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Transitions to Kindergarten

Fully Funding State Pre-K

Illinois's Young Dual Language Learners

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NASBE

National Association of
State Boards of Education

Editor's Note

Valerie Norville
Editorial Director

As state board members and all parents can attest, learning does not begin in kindergarten. Because pre-K learning experiences diverge widely across a variety of settings, some children enter unprepared, are already behind their peers in knowledge and skills, and tend not to catch up in later years. A recent review of decades of early education studies concludes that programs for children under age 5 can have long-lasting impact: They significantly decrease special education placement and grade retention and increase high school graduation rates.[1]

It isn't easy to grapple with inequitable access and uneven quality in early education. Yet for all children to have a strong start, there is work to do.

This edition of the *Standard* explores many dimensions of early education. First, a bit of history. A large cast of people who have been the leading lights in this field convened to participate in a NASBE task force on early childhood education. In 1988, the task force published "Right from the Start," which Senator Ted Kennedy called "thoughtful and groundbreaking." Lori Connors-Tadros and Madelyn Gardner place the task force report in the context of its day and fast forward to how the policy conversation advanced over the subsequent 30 years.

Foundation for Child Development's Sara Vecchiotti explains why it is time to focus on workforce preparation, qualifications, and compensation, and she outlines the role that state boards of education can—and have the authority to—play.

W. Steven Barnett and Richard Kasmin detail the experience of 11 states that sought to expand access to state-funded prekindergarten by incorporating it in school funding formulas. Surprisingly, the conversion to this funding model has not always increased the cost to the state.

Aaron Loewenberg explores the reasons why the transition to kindergarten is a key inflection point in a child's life. He relates the experiences of four states whose state boards, state education agencies, and legislatures acted to improve the transition process and ensure that each child is ready to embark on their K-12 journey.

Luisiana Meléndez and Patricia Chamberlain paint a picture of efforts in Illinois to help its growing population of dual language learners. State legislation in 2008 made three- to five-year-olds enrolled in preschool classrooms funded by the Illinois State Board of Education eligible to receive language support services. It takes strong interagency collaboration to advance culturally and linguistically appropriate practices for the youngest learners, they conclude.

Philip Sirinides and Missy Coffey describe the disconnect between determined state efforts to build early childhood integrated data systems and the lagging efforts to employ that data in decision making. They cite technical and analytical obstacles but find the biggest problem is states' lack of a coherent strategy to connect analytics with policy and operations. As they advocate lifelong learning, state boards can also model it in a commitment to organizational learning on how to leverage early childhood data.

The Erikson Institute's Aisha Ray rounds out the issue in a rich Q&A on increasing the cultural and linguistic competence of early childhood educators. ■

[1]Dana Charles McCoy et al., "Impact of Early Childhood Education on Medium-and Long-Term Educational Outcomes," *Educational Researcher* 46, no. 8 (2017): 474–87.

News & Notes

As the year's end approached, House and Senate leaders were on track to reach agreement on increasing the strict spending caps established by the Budget Control Act of 2011. Raising the caps would give appropriators significantly more flexibility, smooth the way for a fiscal 2018 omnibus bill, and make it easier to protect the Department of Education's budget from the deep cuts proposed by the Trump administration and adopted by the House. Higher caps would provide a legislative and political path for investments sought in Title II and the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, while also more robustly funding the Student Success and Academic Enrichment block grant (Title IV). Congress had until December 22 to complete the fiscal 2018 process or pass another temporary funding bill. Republican leaders have been under significant pressure from their own members to complete the process, so a new temporary funding bill likely would not extend too far into 2018.

■

Tax bills wending through the House and the Senate differ in important ways. The House bill eliminates the $250 tax deduction available to teachers who use their own money to purchase school supplies, while the Senate bill doubles it to $500. The House bill eliminates the higher education loans interest deduction, though both propose to limit or eliminate the state and local tax deduction. The House bill also removes tax incentives for using local bonds for major infrastructure projects, including school construction. The bills also permit families to use 529 college savings plan funding, up to $10,000, for paying K-12 costs associated with private schools. While Republican leaders hoped to send a consensus tax bill to the White House in December, disagreements within the caucus about the bill and other pressing issues such as appropriations and the debt ceiling suggest additional time may be required for the conference to complete its work. A protracted process may ultimately jeopardize the bill, as constituencies associated with major provisions slated for elimination or reduction coalesce in opposition.

■

Reviewing state plans for implementing the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) remains a top priority for the U.S. Department of Education, which by mid-December had approved 16 of the plans submitted in April. Before the end of 2017, ED was expected to begin giving feedback to the 34 states that submitted plans in September. Then the district ESSA implementation process will begin in earnest.

■

The ESSA Innovative Assessment Pilot, which lets up to seven states explore new testing strategies in select districts for federal accountability purposes, has reappeared on the policy horizon. A notice inviting applications was expected at the end of 2017 or early 2018, which would enable ED to conduct peer review as early as spring 2018.

■

By mid-November, the Senate had confirmed only Betsy DeVos as education secretary and Peter Oppenheim as assistant secretary for legislation and congressional affairs out of 16 ED positions requiring confirmation. But the administration had begun to make progress on nominations: Carlos Muñiz to serve as general counsel, Jim Blew as assistant secretary for the Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Analysis, Mick Zais as deputy secretary, and others. They have had confirmation hearings and await full Senate consideration.

Foreign Language Enrollment (percent of K-12 population)

30% +
19–29%
10–18.9%
< 10%
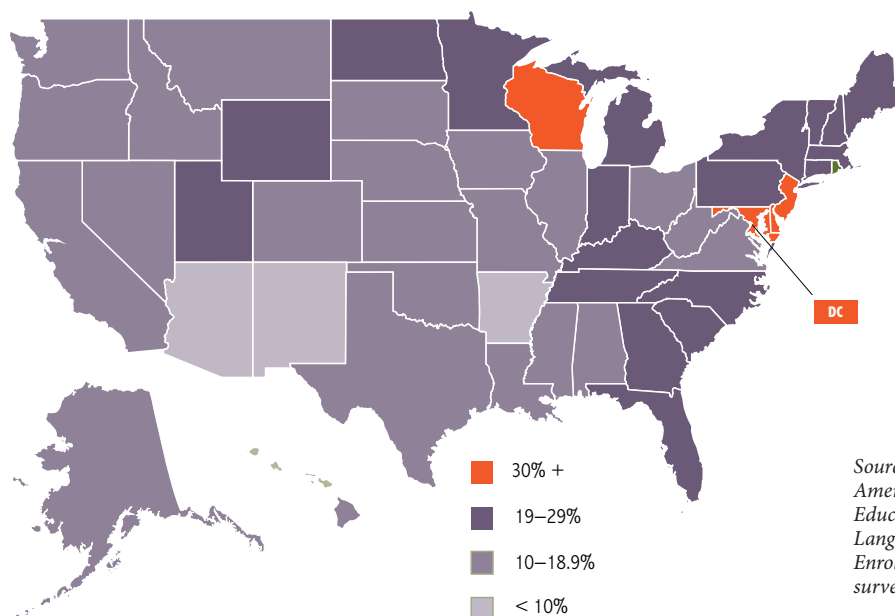
Source: Drawn from data published in American Councils for International Education, "The National K-12 Foreign Language Enrollment Survey Report," 2017. Enrollment calculations were based on survey data and an estimation model.

We, the Media

Renée Rybak Lang
Communications Director

I have been spending a lot of time in preschools lately. My daughter just turned three and is ready to graduate from her loving in-home daycare to a more formal early learning environment. Finding the right preschool has not been easy. For starters, the "good" preschools in Northern Virginia often have two-year (or longer) waiting lists or cost more than my monthly mortgage payment. But then, there are the enlightening answers I get to important questions: "Do you require your teachers to have advanced degrees in early education?" and "How often do you see turnover?"

In most cases, teachers are not required but are "encouraged" to have college degrees. Administrators often avoid the turnover question altogether. One school director was very honest, however, admitting to me that her turnover rate was high. She explained that many of her teachers are young, have childcare issues of their own, or must travel a great distance to work. She simply cannot pay them enough to offset those kinds of costs. The teachers love the kids and love to teach, but they burn out.

These answers underscore the challenges for state policymakers. So also do articles in this issue, whose authors make the case for increased investment in high-quality early childhood education. A key determinant is an experienced, credentialed, and well-supported workforce.

Standard authors Philip Sirinides and Missy Coffey argue that smart policymaking to build high-quality early education requires state boards to build their capacity to learn from data. My experience tells me it is equally important for parents to be able to access and learn from understandable, transparent information so they too can make the best decisions for their children. With my background in education policy, I was often the one parent in the room asking the tough questions about whether prospective schools measured up. But not every parent knows what to look for, and they often must turn to fellow parents. There is a role for state policymakers in helping parents get up to speed.

At NASBE's recent Annual Conference, Learning Heroes' Bibb Hubbard and Data Quality Campaign's Dakarai Aarons presented information on parent perceptions of education data. According to a recent Learning Heroes survey, parents are not getting the kinds of information they need or want. Data points that policymakers need, like disaggregation, are not that important to parents. But within-district comparisons, measures of growth, social-emotional factors, and summative ratings are.

State policymakers that want to better connect with parents must begin by putting themselves in a parent's shoes. They are end users as much as teachers, administrators, and students and should be treated as such. Present information clearly, accessibly, and simply. Give parents context for decision making and make sure they understand how a decision affects *their* child. A central message embedded in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is that listening to stakeholder voices will help make better policy that serves all children. But in exchange for providing input for the system as a whole, parents want something in return: the tools to find the right school and the best supports for their own child's learning. ■
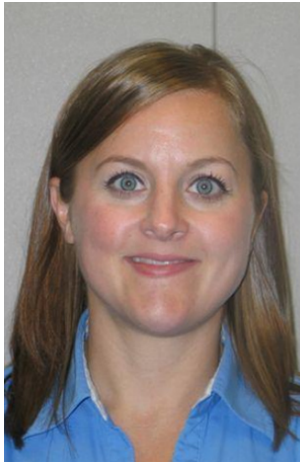
NCOSEA Voice

Nicole Proesch
President, National Council of
State Education Attorneys, Iowa

*Logic will get you from
A to B. Imagination will
take you everywhere.*

—Albert Einstein

Striking a Balance in Early Childhood Discipline

Recently, a five-year-old kindergarten student was suspended for three days after he told his teacher that he had a bomb in his backpack, though there was no bomb. A four-year-old was suspended for seven days for bringing an empty shell casing to school and for having regularly turned toys into imaginary guns. A seven-year-old was suspended for two days for biting his Pop-Tart into a gun shape and pretending to shoot his classmates. Such applications of zero tolerance policies prompted Florida law makers to pass a "Pop-Tart law" to limit zero tolerance at schools, including discipline for "brandishing partially consumed pastry or other food to simulate a firearm or weapon" [Florida Code § 1006.07(2)(g)].

Under *Goss v. Lopez*, administrators may use exclusionary discipline, but parents of children in publicly funded early childhood programs, as well as those in K-12, are constitutionally entitled to notice and opportunity to be heard before schools expel or remove students for more than 10 days. Students with disabilities are also entitled to protections under federal law when they are removed from classrooms for disciplinary reasons.

