer has been collaborating with the Local Initiatives Support Coalition (LISC) on a project investigating the impact of family child care support networks on the quality of family child care in the city of Chicago. This study examines the relationship between affiliation with a family child care support organization and quality of care in network-affiliated family child care programs. Few previous studies have investigated specific strategies to improve the quality of care in home-based settings such as family child care.

Finally, the Herr Research Center is conducting a statewide system evaluation of the Illinois Early Childhood programs, including Preschool for All. One of the key research questions guiding the Illinois Birth to Five Evaluation looks at the level and range of program quality across the various programs.

## Acknowledgements

Herr Research Center for Children and Social Policy 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 an additional gift from the Herr family and with grants from the McCormick, Joyce, and Spencer foundations, and the Children's Initiative, a project of the Pritzker Family Foundation.

We thank Samuel J. Meisels for his comments on previous versions of this publication, and Barbara Bowman, Harriet Egertson, and Jacqueline Jones for their contributions to the Q & A article on Implementing, Monitoring, and Funding Quality in Public Pre-K Programs. We also thank Erikson Institute board of trustees president Richard Kiphart and Erikson's Office of Institutional Advancement for their assistance and support in making this conference a success.

Thanks also to the staff at the Chicago Club and The Book Stall of Winnetka.

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## From the Director



**Eboni C. Howard, Ph.D.**  
Director

The focus of this issue of *Children and Social Policy* is on issues of quality in publicly funded prekindergarten programs. The early childhood field agrees that quality matters for education programs to promote positive child development. Yet which aspects of quality are most important? And how do states ensure that quality is assessed and monitored in a way that optimizes the potential for these programs to have positive impacts on children?

Before 1960 only three states had allocated funds for public prekindergarten programs. In the next two decades a few more states followed suit, but it was not until the 1980s that state-funded prekindergarten programs really began to take off and flourish across the nation. Today nearly 40 states and the District of Columbia provide public funds for prekindergarten programs, and many are expanding to serve greater numbers of children. With this push to provide public preschool education, many early childhood stakeholders have reignited questions about program quality as it relates to child outcomes. There is a base of evidence about the influence and effectiveness of high-quality early education programs, but most of the strongest evidence is focused on a few small programs that came into being in the late 1960's. Less is known about how best to effectively design, fund, monitor, and provide high quality public statewide *systems*—not singular, isolated programs—in early care and education.

Ensuring high quality in public, statewide preschool programs is a complex endeavor. In the article beginning on page 4 of this newsletter, **David L. Kirp** cautions that it is easier to “build better and then bigger, than bigger to better.” He argues that we must invest first in developing proven, high-quality programs and then replicate them widely, rather than investing now in reaching greater numbers of children without regard to program quality.

In this newsletter we discuss some of the key challenges in developing high-quality programs including issues around definitions, assessments, and monitoring of quality within and across programs. **Jana Martella**, executive director of the NAECS/SDE and Coordinator of the Council of Chief State School Officers' Early Childhood Consortium on Standards and Assessments starts off by focusing on the national trends in standards and assessment, and ponders the issue of “measuring what matters.” In the article “In Focus” (p. 10), we present a case study on some of the challenges and best practices in implementing high-quality preschool programs, as shared by **Ellen Wolock**, director of New Jersey's Office of Preschool Education; and Lindy Buch, director of the Michigan's Department of Education Office of Early Childhood Education and Family Services.

**Melanie Wiley** and I add to the discourse by examining what is really meant by “quality.” The word is used so often and so often ill-defined that we question if we have the cart before the horse when it comes to implementing and monitoring quality public preschool programs. How can we possibly measure and monitor quality if we cannot clearly define what it is, what is missing, and what aspects are most important as it relates to child outcomes? Erikson Institute emphasizes the importance of placing child development knowledge in the context of family, community, and culture; these contexts must also be considered when defining quality.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. Howard'.

# The Dream of Universal Preschool, or the Nightmare?

By David L. Kirp

There are three major tensions in the political discussion about universal preschool—both in Illinois and throughout the nation. First, for many there remains the question about whether public funds for preschool education should be targeted at programs for those children who will benefit most from them. Advocates of this approach argue that those children having the greatest need for preschool are those who are being raised in poor families and growing up in troubled communities; these are the children who are at greatest academic risk and stand to gain the most benefits from high quality prekindergarten programs. Thus, the argument continues, if resources are focused on this group, a more efficient and socially just program is ensured: we maximize gains and we close the achievement gap among those most in need.

Opponents to this approach argue for universal preschool education that ensures all age-eligible children have equal access to a state-funded preschool program, regardless of academic risk. This option presents a second dilemma: Should states invest resources to expand their reach to meet the needs of all eligible children, or to ensure that existing programs are of the highest quality possible and targeted them at those most in need? This dilemma pits quantity against quality: bigger versus better. A third dilemma is implied by framing these discussions around ensuring children are “ready for school,” which reveals a perceived dichotomy between meeting the needs of preschool-aged children versus those from birth to age three. I discuss each of these dilemmas in greater detail in this article.

## Targeted versus Universal Services

Much of what I describe in *The Sandbox Investment*<sup>1</sup> is set in Chicago, the epicenter of the pre-K movement. For example, an early section of the book describes a very good, half-day, tuition-free class for at-risk kids at a public elementary school on the mid-south side of Chicago. Across the hall, there was a full-day, tuition-based pre-K class, with families paying \$8,000 a year for

their children to attend. Down the hall there were two full-day kindergarten classes. Imagine what would have happened had there been a half-day, free kindergarten class for children who were in trouble and, across the hall, a tuition-based, full-day class for those who could afford it—the Cadillac and the Kia varieties of early education. If the public school model is good enough for five-year-olds, why is it not good enough for four-year-olds?

## Bigger versus Better

The dream of universal preschool really is a dream of the common school—the school that is open to everybody and not just those in greatest need. This same argument characterized the early discourse around public kindergarten several decades earlier; and a century ago, around high school education (there were proposals to create free high schools for paupers). However, given limited public dollars to invest in early childhood programs, this dilemma represents another false dichotomy. The question is not whether to offer preschool education or who gets it, but where to begin to provide it? The typical answer is to begin with communities in greatest need, where preschool programs are relatively scarce, and where the elementary schools are not performing to high standards. After starting with the neediest locals, then the answer is to expand to communities that are not quite so badly off. This model builds in a dynamic: parents in neighboring communities notice these high-quality programs and push for similar opportunities for their own children. This model dictates starting small and then building big, which is much more efficient than starting big and trying to serve everybody. The “start by serving everybody” model is represented by Florida’s approach, characterized in *The Sandbox Investment* as the nightmare program in every way, shape, and form.

It also is much easier politically to start smaller, yet better, and grow the program over time, than it is to start big and try to improve quality once wide-spread. Unfortunately, politicians base program successes on numbers served during their administration, and not on more complex formulas assessing the nuance of program quality. The common political statement is “we added 50,000 children to the pre-K rolls,” as opposed to “we had more teachers with BA degrees and smaller classes

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<sup>1</sup> Kirp, D. L., (2007). *The Sandbox Investment: The Preschool Movement and Kids-First Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

and better curriculum, parent involvement...” because by the time they get to the word “involvement” the audience has gone to sleep. This dilemma therefore is also a false dichotomy. Buy-in from government officials will be easier to obtain for expanding existing programs to more children than for improving services for the few who already receive them. Starting out with small high-quality programs, then, ensures quality will be built-in when the program is expanded, but may not always lead to the political support necessary for expansion. However, West Virginia and Illinois provide good examples of this approach—starting targeted and focused on quality before state-wide expansion.

### Preschool versus Zero-to-Three

One argument forged by pre-K advocates is that 90% of brain growth occurs by the age of five. The zero-to-three advocates claim that the pre-K folks have “hijacked their numbers,” since 80% of brain growth occurs by age three. Hence, yet another false dichotomy is created between concerns for children zero-to-three and three-to-five. One might argue that investing in pre-K—three-to-five—is a pragmatic approach. Pre-K is where the political opportunities are now, based on the argument that investing in preschoolers will ensure all three- and four-year-olds are “ready for school.”<sup>2</sup> Because Washington is largely on board with the notion of getting children ready for school, pushing universal preschool may be an entrée to a “kids-first politics” that would reach backward to younger ages as well.

Kids-first politics is a central focus of *The Sandbox Investment*. That is, the hope or aspiration that the current push for universal preschool represents the

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<sup>2</sup> The “ready for school” premise—or “ready to learn,” as it also is called—presents a risk, however, of creating a “no preschooler left behind” political climate. There is evidence of this already. Parents have internalized the notion of children’s later success being dependent on their being “ready for school,” and thus are demanding that their children learn letters and numbers in preschool. This is true for those parents who are poor or have low income as well as those who are paying \$31,000 annually in pre-K tuition. Although basic academic preparation—i.e., letters and numbers—is important, all children eventually will receive this instruction; preschool should focus largely on purposeful play, health and on the whole child, and getting parents engaged in the process.

beginning of a larger movement to persuade politicians to take the needs of all children seriously. Unfortunately, the classic view from politicians is that children are blobs—that they do not matter in politics because they do not vote and they lack purchasing power. *The Sandbox Investment* offers a detailed argument as to why that conventional wisdom is just wrong. Recently, however, it has become easier to move the political discourse from age four to age three. Illinois led the way in that trend, but other states are following suit. Such a shift has made it easier now to talk about children birth to age three than it was before the preschool movement, and in the most unlikely places. For example, the current governor of Oklahoma campaigned with a plank that included beginning a zero-to-three program and won. The voters in Nebraska voted for a \$10 billion bond issue for a public/private collaboration involving the Ounce of Prevention Fund’s Educare model. Successes such as these are achieved only through transcending the three-to-five vs. zero-to-three dichotomy.

One good example of this approach is provided in the story of North Carolina, under the leadership of Governor Jim Hunt, a hero for kids’ politics who left office with a 75% approval rating. After Hunt left office, the Smart Start program—a statewide initiative to improve access to high-quality care for young children ages zero to five—was flat funded. A new governor came in and said, “Well, what I want to do is create my own program. We’ll call it ‘More at Four,’” which is a pre-K program. From the advocates’ perspective, Hunt opened the door for zero-to-three and gained momentum with Smart Start, which in turn has opened the door for pre-K. More at Four will expand the reach of services started with Smart Start by providing services to more children.

### Concluding Thoughts: The Dream, the Nightmare, the Challenge

The dream is one that we all share, a world in which politicians and taxpayers pay more than lip service to kids and start spending the necessary funds for making America a far better place to grow up. The State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) argument in Washington is a nice example of this, providing a reminder that funding children’s health is not so costly: \$35 billion

dollars over five years to cover health care costs for essentially every child who is uninsured. What an amazing deal. So the dream is that the child care centers built at the Portland Shipyards for mothers in their employ during World War II—this fantastic, full-day model, with great teachers, great programs, and attention to every aspect of kids' lives—that this model could be resuscitated and put in place now. That is the dream.

The nightmare is that public preschool is funded on the cheap, that what is happening in Florida becomes the norm. The nightmare is that, even as the number of children enrolled in publicly funded preschool grows, the amount of money spent per child shrinks. This is what happened last year, according to a report by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER; Barnett, Hustedt, Hawkinson, & Robin, 2006). The implications are that those great promised results of pre-K, as reported in several now-iconic studies—the High/Scope Perry Preschool study, Abecedarian Preschool study, Chicago Child Parent Centers evaluation, and more recently, Tulsa, Oklahoma, pre-K evaluation and the five-state study by NIEER—are not representative of what the world really looks like. The implications are that what most states offer now are poor-quality programs that do not show positive results 10 years down the road. There are grave political consequences for this type of message.

The social conservatives perceive investments in prekindergarten programs as a waste of money, with the insidious implication that the children who are most in need simply cannot be helped.

The challenge, then, is to all stakeholders in the preschool movement—government officials, early care and education providers, advocates—to remain focused on and mobilized around these issues. Get the message out that preschool matters, and the quality of that education matters. In the best of early care and education settings, teachers are working small miracles. There are teachable moments all throughout any given day in their classrooms. In the worst, we might be inclined to believe the children are better off playing in the streets. In Texas, for example, one might witness 35 or 40 children in a pre-K classroom, with just one teacher; no matter how heroic that teacher, there is little opportunity to take advantage of teachable moments in the day. The challenge is to keep applying the pressure on Washington to play the role of junior financial partner in the preschool movement and to ensure that quality standards are built into the programs they offer.

*This article is an edited version of Professor David L. Kirp's plenary remarks at the October 2007 Midwest Policy Conference.*

## Terms Used in This Issue

**Early learning standards** Widely accepted or regulated statements of expectations for children's learning. Learning standards contain both *content standards*—what children should know and be able to do—and *performance standards*—concrete and specific examples of children's knowledge, skills, or competence.

**On-demand assessment** Formal assessment that relies on objectively measuring specific skills, usually out of context. Can reveal how a child's performance compares to that of a normative sample and how well a child is able to perform on a particular set of test items on a specific day or point in time.

**Process elements** Aspects of programs or classrooms that focus on the nature of interactions and experiences of the children in the classroom and the behaviors, activities, and practices that create emotional climate and instructional support. Process elements are generally difficult to measure or regulate. (Also called *dynamic elements*).

**Quality benchmarks** A specific set of program standards, specifying what programs are supposed to deliver, used as a reference for evaluating program quality.

**Standards-based measures** Methods that evaluate systems and students against clear, pre-determined standards, unlike norm-

referenced or other measures that compare systems and students with each other.

**Structural elements** Aspects of programs or classrooms that include space, time, curriculum, group size, teacher/child ratio, etc. Structural elements are generally easy to measure and regulate.

**Work sampling assessments.** A form of informal, curriculum-embedded assessment, within the context of the classroom, in which teachers collect students' work throughout the school year and compare it to standard guidelines. Information from work sampling assessments is intended to help the teacher individualize future instruction.

# Measure What Matters

By Jana Martella

The story of King Solomon should serve as a cautionary tale to those of us serving the interests of children today. The wise king was faced with deciding the fate of a child whom each of two women claimed as hers. Solomon offered the women a sword and said, “Divide the live child in two and give half of it to one, and half of it to the other.” The true mother was the one who would give up the whole child to the other rather than sacrifice its life for her own keeping. The education community also is faced with pressure to “divide the child”: zero to three vs. prekindergarten; child care vs. preschool; birth to five vs. birth to eight; and so on. We must not succumb to these false dichotomies at the expense of serving the whole child.