Three key factors increase the likelihood of expulsions and suspensions for young children: lack of positive relationships among educators, families, and children; misguided or missing policies, such as zero tolerance policies applied to young children; and insufficient training and support for staff in promoting social-emotional development and managing challenging behavior.

Educators, medical professionals, and civil rights advocates have begun to track exclusionary discipline in early childhood settings, including "push-outs," "soft" suspensions, and calls home to pick up a child who is "having a bad day." Preschool children are being excluded at a rate nearly three times that of K-12 children,[1] with serious detrimental effects:

- impedes the development of positive relationships;
- disrupts learning;
- has unintended undesirable effects that fail to reduce or eliminate targeted behaviors;
- interferes with addressing underlying issues such as disabilities or mental health needs; and
- increases stress on the family, who must find alternate services, often without assistance.[2]

Early childhood programs must balance protecting children with providing effective responses to problem behaviors. Expulsion and suspension should be a last resort—when there is a serious safety concern that cannot be reduced or eliminated with reasonable, age-appropriate modifications. State board members should consider statewide best practices to reduce exclusionary discipline in early childhood settings.[3] The Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports framework, for example, emphasizes a proactive, teaching approach rather than punitive responses. Such frameworks can help achieve a rich learning environment inclusive of all students. ■

[1]Walter S. Gilliam, "Prekindergarteners Left Behind: Expulsion Rates in State Prekindergarten Programs," F*CD Policy Brief Series* no. 3 (New York: Foundation for Child Development, May 2005).
[2]U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education, "Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension Policies in Early Childhood Settings," www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ecd/expulsion_suspension_final.pdf - 102k - 2014-12-10.
[3]Lori Connors-Tadros and Jessica Hammond, "Information and Resources to Assist States in Developing Policy on Early Childhood Suspension and Expulsion," CEELO Policy Report (New Brunswick, NJ: Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes, May 2017).
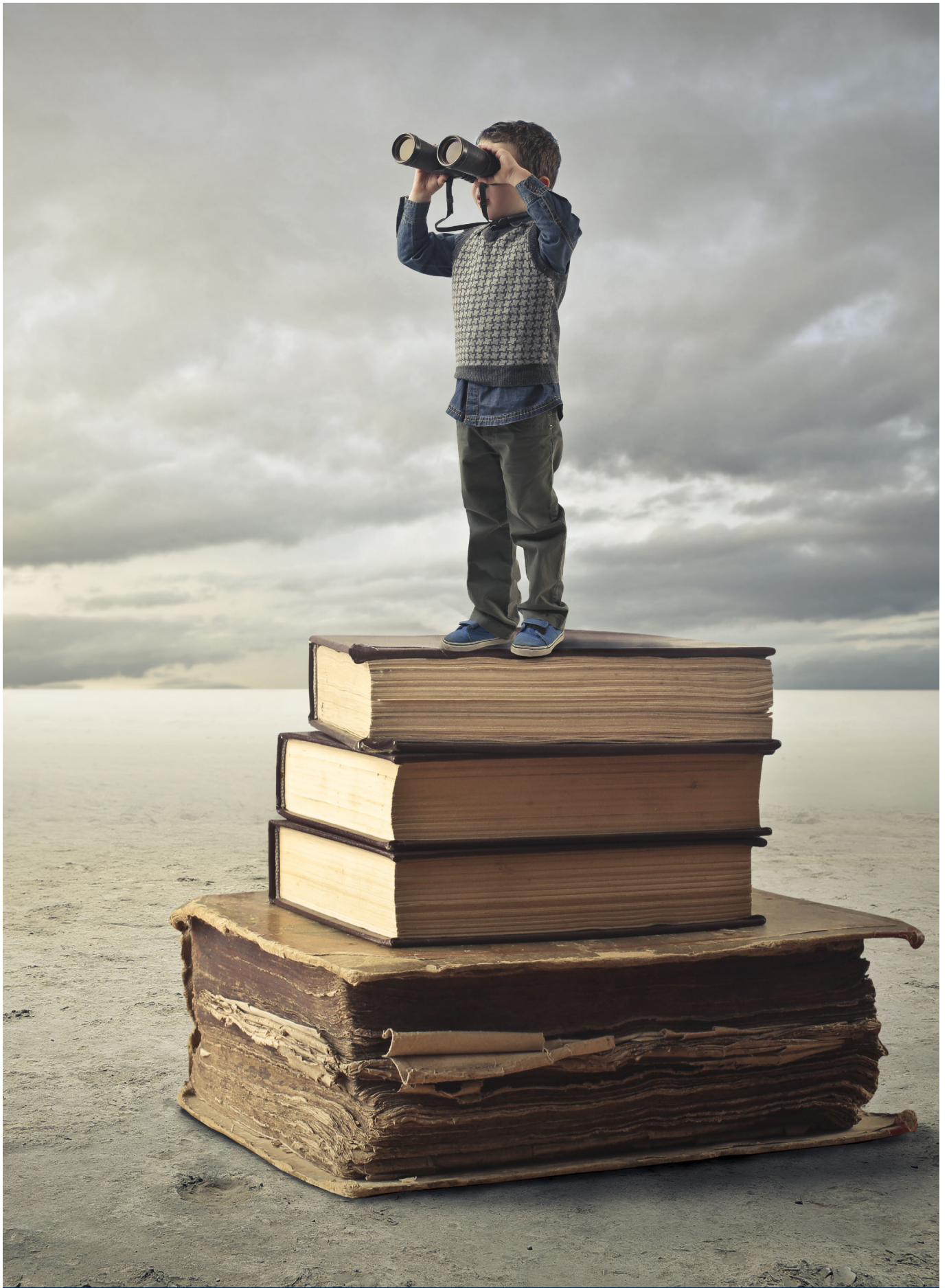
Looking Back, Looking Forward: Tracing the Arc of Early Childhood Policy

NASBE task force on early childhood education remains relevant 30 years later.

by Lori Connors-Tadros and Madelyn Gardner

In 1988, the National Association of State Boards of Education's Task Force on Early Childhood Education published *Right from the Start*, which included ambitious recommendations for improving early childhood education. Thirty years later, states have made progress in implementing the task force's key recommendations. Yet there is much more work for state boards of education to do to achieve the task force's stated goal that "all families get the best from early childhood education."

NASBE convened its Task Force on Early Childhood Education in the larger context of educational reform of the 1980s, which was characterized by two competing perspectives. One focused on state-mandated testing and increased graduation requirements, in response to the alarm sounded by the publication in 1983 of *A Nation at Risk*. The second saw this press for increased standards and accountability as overshadowing the developmental needs of the youngest children and skewing curriculum in inappropriate ways. *Right from the Start* fell squarely in this camp, arguing that "if education is seen as a contest that pits children against their peers, or a race against our foreign competitors, we risk teaching very young children the wrong academic tasks in an inappropriate fashion before they are ready."

NASBE's convening of national, state, school, and early childhood education leaders for a year of study culminated in a policy agenda for strengthening early childhood programs and the early learning grades. The report offered two broad recommendations:

■ develop and promote "early childhood units" within schools to better meet learning needs of children ages 4 to 8 and sustain gains made in high-quality pre-K; and

■ invest in partnerships between schools and community service agencies to support a comprehensive approach to early childhood services that encompasses education for children and parents, mental and physical health, and family supports.

The report also urged state leaders to advocate for new early childhood investments, saying that expanding access to high-quality early learning programs and developing the capacity of schools to support and deliver them are crucial. Although the context has evolved, these recommendations remain relevant today. The task force's full set of recommendations (box 1) have found their way into state and local policies, even as states have yet to ensure that every child experiences a great early education.

Changing Social and Economic Landscape

Since the task force convened, the United States has experienced significant demographic shifts. The National Center on Education Statistics projects that students of color outnumbered non-Hispanic white students in American schools for the first time in 2014–15.[1] In coming decades, the U.S. populace is expected to become even more diverse.[2]

The economy also has shifted, with rising inequality and persistently high rates of child poverty, stagnant wages for many workers, and a weak system of social support. Today one in five U.S. children lives in poverty, a rate higher than most industrialized countries.[3]

Box 1. *Right from the Start* **Policy Recommendations**

The NASBE Task Force on Early Childhood Education made the following state policy recommendations to realize the "new vision of early childhood education."

Promoting the Early Childhood Unit

■ Sponsor experiments to test different models of the early childhood unit.

■ Review and improve state policies related to curriculum and teaching in the early school years.

■ Review and improve state policies related to the assessment and testing of young children.

■ Review and improve state policies related to parent involvement and family support services.

■ Review and improve policies on the training and certification of staff for early childhood programs.

■ Sponsor efforts to inform and educate parents and citizens on the characteristics and benefits of high quality early education.

■ Provide additional resources for implementation of the early childhood unit.

Promoting Collaboration in Early Childhood Services

■ Creating systems for state agency collaboration in planning, standard-setting, and program development.

■ Build systems to encourage early childhood programs and professionals to help each other.

■ Provide funding and incentives to support local collaboration in early childhood services.

■ Support recruitment efforts to increase the supply and stability of the early childhood workforce.

Financing Early Childhood Services

■ Promote early childhood funding as an investment opportunity.

■ Understand the importance of quality in developing programs

■ Promote equity and access to early childhood services

■ Utilize a blend of federal, state, local and parental support.

Source: NASBE, Right from the Start: The Report of the NASBE Task Force on Early Childhood Education (Alexandria, VA: NASBE, 1988), http://www.nasbe.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Right-from-the-Start.pdf.

The Great Recession exacerbated pressures in many communities and adversely affected children. Though the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act invested substantially in health and education, such infusions were temporary, and few states have reached pre-recession levels of education spending.[4]

Against this evolving backdrop, more young children are receiving care from those who are not relatives—especially center-based care—than in decades past, driven in part by rising parental workforce participation, especially among mothers.[5] Many states also have made or expanded investments in early childhood education, creating new opportunities for children to attend programs before kindergarten.

Evolving Research

Research into early childhood development has evolved both in nature and context. This

evidence only reinforces the task force report's call for public investments targeting the first eight years of life, although it provides new insights to inform those investments.

Advances in neuroscience research have provided a better understanding of the growing brains of young children and the importance of early environments for healthy development. Studies have established that early experiences influence brain development for better or worse, laying the groundwork for other dimensions of well-being throughout a child's life and underscoring the potentially long-lasting harmful effects of unhealthy levels of stress and instability. Recently, the Institute of Medicine's 2015 *Transforming the Workforce* report discussed the importance of engaging, supportive adult-child interactions, with recommendations for supporting a highly qualified and effective early childhood workforce.

Restructuring Schools

Right from the Start provided a vision for state boards of education and other stakeholders to change how local education and community leaders designed, implemented, and funded early education for children ages 4 to 8. It proposed an "early childhood unit," in part to counteract the growing trend toward more rigorous standards and increased testing, which early childhood leaders feared contributed to inappropriate curriculum and instruction in early elementary grades.

Members of the task force were visionary in proposing that school design be based on the needs of the youngest learners rather than on federal funding requirements or narrow indicators of achievement in later grades. They focused instead on dismantling silos of educational practice before and after kindergarten.