After one hundred years of virtually universal public education, twenty years of standards-based reform, and more than twenty years of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the nation’s children have demonstrated only nominal improvements in proficiency. Despite the “good news” as claimed by the Department of Education since passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, in the twenty-five years that NAEP has been releasing test score information, fourth-grade reading and math achievement has changed little. One reason for the nominal improvements over the years may be the substantial variation in the quality of instruction provided in schools and classrooms throughout the nation, and not just in early education programs. David Kirp—in *The Sandbox Investment* and in his remarks at the Herr Research Center’s 2nd Annual Midwest Policy Conference—noted that he personally has witnessed marked differences in quality from one prekindergarten classroom to the next, within the same school. Judging from my own experience, the same can be said about the difference from one fourth-grade classroom to the next. Why should we care about these differences? Reiterating Kirp’s message, quality matters in education. Because there is a long-standing, expanding literature about the ways in which quality education matters for children’s

outcomes, this article does not address that issue. Instead, this article focuses on how we can measure quality in early childhood care and education programs, as that matters just as much if not more.

## National Trends in Standards and Assessment

National trends indicate that there have been substantial increases in states’ use of early learning standards as assessed with both child and program measures, as well as in the development of systems for the management and effective utilization of large quantities of relevant data. In 2003, about twenty-five states had established learning standards for prekindergarten programs; today, all 50 states have established standards. Currently, a new wave of standards for programs focused on zero to three is rolling across the country—specifically, 28 states are considering benchmarks and guidelines for infants and toddlers.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, states are increasingly using child measures to assess standards. Four or five years ago, Maryland was the only state known to be conducting

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<sup>1</sup> For review on standards and assessments, see Herr Research Center’s *Children and Social Policy*, Volume 1, Number 1, 2007.

large-scale child measures. They were conducting Work Sampling assessments for every kindergartner in the state. Those numbers are changing gradually. For example, the 10 states I work with in the State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards (SCASS), a project of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), are struggling now with pressure to develop a measure to be used for all children within their programs. National trends indicate similar increases in the use of program measures and data systems development. State education agencies throughout the country are looking at their data repositories and finding ways to align the data that are being collected on children and programs with their early learning standards.

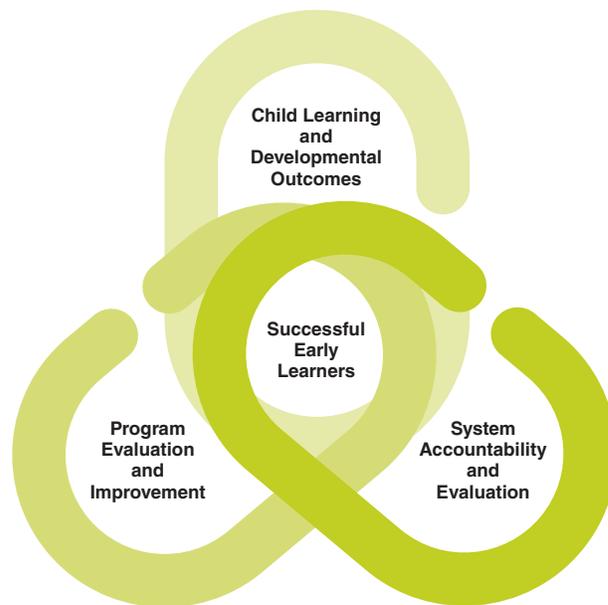
### Measure What Matters

Measure, but measure what matters for quality programs and child well-being. Measuring what matters can buy a lot in ensuring that programs are high quality in terms of facilitating children’s acquisition of knowledge and skills appropriate to their age. The question for many, however, is how to go about measuring in a cost-effective manner. This indeed is a real challenge, but it is important to note that a quick fix—an easy, cheap, off-the-shelf tool—is going to get you just what you pay for. These tools may be helpful by capturing physical elements of a classroom, for example, but educational research has increasingly indicated that many of these measures may not be designed for the purposes for which they are being used—e.g., associating physical elements of a classroom with children’s achievement outcomes. In such cases, the validity and reliability of these measures may be cause for great concern.

Recent research such as the National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL) multi-state study of prekindergarten and some of the work being done by Robert Pianta and his colleagues at the University of Virginia, shows that perhaps what matters most is what happens between the child and the teacher—on the

**Figure 1.**

The “logic model.” From the Council of Chief State School Officers’ State Collaborative on Early Childhood Standards and Assessment. <http://www.ccsso.org/scassecea>



ground and on a daily basis.<sup>2</sup> Numerous instruments for measuring these relationships and processes have emerged in recent years, including but not limited to Pianta’s Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). This is one example of what it takes to measure what really matters for child outcomes. These measures may not be as cost-efficient as, say, the commonly used Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), but it is important that states consider costs and benefits—beyond economics—associated with each approach.

To further ensure that measurement is meaningful, states must also be mindful of how they translate the

<sup>2</sup> See article by Robert Pianta in *Children and Social Policy*, Volume 1, Number 1, 2007.

information they gather to the people for whom they wish to make a difference. For example, how might teachers use information gleaned from assessments to change their practice in the classroom and to make things better for the child? Do children and their parents understand the meaning and intended use of the information that is being gathered from them? Are the policy stakeholders—legislators, administrators, even the private sector business community—clear about the implications of these assessments? The use of a measure should also be guided by the extent to which it can be used to make improvements to program quality.

### Know What is the Matter with Measures

Having stated the importance of measuring what matters—or in other words, what is useful to ensure quality in early education programs—it is important to note that measurement is not infallible. In *Accountability in Early Childhood: No Easy Answers*, Sam Meisels (2006) provides a detailed account of some of the problems. SCASS (2008) discusses why states should assess,

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### Resources

For more tools and information about appropriate assessments for young children from the Council of Chief State School Officers State Collaborative on Student Standards and Assessments for Young Children, visit <http://www.ccsso.org/ECEAssessment>

A New Schools Venture Fund article about how school systems can use data to improve instruction is available at <http://newschools.org/about/publications/achieving-with-data>

National Research Council Committee on Developmental Outcomes and Assessments for Young Children recently published a report, *Early Childhood Assessment: Why, What, and How*, which advises on appropriate use of assessments to inform teaching and improve early childhood programs. Read more at <http://www8.nationalacademies.org/onpinews/newsitem.aspx?RecordID=12446>

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“The use of a measure should also be guided by the extent to which it can be used to make improvements to program quality.”

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technical issues related to early childhood assessment, and describes policy statements made by the State Specialists and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). This is not new information for those working in early care and education fields, but having it available and easily accessible to decisionmakers in early childhood care and education is paramount.

Responding to a query from the Herr Research Center about what topics they were interested in learning more about at their Midwest policy conference, several policy and program administrators indicated they wanted to learn how to conduct assessments “on the cheap.” Michigan and New Jersey provide specific examples of their states’ negotiation of meaningful, effective assessment in the context of limited resources in a later section of this newsletter; but I would urge states to think about this issue systemically. Measurement of quality in early childhood programs must be thought of in totality. Child outcome measures—performance measures and quality measures on the physical classroom environment—are not all that we should be interested in; we also should be considering accountability, professional development, and how to improve programs with the information that we gather. These all are essential components of an assessment system.

*This article is an edited version of Jana Martella’s presentation at the 2007 Midwest Policy Conference.*

# Challenges and Best Practices in Implementing Quality Preschool Programs:

## In Focus with Michigan and New Jersey

By Celina Chatman-Nelson

The articles in this issue of *Children and Social Policy* converge on one basic premise: There is wavering consensus around defining what quality in early childhood education programs is and how it should be measured. Moreover, even when program administrators are able to agree on definitions and measurement tools, they often meet with a host of obstacles to funding, implementing, and monitoring the quality standards they put in place. In this article we focus on programs in Michigan and New Jersey to illustrate some of these challenges and best practices in dealing with them. These issues were cited at the October 2007 second annual Midwest Policy Conference by both Lindy Buch of Michigan's Office of Early Childhood and Family Services and Ellen Wolock of New Jersey's Division of Early Childhood Education in their descriptions of the Michigan School Readiness Program (MSRP) and New Jersey's Abbott Preschool Program, respectively.

### Challenges in Defining, Measuring, Implementing, and Monitoring Quality

What is quality in early childhood education programs? How should it be measured? What tools are available for

measuring quality as it has been defined? These issues are greatly in need of clarification within the field of early childhood education (see *Defining Quality* on p. 15 of this newsletter). Definitions of quality in early childhood care and education programs are difficult to find, yet they are strongly implied in the preschool standards set forth by program administrators. Such is the case with MSRP and Abbott.

Michigan first documented early childhood care and education standards in 1986 in its *Standards of Quality and Curriculum Guidelines for Preschool Programs for Four Year Olds*. The most recent version of this document, the *2005 Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Prekindergarten*, does not offer an explicit definition of quality in preschool programs, but does specify state standards of quality that programs are expected to meet (Michigan State Board of Education 2005). High-quality programs are described within the document as those that start with a statement of their philosophy about why the program exists and what it aims to do, and that meet specified standards across several program functions and objectives (see Table 1). These standards are intended to "provide guidance to all early care and education programs for providing all three- and four-year-old children with opportunities to reach essential

### About Abbott

*Intensive preschool and full-day kindergarten enrichment programs are necessary to reverse the educational disadvantages these children start out with.*

—*Abbott v. Burke (V), 1998*

The Abbott preschool program dates back to 1998, when the state mandated that 30 of its poorest districts provide high-quality preschool services for three- and four-year-olds. "Abbott" in fact refers more broadly to several New Jersey Supreme Court decisions deriving from an initial lawsuit in 1981: *Abbott v. Burke*. Over 300,000

school-age children and 60,000 preschoolers were represented in the case, which challenged the state's public school funding formula on the basis that it discriminated against poor children and led to educational disparities. The court's ruling in *Abbott V (1998)* called for full-day, quality preschool education for all three- and four-year-olds, plus supplemental programs for those students deemed "at risk" on the basis of poverty (the 31 Abbott districts are to receive state aid that would bring their per-pupil expenditures on par with the state's wealthiest districts). Programs were mandated to have at least one certified

teacher and assistant for each class, a maximum of 15 students, and "adequate" facilities. In addition, the programs were to target children living in economically disadvantaged communities and work through the public school districts so as not to supplant existing providers, such as Head Start and private providers. Close to 40,000 students are enrolled in the program, accounting for roughly 70% of all children meeting eligibility requirements. The program is administered by the state of New Jersey Department of Education's Division of Early Childhood Education.

developmental and educational goals” (Michigan State Board of Education 2005, p. 2). In addition, program standards are linked to the state’s early learning expectations for three- and four-year-old children, intended to “help focus” curriculum and instruction.

Similarly, in 2003 the New Jersey Department of Education created the *Abbott Preschool Implementation Guidelines*, originally intended for the Abbott school districts but revised in 2005 to include non-Abbott districts. The guidelines define high-quality programs as those that prepare children “to enter kindergarten with skills and abilities more comparable to those of their wealthier suburban peers” (New Jersey Department of Education Office of Early Childhood Education 2005, p. 7). The state created the Self Assessment Validation System (SAVS; New Jersey Department of Education Office of Early Childhood Education, 2005) as a tool for programs to assess and monitor implementation of the guidelines. The components of the SAVS (see Table 1) are more discrete but overlap almost completely with the standards set forth by Michigan, including the provision of a mission statement. As is the case with Michigan, New Jersey’s quality standards are explicitly linked to early learning expectations.

**Table 1. Program Quality Standards in Michigan and New Jersey**

Michigan	New Jersey
community collaboration and financial support	community collaboration
physical and mental health, nutrition, and safety	health, safety, and food services
staffing and administrative support, professional development	administration
partnership with families	parent involvement
learning environment	curriculum and program
teaching practices	staff qualifications
facilities, materials, and equipment	facilities
child assessment and program evaluation	child assessment and screening
	supporting English language learners
	intervention and support
	inclusion
	transition
	recruitment and outreach
	professional development

### About Michigan School Readiness Program

Michigan School Readiness Program (MSRP) is a program of the Michigan Department of Education Office of Early Childhood Education and Family Services. In 1985, funds allocated by the Department of Education Appropriation Act supported 53 pilot preschool projects serving 8,208 four-year-old children identified as being at risk of school failure. Currently the program provides funds through two streams: a competitive grant program for public or private nonprofit agency providers and state aid for local school districts and public school

academies. To be eligible for funding from the state, programs must demonstrate:

- That all children served possess at least 2 of 25 identified risk factors
- That more than half of the children come from families with low income
- Support of center- and home-based models
- Strong family involvement and/or parent education

State demographic data suggest that 50 to 60% of Michigan’s children would meet eligibility requirements for the program. Of those, approximately 20% of the four-year-old cohort is enrolled in MSRP each year.

Head Start serves approximately 20%, and early childhood special education—Section 619 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)—serves about 10%. Together, these programs come very close to providing publicly funded preschool education to all children who meet the two-risk-factor criteria, perhaps 45 to 48% of young children in Michigan. The program currently serves a total of about 26,000 children each year in 467 school districts and 65 community agencies.

**Table 2. Quality Assessment Tools in Abbott and MSRP**

Level of assessment	MSRP	Abbott
<b>Child</b>	<p>Common examples include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High/Scope Child Observation Record</li> <li>• Creative Curriculum Developmental Checklist</li> <li>• Work Sampling System</li> </ul>	<p>All programs use New Jersey Early Learning Assessment System (ELAS), an ongoing, curriculum-embedded, performance-based assessment including observation and work sampling</p>
	<p>Used in NIEER multi-state evaluation (both New Jersey and Michigan)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT)</li> <li>• Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Achievement</li> <li>• Preschool Comprehensive Test of Phonological and Print Processing (Pre-CTOPPP)</li> </ul>	
<b>Program</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High/Scope Preschool Program Quality Assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R)</li> <li>• Supports for Early Literacy Assessment</li> <li>• Preschool Classroom Mathematics Inventory</li> <li>• Curriculum implementation tools</li> </ul>
<b>District</b>	<p>N/A, but MSRP does include local aggregation of program data</p>	<p>Self-Assessment Validation System (SAVS) across 15 comprehensive areas, assessed at classroom level and then aggregated</p>
<b>State</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-assessed PQA data</li> <li>• Child demographic data</li> <li>• Need and capacity data</li> <li>• Application plans</li> </ul>	<p>Aggregated SAVS data; site visit observations</p>

Both MSRP and Abbott use measurement to monitor and improve programs, guided by their respective quality implementation standards as described above. Both have carefully selected tools and instruments shown by research to be valid and reliable indicators of program and child development characteristics. Many of the tools currently used by both programs were initially implemented for use in evaluating the programs’ effectiveness on child outcomes (see Table 2).