States and communities have adopted various approaches to reorganizing the ages/grades that constitute early education, ranging from preK-3, to prenatal through grade 3, and most recently preK-5. The goal of these approaches is a coherent, seamless education across ages with aligned standards, curriculum and assessment, well-qualified teachers, highly engaged parents, and schools organized to provide children with high-quality learning from preschool through early elementary grades.

NASBE created its Early Childhood Network in 2006 to test models for the early childhood unit and strategies to align instruction in the early years. Over three years, state teams worked to define and ensure preschool quality, develop early learning standards, increase requirements for early childhood teachers, and eventually to align the preK-3 system. A recent study of early learning approaches in Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts revealed that while each state took a different path to unifying early learning and early elementary, common themes emerged:

- New structures and patterns of collaboration across the state agencies charged with early childhood education, birth to age 5, and K-3 instruction needed to be established.

- Incentives were needed for aligning local policy and practice from birth to grade 3, either through grants or with dedicated funding and support to local entities.

- State policy should be balanced against local flexibility to support innovation and responsiveness to local needs while fulfilling the state role for accountability and oversight.[6]

Building Community-Based Systems

Right from the Start called for elementary schools to form partnerships with preschool programs to better support children and families. Research indicates that continuity in learning is critical for all children, and it says that schools' structure and partnerships with parents and community organizations contribute to vital, dynamic development and learning across the age span.[7]

Successful community-based early childhood systems (1) identify a comprehensive vision and common goals for early education, (2) establish a diverse cross-sector governance structure, and (3) collect data to drive decision making and accountability. Sustaining these efforts and their impact requires intentional, relentless attention to the organizational and operational mechanics of the collaboration. While empirical research on educational impact is limited, it appears that state and local partnerships focused on increasing bidirectional communication and shared understanding of partner needs and expectations result in streamlined

Members of the task force focused instead on dismantling silos of educational practice before and after kindergarten.

funding, continuity of services, and higher stakeholder buy-in and engagement.[8]

Funding Still Inadequate, Siloed

The nature of investment in U.S. programs serving children before kindergarten has changed little since *Right from the Start* called the system "diverse, underfunded, and uncoordinated." It noted that "separate funding streams" are among the "many disconnected pieces" of the early childhood landscape. Likewise, a 2017 Government Accountability Office report reiterated the potential for fragmentation, overlap, and duplication among federally funded early childhood programs, partly because of the disparate funding streams supporting them.[9]

Nationally, total state preschool funding has increased over the last decade, but the picture is complicated by multiple funding sources for preschool programs and a continued lack of funding for preschool in some states. Compensation parity remains one of the more intractable problems, as the wage gap hampers programs' ability to attract and retain highly qualified teachers and leaders. Prekindergarten programs are especially challenged, as the qualifications and salaries of school principals and early childhood program administrators in community-based programs differ significantly.[10] New Jersey's Abbott preschool programs succeeded in raising the quality of community-based programs and the qualifications of their staff to very high levels, but doing so required substantial support from the state and school districts.[11] (See also W. Steven Barnett and Richard Kasmin's piece on pre-K financing in this issue.)

Opportunities for State Board Leadership

At its core, early childhood education is a matter of equity. Ignoring or paying insufficient attention to the quality of education in the early years results in insurmountable achievement gaps down the line. Universal, high-quality early learning would reduce—and possibly erase—the achievement gap for children of color and children in low-income households.[12] A recent consensus report from leading researchers summed up the supporting research: "Classroom experiences early

in elementary school can serve as charging stations for sustaining and amplifying pre-K learning gains."[13]

State boards can provide leadership and build momentum toward making early childhood education a priority in their states. Several state boards have done so, tackling pre-K financing, teacher and principal preparation and licensure, and assessment.

In the 1990s, the West Virginia Board of Education adopted policy in support of providing high-quality full-day kindergarten, and in 2002 it mandated that all counties provide "universal access to a quality early education system." County collaborative teams now administer local pre-K programs in mixed-delivery settings, and the state ensures stable, dedicated funds through the state's school funding formula. The state blends federal and state funds at the state level while incentivizing local providers to partner with Head Start and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families to expand access.

In 2012, the state board established an office of early learning for preK-5 within the state's department of education and convened a cross-sector advisory committee. It also adopted a policy to support a comprehensive approach to closing the third grade literacy achievement gap and joined the National Campaign for Grade Level Reading to provide resources to local districts to address that gap. In 2016, West Virginia became one of just six states that the National Institute for Early Education Research named as meeting all 10 of its quality benchmarks. Robert E. Hull, former assistant superintendent of schools in West Virginia and now executive vice president at NASBE, attributes the success of the state's early learning initiative to the state board "strategically and intentionally utilizing their three primary levers of authority—the power of policy, the power of the question, and the power to convene."

The Illinois State Board of Education redesigned principal licensure to require preparation in early childhood education, which is woefully absent from most principal licensure programs.[14] In Colorado and many other states, the state board has required kindergarten entry assessments to inform teaching and learning.[15]

For the first time in federal education policy, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) strongly

> **Compensation parity remains one of the more intractable problems.**

emphasizes early learning. ESSA provides openings for state boards to drive increased access to high-quality early learning programs, align and coordinate birth to grade 3, and prepare and support highly effective teachers. Michigan, for example, is developing a statewide professional development system for educators serving children birth to age 8 and is using Title II dollars to develop on-demand professional development models. Louisiana plans to use Title II funds to support district preparation partnerships and the development of competency-based teacher preparation programs.

State boards can provide momentum and urgency to their states' efforts to invest early in children's learning. *Right from the Start* offered a blueprint—still relevant today—to chart the way forward. Acting on the opportunities before them, state boards can enhance early learning and support the success of their young learners. As child development expert Joan Lombardi, who in 1988 was NASBE senior staff associate and with Tom Schultz led the Task Force on Early Childhood Education, put it: "Reflecting back should renew our commitment to move forward with renewed energy and commitment since in so many ways the recommendations were indeed Right from the Start." ∎

[1] National Center on Education Statistics, "Enrollment and Percentage Distribution of Enrollment in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, by Race/Ethnicity and Region: Selected Years, Fall 1995 through Fall 2023," table 203.50, *Digest of Education Statistics* (2013).

[2] D'vera Cohn and Andrea Caumont, "10 Demographic Trends that are Shaping the U.S. and the World" (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2016).

[3] Yang Jiang et al., "Basic Facts about Low-Income Children: Children under 18 Years, 2015" (New York: National Center for Children in Poverty, 2017); OECD, "Poverty Rate (Indicator)," data set, 2017, doi: 10.1787/0fe1315d-en.

[4] Michael Leachman et al., "Most States Have Cut School Funding, and Some Continue Cutting" (Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2016).

[5] Child Trends, "Child Care: Indicators of Child and Youth Well-Being" (Bethesda, MD, 2016); Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor, "Working Mothers Issue Brief," 2016.

[6] David Jacobson, "Building State P-3 Systems: Learning from Leading States," (New Brunswick, NJ: Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes, 2016).

[7] Deborah Stipek et al., "PK-3: What Does It Mean for Instruction?" *Social Policy Report* 30, no. 2 (Washington, DC: Society for Research in Child Development).

[8] Patricia Del Grosso et al., "Early Care and Education Partnerships: A Review of the Literature," *OPRE Report* #2014-64 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, 2014).

[9] U.S. Government Accountability Office, "Early Learning and Child Care: Agencies Have Helped Address Fragmentation and Overlap through Improved Coordination," GAO-17-463 (Washington, DC, 2017).

[10] Abbie Lieberman, "A Tale of Two Pre-K Leaders: How State Policies for Center Directors and Principals Leading Pre-K Programs Differ, and Why They Shouldn't" (Washington, DC: New America, 2017).

[11] Sara Mead, "Education Reform Starts Early: Lessons from New Jersey's PreK-3rd Reform Efforts" (Washington, DC: New America, 2009).

[12] Allison Friedman-Krauss et al., "How Much Can High Quality PreK Reduce Achievement Gaps?" (Washington, DC: New America and NIEER, 2016).

[13] Deborah A. Phillips et al., "Puzzling It Out: The Current State of Scientific Knowledge on Pre-Kindergarten Effects, A Consensus Statement" (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2017), 7.

[14] K.C. Brown et al., "What Do We Know about Principal Preparation, Licensure Requirements, and Professional Development for School Leaders?" (New Brunswick, NJ: Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes, 2014).

[15] Winona Hao, "State Board Roles in Improving Early Childhood Education" (Alexandria, VA: NASBE, forthcoming).

State boards can provide momentum and urgency to their states' efforts to invest early in children's learning.

Lori Connors-Tadros is senior project director at the Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes, National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers University, and Madelyn Gardner is a research and policy associate at the Learning Policy Institute.
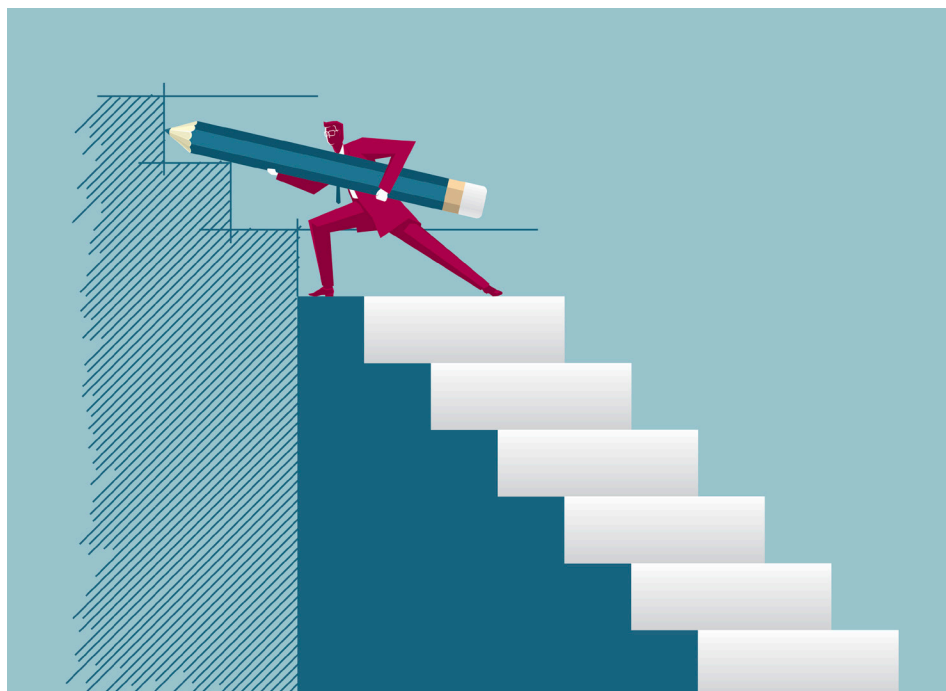
Three ways state boards can elevate the profession and improve outcomes for kids.

by Sara Vecchiotti

Transforming the Early Care and Education Workforce

The field of early care and education (ECE) and state boards of education alike have focused much attention on the quality and effectiveness of ECE programs.[1] Yet state boards ought also to consider the professionals that directly serve or oversee services to young children. Strong programs and strong outcomes depend on well-prepared, competent, appropriately compensated, and supported ECE professionals.