**Funding.** Although New Jersey was recently cited as spending considerably more money per student on preschool than any other state in the country (\$10,494 versus a national average of \$3,642), Wolock still notes that funding issues present obstacles to monitoring program

quality in her state (Barnett, Hustedt, Friedman, Boyd, & Ainsworth, 2007). New Jersey’s situation is unique in that the state is mandated under the Abbott decisions to provide sufficient aid to Abbott districts for bringing their per-pupil spending on par with the state’s wealthiest school districts. The funding formula starts with a base amount for each district as required for meeting minimum standards of adequacy for achieving the state’s learning standards. Districts receive increments of supplemental funding based on the prevalence of risk indicators among its student population, such as developmental risk index or concentration of poverty in the community. The problem is that non-Abbott districts do not receive the same levels of funding as the Abbott districts, so quality preschool for all is not a reality.

Moreover, even in programs for which funding was available, this was not sufficient for ensuring high-quality programs in the absence of necessary infrastructural supports (described in the next section of this article).

Funding issues present obstacles to monitoring program quality in Michigan as well, even though preschool programs are supported through two funding streams from the state's administration for about \$85 million a year total. These funds are administered to sites through formula grants (\$3,400 per child, doubled for full-day programs but with only half the number of slots) based on communities' needs for preschool services and competitive grants to private or public nonprofit agencies and organizations serving children who meet criteria for being at risk for academic failure. Although most of these funds are allotted to the public school districts through the school funding formula, the districts may contract with local providers outside the system to provide the preschool services. Currently, these contractors and the private providers that are funded through the grant program are not required to meet some of the same quality standards (e.g., teacher qualifications) as the public school programs.

**Infrastructure and support.** According to Wolock, New Jersey's problems with infrastructure were manifested mainly in its initial lack of a fiscal monitoring system. When the Abbott program began in the mid 1980s, the funding mechanism was similar to a grant—funds were made available by the state to create a high-quality preschool program that would serve the needs of its young children, but administrators were given little to no direction or limitations for making this happen. As a result, the Office of Early Childhood Education was accused of fiscal mismanagement. A fiscal monitoring system was put in place and subsequently implemented, attenuating any actual or perceived risk of mismanagement. Programs were required to provide the Office of Early Childhood Education with a line-by-line plan for how funds would be allocated, following strict budget guidelines based on required program elements as specified by the state. For example, all programs were required to include line items for classroom materials, a fiscal

specialist, and an early childhood supervisor. Thus, the fiscal monitoring system could also be seen as a first step in ensuring program quality by requiring program budgets to meet some minimum allocation standards.

For Michigan, the lack of infrastructure and support is most evident in the program's low staff capacity for carrying out program monitoring and improvement. Specifically, the state has only three consultants to MSRP; these consultants are charged with providing program quality support to more than 500 grantees under the program. The consultants conduct electronic and on-site monitoring of all grantee sites, with the latter occurring every three years for each grantee (except for programs situated within the public school districts, which do not receive monitoring services at all). To compensate for low staff capacity, Buch's office tries to capitalize on other resources, such as having her staff provide training and technical assistance to grantee agency personnel to carry out monitoring activities on their own; and her office relies on electronic communications, such as web conferencing, to increase efficiency.

### **Best Practices and Lessons Learned**

Given the challenges faced by Michigan and New Jersey in defining, measuring, implementing, and monitoring quality in early childhood care and education programs, what has worked best for these two states? First, careful planning in the initial design phase of a program is important. Administrators must invest a great deal of time and money in thinking through how to ensure programs reach and maintain a high standard of quality. All too often, we are inclined to hit the ground running and invest all available resources in program implementation. This is putting the cart before the horse: Such an approach runs the risk of overlooking important details that may prove detrimental to program effectiveness and success. Important design elements in MSRP included the establishment of early learning standards and plans for an evaluation research study to determine the program's effectiveness. Similarly, in New Jersey the Abbott program initiatives were largely built in from the beginning as a result of the mandate, which provided the

foundation for establishing implementation guidelines and program quality standards.

Second, both Michigan and New Jersey credit the careful and strategic use of evaluation data in their program improvement efforts. Program evaluation is sometimes seen by program administrators as an enemy, based on concerns that negative data can be interpreted as evidence that the program is ineffective. In fact, however, results of program evaluation studies can be useful in determining why and how some program features work and others do not, and help inform plans for fixing what does not work and improving what already does. Both programs collected data at multiple levels and over time: child, classroom or program, and district and/or state. By collecting child-level data over time, the states are able to assess improvement in children's outcomes and link these and other changes to their participation in the program. Collecting child- and classroom-level data allows comparison of the effectiveness of teacher and classroom characteristics such as teacher practices and classroom physical environment, respectively. Data aggregated at the district and state level allow comparison across districts and states, and can help to elucidate differences based on community characteristics such as population demographics (e.g., poverty index) and safety of physical environment. Both Michigan and New Jersey also participated in the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) multi-state evaluation study of prekindergarten programs in the United States (Barnett, Lamy, & Jung, 2005).

### **Ensuring Quality as Preschool Programs Expand**

As momentum for universal preschool continues to build throughout the nation, pressure for states to create new programs or expand existing ones also continues to mount. This mounting pressure might redirect emphasis of state officials' and administrators' efforts on expanding reach—or increasing the number of children served by the state's programs—at potential costs to implementing and monitoring quality. Both New Jersey and Michigan have plans in place to ensure quality as they continue to build their programs. New Jersey will extend services outside the Abbot districts and support kindergarten and later grades, enhance supports for English language learners and children identified as having special needs, and develop better relationships with its providers by emphasizing partnership rather than compliance. Michigan will focus on improving infrastructure and support, encouraging all state-funded programs to implement a standard Quality Rating and Improvement System based on use of the preschool Program Quality Assessment, a statewide system for training and certifying early childhood educators and administrators, and a statewide data collection system. In both states, quality assurance remains at the forefront of these efforts, as both expansion and improvement will be guided by their respective implementation guidelines and relevant evaluation results.

*This article is based in large part on panel presentations and discussions by Lindy Buch and Ellen Wolock at the October 2007 Midwest Policy Conference.*

# Defining Quality

In this section we briefly review the definition of quality related to state-funded preschool education, including a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses inherent in the common definitions. We also offer recommendations to the early childhood field about how to strengthen our approaches to defining and implementing quality in publicly-funded preschool.

By Eboni C. Howard and Melanie Wiley

In the early childhood field we often hear such phrases as “high quality preschool helps prepare children for kindergarten,” “investing in high quality pre-K yields significant returns,” and “children who attend high-quality pre-K programs perform better in school and throughout life.” Though these statements are illustrative of the common discourse about early childhood programs, conversations about preschool are rarely deliberate or specific about what the term “quality” means. To continue to expand and improve these programs, we must thoughtfully consider what is meant by high-quality programming, and how to define, implement, and evaluate the elements of quality in the context of today’s state-funded preschools.

## How We Define Quality

In addressing the issue of how to define quality, it may help to revisit the original programs from which many definitions of quality have been derived—the Carolina Abecedarian Project, the Perry Preschool Project, and the Chicago Child-Parent Centers (see Table 1). These “Big Three” programs are considered to be the standard of preschool effectiveness research by empirically demonstrating the causal connection between program inputs and child outcomes. As such, these programs have established the basis of how we think about high quality practice in publicly-funded preschool programs.

In recognizing the way these programs have shaped our idea of quality we must also consider their relevance

in the context of today’s system. Today’s publicly-funded preschool programs are often drastically different than those of the original Big Three—with large administrative systems, multi-ethnic and linguistic populations, multiple types of schools and program sites, or limited funding. They face the growing challenge of a high-stakes accountability environment that has focused our attention narrowly on school readiness skills rather than on more comprehensive child factors and family services. Although the Big Three programs provide a useful starting point, these contextual differences make it important for us to think beyond the Big Three and critically examine what high-quality should mean in the current climate of publicly-funded preschool programs.

Another common basis for defining quality considers two key dimensions of preschool programs—structural elements and process (or dynamic) elements (see Table 2). Structural elements are those aspects of a program or classroom that include space, time, group size, and teacher-to-child ratio, teacher education, and health and safety regulations—the physical attributes of the environment or discrete teacher characteristics (Barbarin et al., 2006).<sup>1</sup> These factors are commonly regulated by state or local licensing requirements (as cited in Pianta et al., 2005, p. 146). Process elements, on the other hand, are aspects of the classroom that focus on the nature of children’s interactions and experiences, activities available to the children, and personal care routines (Cryer, 1999). These elements are inherently difficult to regulate, and vary widely by classroom and teacher.

The distinction between structural and process features of quality is useful in that it provides guidance for program operation, funding decisions, professional development activities, regulation setting, and program comparison. The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) has taken the lead in this area, developing a set of quality benchmarks for comparing and

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<sup>1</sup> These are the most common structural elements discussed in the literature. However, other structural elements that are debated as being important include teachers’ salaries, standard use of curriculum, early learning standards, screening/referral and support services, meals, and monitoring (Barnett, Hustedt, Friedman, Boyd, & Ainsworth, 2007).

**Table 1. Characteristics of the “Big Three” Model Preschool Programs**

Characteristics	Abecedarian	Perry	Child-Parent Centers
<b>Number of sites</b>	1	1	24
<b>Total number of children served</b>	111	123	1,539
<b>Cost per child per year*</b>	\$13,362	\$8,540	\$4,637
<b>Ages served</b>	6 weeks to 5 years	3- and 4-year-olds	3- and 4-year-olds
<b>Program length</b>	8 hours, 5 days	2.5 hours, 5 days	3 hours, 5 days
<b>Program duration</b>	50 weeks, 5 years	30 weeks, 2 years	41 weeks, 2 years
<b>Maximum class size</b>	12	13	17
<b>Teacher-to-child ratio</b>	1:6	1:6.5	1:8.5
<b>Teacher qualifications</b>	B.A., M.A. or demonstrated skills and competencies	B.A. + elementary and special education certification or better	B.A. + early childhood certification or better
<b>Curriculum</b>	Child-centered learning games and experiences	High/Scope**	Emphasis on basic math and literacy skills through mix of teacher-directed whole-class instruction and small-group activities
<b>Parent involvement</b>	N/A	Weekly home visits + parent group meetings	Parents were required to participate one-half day per week in the center***.

\*This In year 2000 dollars discounted at 3% annually (Schweinhart, et al., 2005).

\*\*The High/Scope curriculum emphasizes adult-child interaction, and hands-on experiences. It emphasizes children’s experimenting and problem-solving skills.

\*\*\*Parent involvement activities included parents serving as classroom aides, tutoring children, performing clerical tasks, accompanying classes on field trips, interacting with other parents in the center’s parent resource room, participating in reading groups with other parents, attending school meetings and programs, participating in educational workshops, doing craft projects for use in the school or at home, and taking trips to the library with teachers or their children. (Reynolds, 1994, p. 790).

*Note.* From “Increasing the effectiveness of preschool programs,” by D. J. Ackerman and W. S. Barnett, 2006, *National Institute for Early Education Research, Policy Brief 11*, p. 3. by the National Institute for Early Education Research. Adapted with permission. From “Lifetime effects: The High/Scope Perry Preschool study through age 40,” by L. J. Schweinhart, J. Montie, Z. Xiang, W. S. Barnett, C. R. Belfield, and M. Nores, 2005, *Monographs of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation*, 14, p. 16. Copyright 2005 by High/Scope Educational Research Foundation. Adapted with permission.

assessing state-funded pre-K programs.<sup>2</sup> However, as Pianta, et al. (2005) say,

Nearly all state legislation aimed at ensuring access and equity to high-quality prekindergarten programs relies on structural features of programs or teacher characteristics as the primary targets of regulation (NCES, 2003). It is assumed that if certain features of programs (e.g., ratios, teacher credentials, wages) meet certain thresholds (e.g., teachers with a bachelor’s degree, ratios below 16:1, improved salaries) then the program will be of sufficient quality to have the desired positive effect on children’s readiness for school. (p. 146)

This is true because the structural features of a program are those easiest to measure. As a field, we have yet to determine if the assumed indication of quality is justified.

### What is Flawed in Our Definition?

One of the biggest weaknesses in the discourse on quality is that the field of early childhood education has not had a thoughtful discussion about the current components of quality and their impact on the lives of children. Quality is defined by the components it includes; yet like the concept of quality itself, many of these components are undefined or not well understood. For example, though professionals agree that a quality preschool program includes parent involvement, their definitions of parent involvement—especially in publicly-funded preschool programs—can vary substantially in different locations and classrooms. Even with clearly defined structural components of a program (e.g., maximum class size of 20 children), it is unclear to what extent these factors actually affect child outcomes or are valuable in today’s preschool contexts. Defining quality is more than just listing what it includes. We also need to discuss and determine the meaning of individual components of quality.

<sup>2</sup> Since 2003, the NIEER has published the State Preschool Yearbook, an annual report that compares standards for state-funded pre-K programs against a set of quality benchmarks.