Now is the time to professionalize the ECE workforce, improve preparation and professional learning, and enhance practice. Several state boards have begun this work, exercising policymaking authority when they have it and working collaboratively with state partners and stakeholders, which all boards can do.

Why Focus on the Workforce?

Lead teachers, teacher assistants, home-based providers, coaches, master teachers, principals, and administrators comprise the ECE workforce, and all are integral to creating enriching, nurturing learning environments for young children and ensuring high-quality teacher-child interactions.[2] Yet quality varies markedly across programs. The quality of program content, components, supports, and implementation differ, and programs are delivered inconsistently, with practices that fail to reflect recent developmental science.[3] Likewise, early educators have varied competencies, qualifications, compensation, and professional supports, all of which affect program and classroom quality and help achieve positive child outcomes.[4]

The status of the ECE profession reflects the complex, fragmented, disparate ECE system itself. In all 50 states, early educators' educational backgrounds and qualifications differ depending on whether they teach in state prekindergarten, Head Start, or child care, as well as compared with family child care settings.[5]

Further, 35 of 59 state pre-K initiatives require the lead teacher to have a bachelor's degree, 51 require specialized training in pre-K, and 19 require teacher assistants to have a child development associate credential or equivalent.[6]

National Survey of Early Care and Education data reveal overall that education levels were higher for those serving children age 3 through 5 (45 percent with at least a four-year degree) than for those serving younger children (19 percent with at least a four-year degree).[7] These variances are important: Research suggests a link between specialized training in ECE to acquire key competencies and classroom quality and child outcomes.[8]

However, obtaining a degree does not guarantee teacher competence. Teacher preparation programs within institutions of higher education also vary widely in terms of coursework, clinical/field-based preservice practice, and induction supports, as well as whether developmental science informed program design.[9] Therefore, there is room to align definitions of what ECE professionals should know and be able to do in instructing and supporting children's learning with determining standards for what curricula, field experiences, and induction supports adequately prepare student teachers.

A focus on training and knowledge is not enough. Improving compensation and supporting well-being is also essential. ECE professionals are routinely compensated at low-income levels, even for those with high levels of educational attainment. In fact, large percentages of the workforce need public assistance to support their own children and families—34 percent of prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers and 46 percent of child care workers. Compare this with the 13 percent of elementary and middle school teachers and 53 percent of fast food workers receiving assistance.[10] Economic worry leads to stress and depression, potentially affecting teacher well-being, which in turn can hamper teachers' ability to be supportive of and responsive to children in the classroom.[11]

Well-being also stems from whether professionals feel supported within their work environment, which includes their ability to access supports for professional learning. Professional development that is of high quality, intentional in purpose and design, and focused on effective instructional strategies can improve teacher practice and thereby improve child outcomes.[12]

However, not all ECE professionals have such opportunities for ongoing learning.[13]

Moving toward more unified ECE professional systems—from preparation to competencies to compensation and professional supports—can help reduce the wide variability in program and classroom quality and better support children.

What Is the Field Doing?

Much is happening in the field of ECE to transform the profession. For example, the Power to the Profession initiative convenes 15 ECE professional and member organizations in a national taskforce to define a shared framework of knowledge and competencies, qualifications, and compensation for all professionals working with children birth through age 8.[14] Currently, five states within the Power to the Profession initiative are engaged in intensive state-based communications and advocacy building work.[15] As a follow-up to the groundbreaking workforce report from the Institute of Medicine/National Research Council (IOM/NRC) in 2015, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine has organized implementation teams in several states that are focused on realizing specific recommendations from the report.[16]

In addition, the National Governors Association supported six states in development of a policy agenda to strengthen the ECE profession through workforce investments and strategies; another cohort of states is scheduled for 2018.[17] Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.) focused efforts on teacher preparation articulation agreements and compensation in several states.[18] The Center for Enhanced Early Learning Outcomes and the BUILD Initiative sponsored roundtables that convened states on instruction tools, credentialing, and implementing IOM/NRC recommendations.[19] The Foundation for Child Development has supported the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE), the National League of Cities, and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) to help several states and cities focus on ECE workforce issues.[20]

What Can State Boards Do?

There are several ways state boards can exercise their policymaking authority and their roles as advocates and consensus builders to

Large percentages of the workforce need public assistance to support their own children and families.

strengthen the ECE workforce. Boards have varied roles in this domain: setting requirements for core early learning standards, advancing workforce credentialing and preparation, and improving professional development opportunities. Across the country, 16 state boards have authority over standards, 32 have authority over preK-12 teacher licensure, and 28 have sole authority over teacher preparation programs.[21]

All boards have the power to transform the workforce. Table 1 shows how board authorities align with the recommendations of the IOM/NRC report and three key goals: professionalize the field, improve preparation and professional learning, and enhance practice.

Goal 1: Professionalize the Field.
The 32 state boards with authority over preK-12 teacher licensure can set core competencies for early learning educators as the basis for certification and licensing, thereby strengthening competency-based qualifications.[22] Rather than starting from scratch, states can benefit from the ongoing efforts of the Power to the Professions taskforce, which is working toward defining these competencies.[23]

In rethinking competencies, state boards should ask these questions: Do current qualification and certification requirements align with what teachers and principals should know and be able to do to support children's learning? Are the required competencies informed by child developmental science? Are they informed by what the field and ECE profession see as needed competencies? Are the ECE administrator and principal leaders who are included in planning representative of mixed-delivery systems? Boards can work to answer such questions, and in conjunction with other state agencies, can examine qualifications and adopt competencies for professionals across the birth to age 8 continuum.

The IOM/NRC report provides a starting point for establishing core knowledge and competencies.[24] For example, it suggests that all ECE professionals should know how children develop and learn across the developmental domains (cognitive, socioemotional, etc.), and they should know how the areas of development interact to promote children's learning and further development. Armed with such

knowledge, early educators can create goal- and objective-based learning opportunities and use a portfolio of instructional strategies to support individual learning trajectories.

Goal 2: Improve Preparation and Professional Learning.
Another relevant area of board authority relates to establishing standards for accreditation of preparation programs for teachers and administrators, and such standards should align with the competencies required for teacher certification and licensure. Through such accreditation, state boards can influence how early educators are prepared and align preparation standards with core competencies.

Questions to consider in rethinking standards for teacher preparation: Are teacher education programs adequately preparing students to meet the demands of ECE settings? Are programs preparing administrators and principal leaders who are well versed in ECE? Is content, curriculum, and pedagogy aligned with the required competencies? Are efforts focused on recruiting and retaining a diverse ECE student population? Are programs effectively providing preservice clinical, field-based practical experiences and supporting graduates in their first years of teaching? Do institutions of higher education have articulation agreements supportive of a career ladder?[25]

Goal 3: Enhance the Quality of Professional Practice.
State boards have a significant role, alongside their education agencies, in planning and implementing the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and administering federal assistance programs, as well as developing rules and regulations for the administration of state programs, including state pre-K.

Questions to consider: Does the state have an overall vision and plan for ECE? How can a state use ESSA to strengthen the ECE workforce and coordinate it with other state plans and efforts? How can opportunities for professional learning and collaboration within ESSA be used to improve the quality of ECE practice? Are early educators and kindergarten and elementary school teachers themselves compensated at a level equivalent to that of secondary educators? Boards can help direct ESSA implementation

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Boards can examine qualifications and adopt competencies for professionals across the birth to age 8 continuum.

Table 1. ECE Workforce Recommendations, Goals, and Board Authorities

Recommendation	Goal	Authority
1. Strengthen competency-based qualification requirements for all care and education professionals working with children from birth through age 8.	Professionalize the Field	Certification & Licensure
2. Develop and implement comprehensive pathways and multiyear timelines for transitioning to a minimum bachelor's degree qualification requirement, with specialized knowledge and competencies, for all lead educators working with children from birth through age 8.	Professionalize the Field	Certification & Licensure
3. Strengthen practice-based qualification requirements for all lead educators working with children from birth through age 8.	Professionalize the Field	Certification & Licensure
4. Build an interdisciplinary foundation in higher education for child development.	Improve Preparation & Professional Learning	Accreditation of preparation programs
5. Develop and enhance programs in higher education for care and education professionals working with children from birth through age 8.	Improve Preparation & Professional Learning	Accreditation of preparation programs
6. Support the consistent quality and coherence of professional learning supports during ongoing practice for professionals working with children from birth through age 8.	Enhance the Quality of Professional Practice	Professional Development Systems & ESSA implementation
7. Develop a new paradigm for evaluation and assessment of professional practice for those who work with children from birth through age 8.	Enhance the Quality of Professional Practice	Professional Development Systems & ESSA implementation
8. Ensure that policies and standards for care and education leaders encompass the foundational knowledge and competencies needed to support high-quality practices for child development and early learning.	Professionalize the Field	Certification & Licensure
9. Strengthen collaboration and communication among professionals and systems within the care and education sector and with closely related sectors, especially health and social services.	All Three Goals	All Authorities
10. Support workforce development with coherent funding, oversight, and policies.	All Three Goals	All Authorities
11. Collaboratively develop and periodically update coherent guidance that is foundational across roles and settings for care and education professionals working with children from birth through age 8.	All Three Goals	All Authorities
12. Support comprehensive state- and local-level efforts to transform the professional workforce for children from birth through age 8.	All Three Goals	All Authorities
13. Build a better knowledge base to inform workforce development and professional learning services and systems.	All Three Goals	All Authorities

Source: Institute of Medicine/National Research Council, "Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age Eight: A Unifying Foundation," 2015.

Figure 1. State Progress in Early Workforce Policies

Category	MAKING HEADWAY	EDGING FORWARD
Qualifications	5	24
Work Environments	4	16
Compensation	1	16
Financial Resources	3	18
Workforce Data	19	19
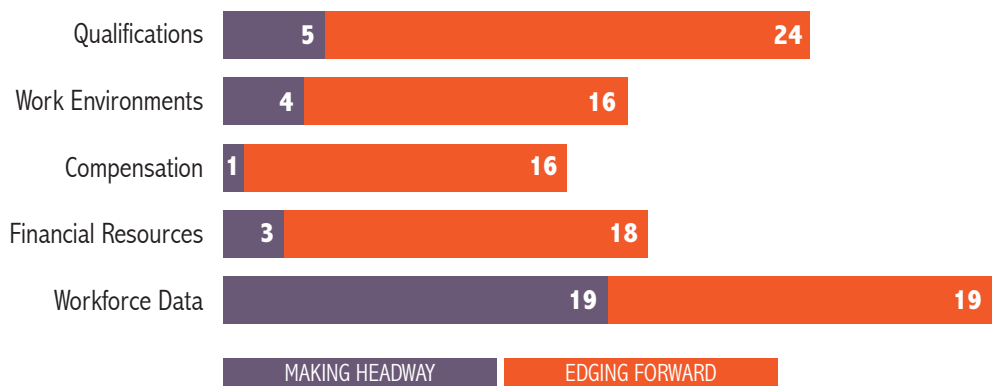
Source: Marcy Whitebook et al., "Early Childhood Workforce Index 2016" (Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment Institute for Research on Labor and Employment, University of California, 2016).

toward a focus on the ECE workforce and provide opportunities for gaining the following:

- sustained, embedded, data-driven professional development for ECE teachers and leaders (Titles I, II);

- specialized knowledge in professional development for curricula, literacy, assessment, family engagement, school readiness, dual language learners (Titles I, II);

- staff coaching by experienced teachers, principals, and faculty through higher education partnerships (Title II);

- induction programs and ongoing evaluation for administrators and teachers in preK-3 (Titles I, II);

- residency programs for teachers, principals, and other school leaders (Title II).

ESSA implementation also gives boards opportunities to support recruitment, hiring, and selection of promising, diverse, effective ECE educators (Title II). Boards can also work through ESSA implementation and in their advocacy role to ensure appropriate compensation. Establishing parity for teachers in community-based organizations with public school counterparts for Title I preschool programs and state pre-K is an important first step.

Four State Boards Make a Start

Much work remains to develop supportive ECE workforce policies at the state level (figure

1). To support state efforts, the Foundation for Child Development provided funding to NASBE to work with four state boards that committed to focus on the ECE workforce by rethinking early educator competencies and certification, preparation programs, career pathways and professional development, and evaluation. Below is a brief description of the work occurring in each state:

- The Iowa State Board of Education is working with its department of education to define early learning standards for every K-3 classroom and strengthen policies to support Iowa's ECE workforce. Part of the work includes developing knowledge and skills-based competencies and providing professional learning for K-3 educators that aligns with early learning standards.

- Michigan's state board is developing a strategic framework for an infrastructure to support a qualified ECE workforce serving children birth through age 8. The work involves integrating personnel development systems across the ECE workforce; aligning career pathways to core knowledge and competencies; examining licensure programs, standards, tests, and grade bands; determining professional learning opportunities; and proposing policy recommendations to support the ECE workforce.

- Nebraska's state board is reviewing requirements for ECE leaders and expanding professional development opportunities (e.g., online

training) for teachers, principals, and other administrators with responsibilities for educating children from birth through third grade.

■ The New York State Board of Regents established a Blue Ribbon Committee on Early Learning to help launch a unified, competency-based early educator preparation program that addresses the diverse needs of children in their early years and a professional development system for the ECE workforce.

While the state boards are working individually, they will also collaborate in other ECE workforce efforts that the National League of Cities and NAEYC are leading. Such joint work and peer-to-peer learning is expected to link and leverage varying levels of government systems (state boards of education and municipal leaders) and professional associations (state/local NAEYC affiliates) to create a more effective, inclusive policymaking approach.

Conclusion

There is ample opportunity for state boards to improve outcomes for children by strengthening the early care and education workforce and thereby improving the quality of early care and education. Ensuring that ECE professionals have the knowledge, supports, and resources they need to support children's learning is one avenue to improving the quality of teacher-child interactions and of children's learning environments.

Children will not receive benefits from early care and education unless ECE professionals are adequately prepared, competent, supported, and well compensated. By enhancing the ECE workforce, state boards can ensure that all children have a chance to receive a high-quality early education. Unless states focus on the ECE workforce, the extant context of fragmented, inconsistent ECE systems and varying ECE program quality will continue. Moreover, children will continue to miss opportunities for equitable, high-quality ECE experiences that can help them reach their full potential. ■

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[2] In 2015, the Institute of Medicine/National Research Council (IOM/NRC) released "Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age Eight: A Unifying Foundation." The consensus report stemmed from multidisciplinary, independent, objective, and nonpartisan expert committees that provided thorough issue reviews and evidence-based recommendations. The IOM/NRC report highlighted the importance of the ECE workforce for program quality and positive outcomes for young children. See also Institute of Medicine, *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development* (Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2000); B. K. Hamre, "Teachers' Daily Interactions with Children: An Essential Ingredient in Effective Early Childhood Programs," *Child Development Perspectives* 8, no. 4 (2014): 223–30; Diane Early et al., "Teachers' Education, Classroom Quality, and Young Children's Academic Skills: Results from Seven Studies of Preschool Programs," *Child Development* 78, no. 2 (2007): 558–80.

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[4] Center of Developing Child, "From Best Practices to Breakthrough Impacts"; Ajay Chaudry, "The Promise of Preschool Education: Challenges for Policy and Governance" in Phillips et al., "Current State of Scientific Knowledge," 75–84.

[5] Marcy Whitebook et al., "Early Childhood Workforce Index—2016" (Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley, 2016).

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[7] National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team, "Number and Characteristics of Early Care and Education Teachers and Caregivers: Initial Findings, National Survey of Early Care and Education," *OPRE Report* #2013-38 (Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013).

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[10] Whitebook et al., "Early Childhood Workforce Index."

[11] E. J. De Schipper et al., "Cortisol Levels of Caregivers in Child Care Centers as Related to the Quality of Their Caregiving," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 24, no. 1

Children will not receive benefits from early care and education unless ECE professionals are adequately prepared, competent, supported, and well compensated.

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Well-structured efforts to get children ready pay off in greater academic gains.

States Pave the Way for Smoother Transitions to Kindergarten

by Aaron Loewenberg*

Children enter kindergarten with a wide range of previous education experiences: Some have participated in pre-K programs: private, state-funded, or part of Head Start. Others have spent time in a family child care setting or in informal arrangements with family, friends, and neighbors. Regardless, this transition is fraught with stress and uncertainty for many children and their parents. State leaders, as well as elementary and pre-K educators, can ease the transition into kindergarten and by doing so improve the odds that children will succeed in school.

Generally speaking, kindergarten represents a markedly different environment for children who used to spend their days at home or even those who participated in pre-K. Interactions in a kindergarten classroom become more focused on academic progress, with specific targets for literacy and numeracy that may not have been present before.

This transition is significant for parents as well. Contact with teachers is often more formalized and less frequent than in a pre-K classroom. There is often less emphasis on parent-teacher and parent-parent contact than before.

Since evidence suggests that early education experiences can powerfully affect students' later academic and life outcomes, state boards of education have strong incentives for making the

*This article is adapted from the author's earlier report, "Connecting the Steps: State Strategies to Ease the Transition from pre-K to Kindergarten" (Washington, DC: New America, July 2017).

transition to kindergarten as smooth and stress-free as possible for children and families. A 2005 study that examined data on more than 17,000 children established a link between the number of transition activities schools facilitated prior to and near the beginning of the kindergarten year, such as teacher home visits or parent orientation sessions, and larger gains in academic achievement by the end of the year. These positive gains were greatest for children whose families were low- or middle-income.[1]

Despite evidence illustrating the importance of the kindergarten transition point, many districts and schools take a haphazard approach. To the extent that transition activities take place, they frequently entail such practices as sending brochures home rather than more effective, high-intensity activities such as arranging for pre-K students to visit a kindergarten classroom or allowing for joint planning time between pre-K and kindergarten teachers.[2]

While planning a stable, well-connected transition falls largely within the purview of individual schools and districts, state leadership can actively encourage intentional efforts at the local level. Four states that have improved the transition process serve as examples of what state leaders can achieve: West Virginia, Colorado, Oregon, and Washington.

West Virginia

West Virginia's Board of Education took an active role in easing the transition to kindergarten by codifying requirements for counties. Board of Education Policy 2525 outlines criteria for approving and operating programs that are part of the West Virginia Universal Pre-K program, and it mandates certain activities at the county level:[3]

■ Each county's early childhood team—made up of representatives from the county pre-K program, the pre-K special needs program, a licensed community child care program, and a Head Start program—writes a plan for transitioning students out of pre-K and into kindergarten.

■ Each plan must offer pre-K students and their families an opportunity to visit their prospective kindergarten setting.

■ Counties must provide written information to parents about kindergarten registration and expectations for kindergarten students.

■ County collaborative teams must give pre-K providers and kindergarten teachers an opportunity to meet annually to discuss how to best prepare students for kindergarten.

County teams also must establish a system for transferring assessment data that are documented as a part of each child's Kindergarten Transition Report to the student's future kindergarten teacher. Pre-K teachers use the Early Learning Scale three times a year to assess children. These assessment results offer a snapshot of children's learning and development in the domains of social and emotional learning, language/literacy, math, and science. Some counties bring pre-K and kindergarten teachers together to interpret the data, while other counties provide a general overview to kindergarten teachers about the purpose and use of the transition report. These assessment results and narrative comments are intended to help kindergarten teachers prepare to meet the individual needs of each incoming student.

The board's policy also requires county teams to use transition best practices detailed in the West Virginia Ready, Set, Go! School Readiness Framework created by the state's department of education and board of education and established in 2011. The framework includes an early childhood transitions toolkit that breaks down transition activities into four components: Ready Children, Ready Families, Ready Schools and Programs, and Ready State and Communities.

Oregon

Oregon has taken a different approach. A 2013 legislative initiative sought to encourage local innovation in improving transitions to kindergarten through grants. The Early Learning Kindergarten Readiness Partnership and Innovation grant program (KRPI) gives grantees considerable discretion to implement approaches in one or more of the following areas:

■ supporting successful transitions into kindergarten;

■ engaging families as partners in children's learning and development;

Despite evidence illustrating the importance of the kindergarten transition point, many districts and schools take a haphazard approach.

- providing opportunities for shared professional development between early learning and elementary school educators; and

- increasing alignment, connection, and collaboration within the prenatal to third grade continuum.

The first grants were distributed during the 2014–15 school year. Since the program was established, grants have funded a wide variety of programs. For example, Early Learning Multnomah, the early learning hub for the Portland area, has used a portion of its grant to fund full-time P-3 coordinators in eight high-need schools. The coordinators organized Play and Learn groups, where children aged zero to five play educational games while their parents learn more about what is expected once children reach kindergarten. The coordinators also help organize and staff the Early Kindergarten Transition Program, a two- to three-week summer program in which incoming kindergarteners become familiar with their new school and parents learn about ways to support learning at home.

KRPI funds have also been used to establish joint training sessions between early learning providers and kindergarten teachers. Within the Portland Public School System, Head Start and kindergarten teachers participated in trainings about positive behavioral intervention and supports.

In the program's first year, the 16 communities that received grants provided professional development events for hundreds of early learning providers and elementary school staff throughout the state, many of which were joint professional development events. According to a program evaluation, early learning providers who participated in joint training sessions reported higher levels of understanding of kindergarten teachers' expectations after attending the sessions, and teachers reported increased levels of understanding of the early care environments children participate in prior to kindergarten entry.[4]

Colorado

Colorado is working to improve local transition planning through a Colorado Department of Education program to promote ongoing,

observation-based assessment in early care and education settings. Results Matter is designed to streamline the system for measuring the development of children aged zero to five in early care and education programs by training educators in the use of authentic observational assessment and enabling results to be tracked from year to year.

Results Matter is open to any early care or education program that chooses to participate. Participation is required for children enrolled in the Colorado Preschool Program and pre-K students who receive special education services. The program has helped create partnerships between pre-K and kindergarten teachers. It has also helped nonprofit foundations to more precisely identify where technical assistance is most needed when working with districts and schools.