**Table 2. Key Components of Quality as Defined by Structural and Process Features**

<b>Structural Features</b> <i>Physical Attributes</i>	<b>Process Features</b> <i>Practices and Activities</i>
Class size	Teacher sensitivity in teacher-child interactions
Teacher-to-child ratio	Teachers use of responsive language with children, providing reassurance and encouragement
Educational level of teaching staff	Instructional support in the classroom
Professional development for teaching staff	Classroom management, establishing a predictable and structured classroom
Length of program	Classroom materials provide children with a variety of learning experiences
Building safety regulations	Parent involvement

Additionally, not all aspects of quality conform to a one-size-fits-all approach. Quality is abstract and subjective and it holds different meanings for different people. We must consider how parents perceive quality and how their perceptions compare with those of educators, policymakers, and researchers. Research suggests that parents view quality very differently than the typical policymaker or educator—that, in addition to what happens in the classroom, parents consider factors such as comprehensive services for families, location, and hours of operation in their definition of a high-quality program. A program’s ability to meet the unique need of the families it serves (e.g. transportation, extended hours, convenient location, and multi-lingual services) also needs to be part of our consideration of quality.

It is unlikely in today’s fiscal climate that any state preschool program will have the resources to fund every component deemed important for quality. Many states now face the task of creating or maintaining quality preschool programs with severely limited funding. The average state preschool expense per child in the 2006-

2007 school year was \$3,642—significantly less than any of the Big Three programs (Barnett, Hustedt, Friedman, Boyd, & Ainsworth, 2007). We should thoughtfully consider how to coordinate and collaborate with other entities—health care and child care in particular—to deliberately and meaningfully provide a comprehensive preschool experience in low funding situations, as well as determining empirically which components of quality have the most significant impact on child outcomes.

### Next Steps

The number of state preschool programs (and access to them) is rapidly expanding, with states continuing to emphasize the quality and effectiveness of their programs. The problem is we still lack a solid and agreed upon operational definition of what high quality means for different communities, families, and children. Unfortunately, we have little empirical evidence to help zero in on those aspects of quality that matter most for different types of community-, family- or child-level outcomes. As a field, it is time to bring to the table the

question, “What do we want quality to mean for today’s children and families?”

Without a common understanding of exactly what we expect from a high-quality preschool program and the outcomes we consistently expect to achieve from such programs, we risk expanding programs and services that are outdated or ineffective for today’s children and families. Our concept of quality needs to be focused and its components clearly defined. While it is useful to look at past models, quality must be defined in the context of today’s families and resources, and programs should be inclusive of parents and appropriate for the particular families and children they serve. Before we can provide children with a high-quality preschool experience we must first thoughtfully consider and gather additional scientific evidence about what makes preschool high-quality so that we can continue to move toward building better programs and early childhood systems and toward realizing better outcomes for children.

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## Q & A: Implementing, Monitoring, and Funding Quality in Public Pre-K Programs

**The October 5, 2007, conference included three small-group breakout sessions intended to provide a forum for those working on quality issues in state-funded preschool programs to share with and learn from each other in ways that could inform their own work. Each session focused on a particular topic:**

- **Technical assistance and integrated quality systems**
- **Monitoring systems and program standards alignment**
- **More pre-K or better pre-K?**

Perhaps the greatest challenge for states working to expand public pre-K programs is implementing and monitoring quality and ensuring sufficient funds for doing so. Participants in the Herr Research Center’s second annual Midwest Policy Conference—advocates, local and state agency administrators and officials, nonprofit directors, foundation staff, and program directors—discussed many of these concerns in depth during the plenary and small-group sessions of the conference. The questions and

answers presented here summarize highlights from those discussions.<sup>1</sup> Although in most cases we present the questions almost exactly as they were asked, in the responses we have tried to capture the essence of the discussions that were prompted by these questions.

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<sup>1</sup> Responses presented reflect the general ideas of these discussions rather than remarks made by a single individual. The positions presented do not necessarily reflect the position of Herr Research Center or Erikson Institute.

**Q: How do we best expand pre-K programs?**

**A:** A conference participant offered the example of the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) as a cautionary tale for states moving forward with pre-K expansion. CHA units were excellent when first built, with high standards and good living conditions. Expansion of this program, however, resulted in more relaxed standards and an overall deterioration of housing quality. The high level of advocacy around child care and preschool in Illinois is unique and may prevent this kind of downfall, but it is still a model worth noting. All states with successful pre-K programs have started small and expanded gradually, and a powerful advocacy body with a common understanding and common values is key to this type of quality system-building. It is important to find ways to communicate the research findings about the effects of preschool, and to continue to work on telling this story effectively to different audiences.

**Q: When thinking about expansion and maintaining quality, where should we put our resources?**

**A:** As pre-K programs are expanding rapidly in many areas a major challenge is maintaining high-quality infrastructure. The quality of pre-K is not only in the classroom but also in the infrastructure that monitors what happens in classrooms. For example, in Illinois an unofficial set-aside of 20% of new funding was put toward professional development, technical assistance,

monitoring, and training. This commitment to infrastructure and staff development is a critical component of quality that will need to be negotiated as pre-K programs expand.

**Q: How can we create high standards for the qualifications of staff and for supporting high quality teachers?**

**A:** It is essential to create high standards for the quality of teachers, and teacher certification alone is not a sufficient measure of quality. Regardless of certification requirements, all teachers bring different experiences and knowledge to the classroom. For this reason, providing on-going technical assistance and professional development for teachers is critical to producing quality programs. However, administrators should still work to create more common and comprehensive standards for teacher training programs, as few such standards currently exist.

Another challenge, even in systems with the best teacher education programs, is the change that occurs when teachers leave higher education and enter the workplace. New teachers tend to become a part of the culture of the school district and take on the practices and direction of their district or leadership. Programs must continue to reinforce the quality education these teachers received. Successful teachers need more than high-quality preparation; they also need continued high-quality support and professional development throughout their careers.

**Q: How can we work with higher education to prepare early childhood professionals?**

**A:** There are some good examples in Illinois, such as the practice by some colleges and universities of offering on-site courses in early childhood for teachers at selected early childhood program sites. Also, the University of Illinois provides an early reading course for the state's early reading program coaches. Finally, many teacher education programs require students to learn the state early learning standards, which they will be expected to work from in the classroom.

As a system, however, there is some mismatch between what is taught in early childhood education programs and what is actually feasible in the schools, largely due to limited resources in schools. The teacher education programs teach the ideal—e.g., techniques designed for small classrooms—when the typical early childhood classroom in fact may have up to 30 children. In places like Illinois where the demographic profile of students in public schools is changing rapidly and dramatically, teachers also need to learn about issues pertaining to diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In general, teachers need to be prepared for the resources and environments they will actually face in the classroom.

**Q: Can you give us an update on the budget issues in Illinois, including the potential cutback in the formerly anticipated increases**

### **in child care supports and a slow-down of the timetable for universal pre-K?**

**A:** In a statement released June 24, 2008, Illinois governor Rod R. Blagojevich warned that child care services funding and child care subsidies for low income families were among potential budget cuts for the 2009 fiscal year. In the end, the Child Care Assistance Program received a \$45.2 million increase in this budget, allowing continued access to affordable child care for thousands of families in Illinois. The Illinois Preschool for All program was also extended through a bill passed by the General Assembly and signed into law by Governor Blagojevich on June 30, 2008. While Preschool for All has not yet been made permanent, there is certainly growing political support for this program.

### **Q: How can we address both the quality and accountability expectations in state oversight?**

**A:** To avoid high-stakes accountability for individual children and programs, states first need to shift their accountability focus more toward overall program quality. It is also important to consider that besides academic skills, there are a number of child characteristics—social-emotional development, approaches to learning, initiative and responsibility—that are difficult to measure quickly. These aspects of child outcomes are best looked at by sampling representative populations, which also helps to avoid high-stakes decision making.