The Colorado Department of Education publishes a handbook each school year to lay out the timeline and steps for administering assessments and the expectations for documentation of student records. The department also provides training on early childhood observation skills at no charge for pre-K educators in publicly funded programs if they did not receive this training in college or through another program.

Funding provided by the Race to the Top–Early Learning Challenge enabled the state to expand the project to include more child care centers and family child care homes. Child care providers received training and technical assistance over a two-year period to support the use of age-appropriate assessment in these settings.

Washington

Washington passed legislation to improve kindergarten transitions, which then governor Christine Gregoire signed into law in 2011. The Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills, or WaKIDS, is led by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction in collaboration with the Department of Early Learning and Thrive Washington, a well-known advocacy organization. The program has three components—family connection, whole-child assessment, and early learning collaboration—and is required for state-funded, full-day kindergarten. State funding for full-day kindergarten

was available to all schools in 2016–17, when approximately 77,000 kindergarteners took part in WaKIDS.

Family Connection. Schools must invite families to individual meetings to discuss goals and expectations for the kindergarten year and allow parents to share information about their child with the teacher. State law permits districts to use up to three school days to engage in the family connection meetings.

Whole-Child Assessment. Participating kindergarten programs are required to use a program called GOLD to assess child development and learning. Some school districts choose to use the GOLD data to create student report cards throughout the year. GOLD is also used in the state pre-K program; kindergarten teachers have access to the most recent scores of students previously enrolled in the state pre-K program.

Early Learning Collaboration. Unlike the other two components, the collaboration component leaves a great deal of flexibility to individual districts and schools to decide how to work with early learning providers. By law, districts are required to establish relationships with early learning community providers and engage in kindergarten readiness activities with those providers and parents, but individual districts choose the means for accomplishing these tasks.

The state encourages principals to bring kindergarten teachers and early learning providers together for professional development sessions that include reviewing WaKIDS kindergarten data and transition forms completed by pre-K programs. Washington has developed an Early Learning Collaboration Framework to help guide schools and districts in this work. The framework is used at regional convenings, where kindergarten teachers, principals, and early learning providers discuss steps for collaboration and analyze assessment data. The state has also created a voluntary kindergarten transition form that early learning providers and parents can use to share information about incoming students with kindergarten teachers.

In addition, Child Care Aware of Washington launched the Bridging Communities and Making Connections program to improve collaboration with early learning providers. This program allows elementary school principals to receive reports of licensed child care providers in their area. Regional Child Care Aware of Washington offices follow up with resources and services to facilitate communication between providers and principals. By building these connections, the program helps principals form relationships with families of incoming students before kindergarten starts.

Conclusion

While transitions take place at the individual district and school level, the four states profiled here took steps to encourage local actors to move beyond standard practices such as sending home kindergarten brochures. Schools in their states are instead engaged in the more substantive work of building relationships between early learning providers and elementary schools.

Each state's approach offers unique benefits and challenges, and it will be up to individual states to decide which is the best fit for their population of students and families. The key takeaway is that states must be engaged in making the transition to kindergarten less difficult for students and families in order to ensure successful academic and life outcomes for all children.

State boards of education play an important role in smoothing these transitions. Actions such as ensuring that pre-K and kindergarten curriculum standards are aligned and making early childhood education a component of administrator preparation can pave the way toward making kindergarten transitions easier for children and their families.

By supporting state legislation or grant programs that have smoother transitions as a goal, state boards can also use their bully pulpits to encourage districts to be more intentional about the transition process. State boards can encourage collaboration and partnership across state agencies that provide oversight of birth-to-5 early childhood programs and elementary schools.

Additionally, states can take the following steps:

1. Use federal funds to finance transition activities. With the recent passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states and districts now have greater flexibility to invest in early learning. Under Title I of ESSA, federal

> State boards can also use their bully pulpits to encourage districts to be more intentional about the transition process.

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Fully Funding Pre-K through K-12 Funding Formulas

States that use the formulas to fund pre-K fare better on measures of adequacy and equity.

by W. Steven Barnett and Richard Kasmin

Pre-K is widely acknowledged to be a sound public investment. When their pre-K programs are of high quality, disadvantaged children see particularly large benefits—higher test scores, less need for grade repetition and special education, and increased educational attainment.[1] Yet high-quality programs are in short supply. State boards of education can change this situation, but they must first figure out how to pay for it.

One obvious approach is to incorporate pre-K into the existing K-12 school funding formula. That fewer than a dozen states have taken this approach suggests that it is neither simple nor easy. Putting pre-K into the school funding formula does not increase the revenue available. Unless the school-age population is declining, tax increases or reallocation of existing revenue are necessary to expand pre-K. Of course, this is true for any pre-K initiative. With the school funding formula approach, however, some may oppose what they view as creating a new entitlement, decreasing K-12 funding, or creating an unfunded mandate for local education agencies (LEAs). In addition, K-12 funding formulas are not perfect and often face criticisms over their adequacy and equity. Despite these very real concerns, the school funding formula can still be the best available option.

Recently we compared states that use the K-12 formula to finance pre-K with those that do not to see how they all fared with respect to adequacy and equity.[2] States that use their K-12 formulas did better on both counts—that is, they have higher, more stable funding levels for pre-K and better coverage of the population. A look at the varied approaches of those states enables us to derive some lessons for how state boards can best apply their existing funding formulas for

pre-K. Note that this approach can work even for states and cities where private rather than public providers deliver most of the pre-K services.

Adequacy and Equity

A patchwork of public and private organizations provides U.S. preschool education, which is funded by fee-paying parents, private foundations, and all three levels of government. Somewhat more than half of U.S. three- and four-year-olds attend a preschool program, and 59 percent of those children attend a public program.[3] Enrollment varies by age, with most state and local pre-K programs limited to four-year-olds, while Head Start and preschool special education serve more equal numbers at each age.

In 2016, state-funded pre-K enrolled roughly one-third of the nation's four-year-olds. States spent about $7.5 billion on pre-K.[4] As part of many state pre-K programs, LEAs provide additional funding for their own initiatives and for preschool special education, but these expenditures are not tracked at state or national levels.

Adequacy is easier to define than to judge.[5] Funding is "adequate" if it is enough to provide an education capable of producing desired outcomes for students (e.g., to meet state standards). The question of how much funding is required for K-12 schools to meet that definition for the average child and for different children in different circumstances has fueled numerous school board debates and court cases. For preschool, the problem is made more difficult by lack of information on district pre-K expenditures.

Nevertheless, it is safe to say that across the nation there is an adequacy

Table 1. Estimated Coverage of At-Risk 4-Year-Olds in Select States

State	4-Year-Old Enrollment in Head Start, Special Ed, and State-Funded pre-K as a Share of All 4s	Estimated Share of 4-Year-Old Population below 150% FPL	Difference (percentage point)
Arizona	21%	38%	-17%
California	46%	34%	12%
DC	81%	37%	44%
Florida	85%	37%	48%
Iowa	70%	26%	44%
Louisiana	46%	41%	5%
Maine	52%	29%	23%
Maryland	43%	21%	22%
Michigan	40%	34%	6%
Nebraska	35%	27%	8%
Nevada	15%	35%	-20%
New York	61%	33%	28%
North Carolina	30%	37%	-7%
Rhode Island	24%	29%	-5%
South Carolina	51%	37%	14%
Tennessee	35%	38%	-3%
Texas	58%	36%	22%
Vermont	75%	24%	51%
West Virginia	70%	37%	33%

Sources: Pre-K enrollment data from Barnett et al. (2016); data on poverty share from Annie E. Casey Kids Count Data Center, 2016.

problem in pre-K financing. A formal analysis of what it would take to achieve specified learning goals rarely determines funding levels, and most public pre-K programs lack the resources to produce strong, lasting gains for children. They have less qualified teachers, less support for instructional improvement, and larger class sizes than in other pre-K programs. Funding per child also tends to be far lower.

Equity is about fairness, and people differ in what they consider fair. In our view, equity increases as the number of children in low-income families who are served increases, as they have the least access to high-quality private pre-K. Equity also increases when programs spend more on those with greater needs, who require more intensive services to catch up with their peers.

Most state pre-K programs address equity by limiting eligibility to children at higher risk of not succeeding in school, including those from lower income families. However, states also commonly fail to fund programs at levels that allow all eligible children to enroll. Except when K-12 funding formulas are applied to pre-K, spending adjustments to meet differential child needs are rare.

To provide a sense of equity in access, table 1 compares four-year-old enrollment in the major federal and state pre-K programs to the

percentage of four-year-olds below 150 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL) for selected states. The difference is calculated in column three, with positive numbers indicating more than enough enrollment to serve all low-income children and negative numbers indicating too little capacity. These admittedly rough estimates capture only potential capacity. Nonetheless, it is clear that capacity varies greatly from state to state (not even considering those that do not offer pre-K at all).

State K-12 funding formulas determine how much funding is needed per pupil for an adequate education and how much of that the state will contribute to each school district. Ideally, the formulas are based on a realistic assessment of adequacy and make adjustments based on differences in needs of children, local capacity to raise revenue, geographic cost differences, and inflation, as well as the number of students enrolled. The extent to which they do so varies by state, but every formula makes some of these adjustments.[6]

Eleven States Using K-12 Funding Formulas

Eleven states fund pre-K programs using their state's school funding formulas, though the programs vary in several key features (table 2). Seven can be said to fully use the formula because they allow all age-eligible children to enroll and generate funding from the formula (though California's Transitional Kindergarten is open only to children with birth days between September 2 and December 2). Of these, three fund a full day. Oklahoma and Washington, D.C., are two examples in which the school funding formula is used to fund pre-K in exactly the same way that K-12 is funded.

West Virginia illustrates how states can adapt a formula funding to the more complex pre-K funding landscape. Although spending per pupil is set on par with K-3 spending and coverage is universal, West Virginia blends or braids Head Start and child care revenue to reach the full amount rather than depending entirely on education dollars. In essence, education revenue funds half a day, and other revenues fund the other half day of the formula amount. Other formula states fund only a half day of pre-K, much as many states fund only a half day of kindergarten.

Some of the states that use the K-12 formula for pre-K also administer another pre-K program that is not formula funded. Iowa, for

Table 2. Use of School Funding Formula in State Pre-K Programs

State Program	Universal Coverage	Cap on Funding	Full-Time Equivalent	Pre-K/K-12 Spending Ratio
CATK	YES	NO	0.50	0.98
DC	YES	NO	1.00	0.97
OK	YES	NO	0.92	0.88
WV	YES	NO	0.96	0.96
IA SVPP	YES	NO	0.50	0.32
VT	YES	NO	0.50	0.59
WI 4K	YES	NO	0.50	0.65
CO	NO	YES	0.50	0.48
ME	NO	NO	N/A	0.67
MD	NO	NO	0.68	0.79
TX	NO	NO	0.76	0.53

CATK = California Transitional Kindergarten; IA SVPP = Iowa Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program; WI 4K = Wisconsin Four-Year-Old Kindergarten

example, funds pre-K for the general population through the formula but retains a much smaller, older program targeting children from low-income families that it provides with a much higher level of state funding than the formula would generate. This approach strengthens adequacy and equity by funding the most disadvantaged at a higher amount per child, but the targeted program lacks sufficient funding to reach all eligible children.

Some states employ just one part of the K-12 formula to calculate pre-K funding, using the foundation aid level but not equalization, categorical, or other adjustments. Examples include Colorado and Texas. Both also limit eligibility to at-risk populations. In addition, Colorado does not require school districts to offer services to all eligible children who apply, and the state caps total spending annually. Colorado districts receive pre-K funding based on slot allotments rather than actual enrollment when the latter exceeds the allotment.

Texas provides another example of how additional funding may supplement the formula. The formula provides for half-day services for three- and four-year-olds who meet one of several risk factors, including family income below 185 percent FPL, inability to speak or comprehend English, or a parent on military duty. In some years, the state has provided additional funding for full-day pre-K services, and many districts fund the remaining half day on their own. As in some other states, some LEAs fund full-day pre-K on their own when the state formula pays for only a half day.

Maine uses its school funding formula to finance pre-K much as kindergarten is typically funded, except in one respect. Maine funds pre-K students directly on par with K-3 spending per pupil. If districts choose to offer a full day of pre-K, they receive funding for a full day, but they can opt for a half day. This is not unusual in the sense that many states similarly leave the decision to offer full-day kindergarten to local discretion and fund a half or full day depending on district choice. What is unusual is that districts in Maine can choose whether or not to limit pre-K eligibility based on income, and then districts are funded based on enrollment.

The last two columns of table 2 report the weighted average length of day for enrollment

and an estimate of the ratio of pre-K to K-12 regular (non–special education) funding per pupil. The pairs of percentages should be reasonably close if the funding formula in a state generates similar amounts for pre-K per full-time equivalent and K-12. In some states, the data suggest that half-day pre-K is funded somewhat better, recognizing either higher costs for pre-K (e.g., due to smaller class size) or that a half day has some fixed costs per pupil that make it more expensive per FTE. In Texas, pre-K is less well funded per FTE because many districts offer full-day pre-K but the state still funds only a half day. That leaves Iowa as the only state using the formula in which pre-K appears to be underfunded relative to K-12.

In addition to examining the impacts of the use of the K-12 funding formula at one point in time, we also examined the impact on real spending per pupil over time. Figure 1 compares real pre-K spending per pupil from 2005–06 to 2015–16 in states that use the school funding formula for pre-K with those that do not. This period includes the Great Recession. Real spending per pupil for both groups of states is indexed at 100 in 2005–06. Over the ensuing 10 years, the 11 states that financed pre-K programs with school financing formulas posted an average of 3.6 percent annualized growth. The other state programs have declining per-pupil pre-K spending after the recession hits and only modestly recover so that their average annualized growth rate was just 1.1 percent. This shows K-12 school funding formulas provided much greater stability and growth in real funding per pupil.

Among the states that do not use K-12 funding formulas for pre-K, some use other formulas. The use of a formula suggests that funding levels are determined by some analysis of what is required to meet needs and standards. New Jersey is the most obvious example. Its major pre-K program was developed in response to a school finance court case, and the pre-K funding formula was derived from an analysis of the actual costs of meeting court-ordered standards. Spending per pupil in New Jersey is far above the national average.

Michigan and Tennessee also developed formulas to determine state pre-K funding. Michigan is an above average spender, while Tennessee spends at about the national average.

The 11 states that financed pre-K programs with school financing formulas posted an average of 3.6 percent annualized growth.

Figure 1. Programs That Use School Funding Formula Show Stronger, Steadier Growth, 2005–15
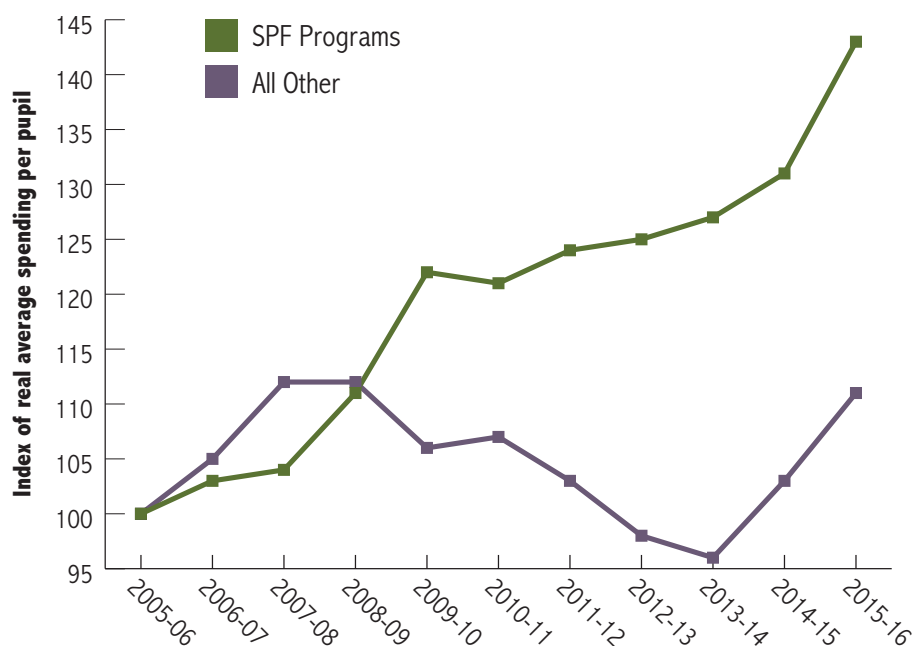
Impact of Applying K-12 Funding Formulas

What if all states applied K-12 formulas for pre-K? We report our estimates of the financial impacts in table 3. We define universal access at 80 percent enrollment (as some will choose private preschools and others to stay home), and our estimates take into account the fact that many states offer half- or full-day programming. For states that solely fund one duration, we provide estimates for just that duration. For those where either a half- or full-day might be provided and funded, we estimate both, thereby bracketing the range of potential financial impact.

By reporting these estimates in millions of dollars and as a percentage of total state expenditures, we hope to provide a sense of the additional revenue that would be required from taxes, fees, or lotteries or from redistributing revenues now spent elsewhere.[7] Remarkably, some states would actually end up spending

less per pupil and less for current enrollment because the formula shifts more of the responsibility for funding the program to LEAs, not because spending per pupil would actually decline. Only Georgia would likely see a reduction in total expenditures because its program already approaches universal access with a relatively high level of funding.

It is not clear that the states with negative estimates for half-day programs actually would spend less, though they might well break even. States already using the K-12 formula are projected to modestly increase expenditures for enrollment expansion. States that do not fund pre-K would need an increase of more than 1 percent of the state's total expenditure. Such large increases would undoubtedly take time, perhaps even a decade.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Only high-quality programs can produce the tremendous results that pre-K promises for children and taxpayers more generally, and such programs are costly. Yet we find that programs in states that are already using the K-12 funding formula for pre-K clearly have benefitted, including weathering the Great Recession much

Table 3. What Universal Coverage Would Cost by State

State	Added State Spending Needed for Universal Coverage at K-12 SPP (millions of dollars)		Added State Spending as a Share of Total State Spending (percent)	
	half-day	*full-day*	*half-day*	*full-day*
Pennsylvania	$128	$367	0.2%	0.5%
Rhode Island	-	$43	-	0.6%
South Carolina	$46	$141	0.2%	0.6%
South Dakota	$16	$32	0.4%	0.8%
Tennessee	-	$129	-	0.5%
Texas*	-$307	$178	-0.3%	0.2%
Utah	$86	$172	0.6%	1.3%
Vermont*	-$1	-	0.0%	-
Virginia	$85	$240	0.2%	0.7%
Washington	$145	$354	0.4%	1.0%
West Virginia*	-$35	$14	-0.3%	0.1%
Wisconsin*	-$52	$75	-0.2%	0.3%
Wyoming	$29	$57	0.7%	1.4%

* State is fully using the school funding formula for either half- or full-day coverage. Sources: K-12 spending per pupil data adapted from U.S. Census Bureau (2016); pre-K spending per pupil and enrollment data from Barnett et al. (2016); state government expenditure data from the U.S. Census Bureau's state and local government database for 2013.

better than pre-K programs in other states. In addition, any process that determines funding based on the cost of meeting specific standards, variations in the needs of children, and variations in local funding capacity is likely to produce fairer, more adequate funding for pre-K than funding schemes that do not. Therefore, use of a K-12 funding formula should not be a purely mechanical process, though it does offer a kind of shortcut to better pre-K funding.

Shifting to use of the K-12 formula does not remove the political challenges, however, which differ across the states with respect to total revenue required and the relative shares required from state and local government. Sometimes, the burden on the state would decrease. Where transition to the formula also means expanding eligibility to all children, the state burden would increase, but it could still be less of a burden than existing approaches.

Any state considering expansion to cover all children—or even all children in low-income families—should look to the example of West Virginia for how revenue might be braided and blended across education, Head Start, and child care with state leadership to minimize the increased financial burden on LEAs.

It should not simply be assumed that shifting to the K-12 formula shifts a fixed share of the burden to LEAs. States must do a careful appraisal of the extent to which LEAs already fund pre-K within and apart from state-administered pre-K. Some districts could find that the K-12 formula reduces their financial burden, allowing them to increase spending per child and coverage or even to shift financial resources to other needs.

Where additional revenue must be generated to fund pre-K through the K-12 formula, leaders will have to build political will.

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State ESSA Plans Address Early Education

by Winona Hao

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) created opportunities for supporting early childhood education (ECE) and its workforce. For example, states' ESSA plans must describe how they will assist school districts and elementary schools that elect to use Title I funds to support early childhood education programs. In addition, Title I requires state report cards to include the number and percentage of students enrolled in preschool programs. For the first time, early childhood educators are included in the definition of professional development under Title II. Title III focuses on providing states and districts additional support for educating English learners and migrant students. Funds may be used to support strategies that promote school readiness of English learners and their transition from early learning programs to elementary school.

The U.S. Department of Education released nonregulatory early learning guidance on ESSA last year urging state education agencies and districts to take advantage of the law's opportunities to support ECE—particularly through use of funds under Title I, II, and III.