It is important to realize that using assessment to inform instruction is a completely different idea than monitoring child outcomes. One measure should not have both goals.

### **Q: How do we respond to the group of people—policymakers, journalists, business leaders—who want to know if children are making progress from September to June?**

**A:** It is a reasonable question for legislators to ask because they need to know how to make appropriations each year, but it is important to be honest and straightforward in conveying to these audiences that the methods of measuring progress for older students do not apply in early childhood. Moreover, the value of participation in pre-K programs is not in individual gains from the beginning to the end of the pre-K year but over longer periods of time. There is abundant research evidence now linking participation in high-quality pre-K programs to longer-term gains, including better school adjustment, fewer referrals to special education, less grade retention, higher incidence of high school graduation, fewer encounters with the juvenile justice system, and fewer teen pregnancies. It is important that states invest money in early childhood programs sufficient for collecting the data needed each year to assess children's progress over longer periods of time, which requires a two-pronged examination: (a) Looking at whether participating children experience success later in school, where reliable tools exist for measuring

progress; and (b) keeping watch on the quality of pre-K programs, including support for infrastructure. Data can be collected and provided on inputs into the early childhood system, such as classroom quality and teacher education, and thus provide useful information about features that contribute to positive outcomes in children. Informally, journalists can ask kindergarten teachers about children's progress; almost invariably, teachers say they can tell which children have attended a high-quality preschool.

### **Q: What are some collaboration efforts and practices to monitor quality across sectors of early care and education programming?**

**A:** To begin, the different sectors need to come together to determine which factors to look at in establishing quality and develop effective ways of sharing information. The most promising efforts lie in the robust development of Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS). As of June 2008, such systems were in place in 17 states and 28 additional states were in some phase of QRIS development. These systems were originally started as a way to strengthen quality in the child care sector, but a growing number of states are applying QRIS to all early childhood programs. This model is helping support a more systemic approach to early childhood across all the sectors of the system and to place more emphasis on continuous quality improvement as opposed to program ratings.

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## Contributors

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**Eboni C. Howard, Ph.D.**, is director of Herr Research Center for Children and Social Policy at Erikson Institute. She oversees the work of the center and leads several research projects in the areas of children's mental health, social-emotional development, and publicly-funded prekindergarten programs, including Illinois Birth to Five Evaluation. As director, she also holds the Frances Stott Chair in Early Childhood Policy Research.

**David L. Kirp** is professor of public policy at the University of California at Berkeley and the author of 15 books, including *The Sandbox Investment: The Preschool Movement and Kids-First Politics*, which won the 2007 Association of American Publishers Award for Excellence in the Education category and was named a *San Francisco Chronicle* notable book for 2007. His writing and research has covered a wide range of policy issues including affirmative action, race, gender, education, housing, and AIDS. Kirp's current work is again focusing on "kids-first" policy agendas.

**Jana Martella, M.S., M.A.**, is executive director of the

National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education, a national organization for state education agency staff members with major responsibilities in the field of early childhood education. She is also project coordinator of the Council of Chief State School Officers' Early Childhood Education Assessment Consortium in Washington, D.C. Martella has almost 30 years of experience in education as a teacher, administrator, legislative liaison, and state coordinator for federal programs. Her work has focused on promoting improved opportunities in early childhood education and education system and program improvement through standards-based reform.

**Melanie Wiley, M.S.**, was a research assistant at Herr Research Center at the time this article was written. She has a master's degree in child development from Erikson Institute. While at the Center, she worked on a number of projects in the areas of state-funded preschool programs, early learning standards, and the Illinois Birth to Five Evaluation.

**Ellen Wolock, Ed.D.**, is director of New Jersey's Office of Preschool Education, overseeing all New Jersey state preschool initiatives. Her career in early childhood education started as a teacher in an inclusive preschool setting and she received her doctorate from the University of Michigan, where she studied ways in which to optimize the development of developmentally delayed preschoolers. Wolock is the cofounder and former managing editor of *Children's Software Review*, a magazine that offers advice and reviews of children's educational software and interactive technology products.

# Herr Research Center News

## Recent Presentations by Herr Research Center Staff and Associates

Research assistant **Aimee Hilado** and director **Eboni C. Howard** presented “Infant/early childhood mental health competencies and competency systems: Similarities and differences across five states” at the National Summit on Early Childhood Mental Health Systems Development in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in October 2007.

**Juliet Bromer**, assistant research scientist, presented “Qualitative Research with FFN Providers: Implications for Conceptualizing Quality” at the National Alliance for Friend, Family, and Neighbor (FFN) Caregivers meeting in November 2007. She also presented “Developing an Expanded View of Child Care Quality: The Economic and Work-Family Support Roles of Child Care Providers” in November 2007 as part of a panel on child care subsidies at the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management Research Conference.

**Jon Korfmacher**, faculty associate, presented information about infant mental health to the Department of School Psychology at the University of Athens in April 2008. He also spent two weeks as a visiting professor at Martin-Luther University in Halle, Germany, in December 2007.

## Recent Herr Research Center Publications

*Research report:* Creating a Workforce in Early Childhood Mental Health: Defining the competent specialist; Jon Korfmacher and Aimee Hilado, May 2008

*Research brief:* The Competent Early Childhood Mental Health Specialist; Jon Korfmacher and Aimee Hilado, May 2008

*Issue brief:* How Can Work-Based Policies Benefit Children?; October 2008

All publications available for download in .pdf format at [www.erikson.edu/hrc/publications.aspx](http://www.erikson.edu/hrc/publications.aspx).

## Current Research Projects

### Early Childhood Care and Education

- Chicago Program Evaluation Project: Evaluating Early Care and Education Programs (Howard)
- Illinois Birth to Five Evaluation (Howard)
- Family Child Care Network Impact Study (Bromer)
- Community Memorial Foundation Early Childhood Initiative Evaluation (Korfmacher)
- Chicago Preschool Inputs—Children’s Outcomes: What are the Costs & Benefits? (Howard, Andal)
- A Statewide Initiative to Improve Illinois Early Childhood Teacher Standards, Teacher Certification and Teacher Preparation Programs: Targeting the Developmental and Educational Needs of Culturally Marginalized Children (DENCMC)—part of the Initiative on Race, Class and Culture in Early Childhood (Bowman, Ray)

### Early Childhood Mental Health

- Community Memorial Foundation Case Study: Availability of Early Childhood Mental Health Services in Suburban Chicago (Andal)
- Early Childhood Mental Health: Workforce Development, Consultation, and Assessment Policies and Services in the Great Lakes region (Howard)

## About the Center

The Herr Research Center for Children and Social Policy mission is to inform, guide, and support 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 birth to age 8 and their families. Our researchers design and conduct original empirical studies, evaluations, and analysis on the optimal organizational design, funding mechanisms, monitoring practices, and implementation strategies of early childhood programs and services. We then channel this knowledge to state and local legislators, program administrators, advocates, foundation officials, and other participants in the policy process. The objective of this work, ultimately, is to improve the overall effectiveness of programs and policies for young children and their families.

## Center Staff

### Administration

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