By September 18, 2017, 50 states and the District of Columbia had submitted their plans for implementing ESSA. Some states expanded their early childhood agenda beyond the ESSA mandates. Seven states included ECE in their overall vision statements and created a long-term goal to provide high-quality early childhood programs and align ECE with their K-12 system (see map 1). Eleven states and the District of Columbia embed early education in accountability and assessment systems through indicators such as chronic absenteeism and English language proficiency. Twenty-four states planned some sort of development, retention, and advancement strategies for ECE educators. Twelve states proposed funding and supported professional development opportunities for the early learning workforce. ∎

> **Seven states included ECE in their overall vision statements and created a long-term goal to provide high-quality early childhood programs.**

Map 1. Early Education in ESSA Plans

Legend:
- ▪ Includes ECE in long-term goals
- ○ ECE in assessment and accountability systems
- ★ Plans support for ECE educators

Serving Young Dual Language Learners in Illinois
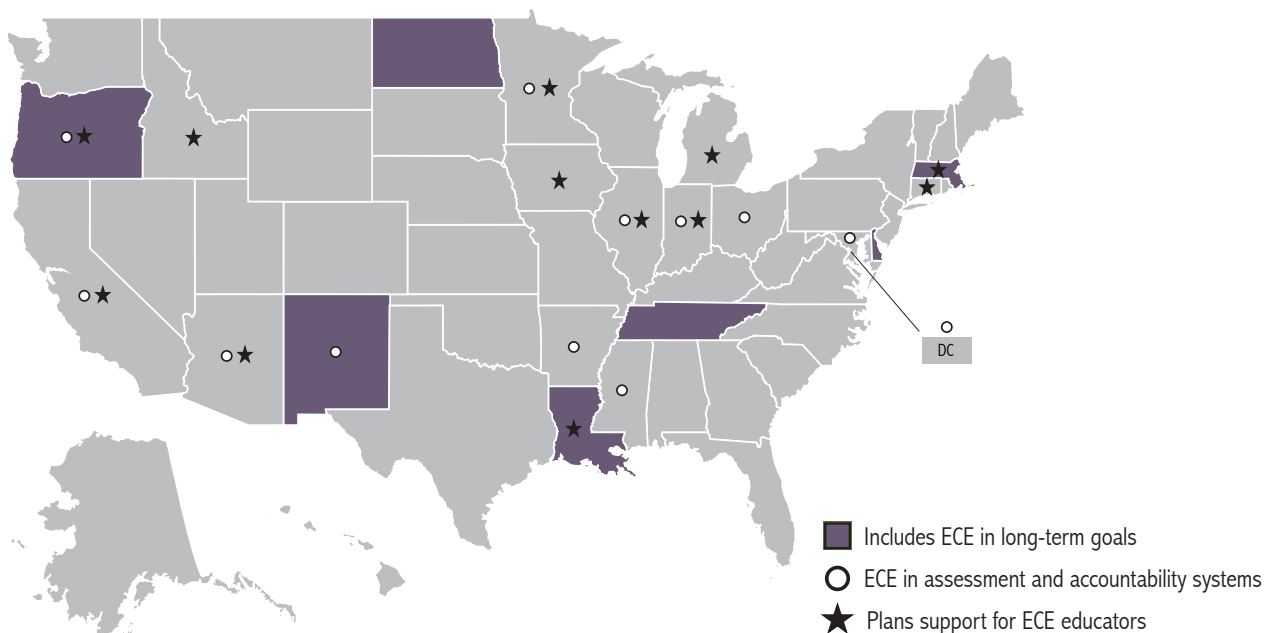
Illinois responds to growing diversity of its youngsters with initiatives to increase workforce skills.

by Luisiana Meléndez and Patricia Chamberlain

Between 2000 and 2010, the foreign-born population in Illinois increased by over 200,000, and the number of young dual language learners (DLLs) also grew. By 2015, DLLs were thought to account for more than a quarter of the state's three- and four-year-olds.[1] In addition, more K-12 children in Illinois were being designated as English learners and were performing at persistently low levels on standardized measures of grade 4 reading and mathematics. In this context, the Illinois General Assembly approved legislation in 2008 that for the first time made three- to five-year-olds who were enrolled in preschool classrooms funded by the Illinois State Board of Education eligible to receive language support services.

Illinois has not been alone in experiencing demographic shifts. Nationally, a third of children between birth and age 5 grow up hearing a language other than English at home, and more than a quarter of children attending Head Start and Early Head Start live in homes where other languages are spoken. Additionally, one in seven children entering kindergarten has a primary language other than English, and as many as 40 percent of the nation's English learners are between ages 3 and 8.[2]

There are many potential benefits associated with early bilingualism (see box 1). However, many DLLs start kindergarten behind their monolingual counterparts and struggle to close this gap through much of their school career.[3] The National Center for Education Statistics reports that English learners nationally have fared consistently below their non-EL counterparts in standardized measures of grade 4 reading and math over the last 18 years.[4] The persistence of this gap is noteworthy, although disregard for the impact of English language proficiency on the scores of standardized measures has made these results controversial.

DLLs are more likely than monolinguals to grow up with certain factors that are believed to hinder educational achievement—for example, living in poverty and having parents with limited formal education. It may be inferred that these risk factors contribute to school achievement challenges and arguably supersede the cognitive benefits of early bilingualism.[5]

In addressing the learning needs of this population, state policymakers also have to reckon with the fact that DLLs are a far from homogeneous group. They differ significantly with respect to the development stage when dual language exposure began, the contexts where the home language and English are used, the English proficiency of their family members, and the balance of their exposure to their two languages. All these variables have implications for DLLs' early language development and have also been associated with their long-term school trajectory.[6]

There is considerable evidence on the benefits of extending access and improving quality of early care and education. Empirical data suggest that quality early childhood education improves early elementary school performance in general, but there is also growing evidence that emergent bilinguals see improved school performance later on, especially when early education programs respond to their particular needs and strengths.[7]

Importance of Cross-Agency Collaboration

Early care and education programs and services are significantly more dispersed across multiple agencies than K-12 systems are, which

> These risk factors contribute to school achievement challenges and arguably supersede the cognitive benefits of early bilingualism.

Box 1. Benefits of Dual Language Learning

At birth, humans have the neurological capacity to learn multiple languages simultaneously, and key language production milestones in young DLLs mirror that of monolinguals.[a] In other words, learning two languages from birth per se does not cause confusion or delay in the development of either.

On the contrary, exposure to and use of two or more languages during the early developmental years can aid the social, linguistic, or cognitive development of DLLs, who often outperform monolinguals in their capacity to store and retrieve information from working memory, a key competency in reading comprehension and mental math.[b] The cognitive benefits of bilingualism can appear quite early, as certain executive functioning advantages are present in young infants.[c] Early bilingual exposure has also been associated with stronger self-regulation and socioemotional competence at kindergarten entry.[d] Although the mechanisms are not yet absolutely clear, initial evidence links these advantages to the demands implicit in acquiring and using two distinct language systems.

[a]Barbara Albareda-Castellot et al., "The Acquisition of Phonetic Categories in Bilingual Infants: New Data from an Anticipatory Eye Movement Paradigm," *Developmental Science* 1 (2011): 395–401; Krista Byers-Heinlein et al., "The Roots of Bilingualism in Newborns," *Psychological Science* 21, no. 3 (2010): 343–48; Adrian Garcia-Sierra et al., "Bilingual Language Learning: An ERP Study Relating Early Brain Responses to Speech, Language Input, and Later Word Production," *Journal of Phonetics* 39 (2011): 546–57; Naja Ramirez and Patricia Kuhl, "Bilingual Learning in Children," Institute for Learning & Brain Sciences, University of Washington, June 2, 2016; Dina C. Castro et al., "Dual Language Learners: Research Informing Policy," (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, 2013).
[b]Catherine Sandhofer and Yuuko Uchikoshi, "Cognitive Consequences of Dual Language Learning: Cognitive Function, Language and Literacy, Science and Mathematics, and Social–Emotional Development," in *California's Best Practices for Young Dual Language Learners: Research Overview Papers* (Sacramento: Governor's State Advisory Council on Early Learning and Care, 2013).
[c]Ágnes Melinda Kovács and Jacques Mehler, "Cognitive Gains in 7-Month-Old Bilingual Infants," *Proceedings of the National Academies of Science* 106 (2009): 6556–60.
[d]Tamara G. Halle et al., "The Social-Emotional Development of Dual Language Learners: Looking Back at Existing Research and Moving Forward with Purpose," in *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 29 (2014): 734–39.

makes it harder to further common agendas and actions that effectively target a particular purpose or goal. Nevertheless, cross-agency collaboration can be an effective pathway to better quality and access for young children and their families.[8] The experience of Illinois exemplifies this potential.

Such collaborations face challenges associated with insufficient funding, regulatory differences among funding streams, discrepancies in program standards, and disparities in how the workforce is compensated.[9] Yet the benefits far outweigh the difficulties. As early learning experts Sharon Lynn Kagan and Kristie Kauerz write, "Whether dubbed system efforts, partnerships, linkages, coordination, or collaborations, such efforts are designed to stimulate new thinking and new actions that will expand services, improve quality and outcomes, and reduce inequities in access."[10]

Expanding Access and Tackling Quality

Partially in response to the growth of linguistic diversity in the state, in 2008 the Illinois General Assembly approved legislation that led the Illinois State Board of Education to change the school code. The board stipulated that three- to five-year-old DLLs in Preschool for All (PFA) classrooms were eligible for the same language support services as K-12 English learners enrolled in public schools.[11]

In addition, teachers in PFA classrooms serving DLLs were required to obtain an endorsement—granted according to provisions specified by the Illinois State Board of Education—that certifies them to be effectively prepared to serve these students. Because PFA students are found in community-based organizations as well as public schools, the new directives apply to any organization that receives PFA funding independently of whether it operates under the umbrella of the board or of other agencies. These measures represented a significant innovation. Nearly a decade later, only three other states—Alaska, New York, and Texas—have similar policies.[12]

The new legislation generated vigorous debates on teacher qualifications and whether it would be possible to meet the ensuing workforce demand, and these debates persist. Currently, numerous early childhood programs

with PFA funding have yet to comply fully with the teacher preparation mandate. Yet changes in legislation and corresponding school code succeeded in raising programs' awareness of the unique needs and strengths attached to early bilingualism—a far from negligible achievement. Another valuable consequence was that institutions of higher education with early childhood teacher preparation programs revised and updated their programs of studies to better prepare teacher candidates to serve DLLs.

Illinois engaged in two other programs of studies to increase the quality of its services to young DLLs. In 2013, the state's early childhood Quality Rating and Information System, which started in 2008, transitioned into ExceleRate Illinois. The Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies administers ExceleRate under the joint direction of the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development, the Illinois Department of Human Services, and the Illinois State Board of Education.

Under ExceleRate Illinois, early care and education programs voluntarily opt to receive quality ratings. Head Start and PFA programs are eligible to opt for the two highest levels of quality in the system, the Silver and Gold Circles of Quality. The standards defining each of four levels of quality incorporate at least one indicator of culturally and linguistically appropriate practice, and the evidence required to substantiate this claim varies by quality level. Programs that have achieved the Gold Circle of Quality are subsequently eligible to apply for one or more awards of excellence, one of which is the Linguistically and Culturally Appropriate Practice Award of Excellence. This award recognizes early care and education programs that maintain such exemplary practices as developing individual dual language learning goals that incorporate family input, using culturally and linguistically appropriate assessments, and offering the option of parent and family conferences in the home language The Linguistically and Culturally Appropriate Practice Award also acknowledges other efforts, such as hiring practices that recruit and retain staff that reflects the language and culture of children and families, and special education services delivered in accordance to linguistically and culturally responsive tenets.

A second initiative, the LC Excel Project, was created to provide individualized support to the first programs seeking the ExceleRate Linguistic and Culturally Appropriate Practice awards of excellence. Interested programs engaged in self-assessment to ascertain how program practices aligned to the award standards and identify evidence of this alignment. When programs determined that a particular practice standard was not fully in place, they tapped LC Excel resources such as online modules, coaching, communities of practice, and technical assistance to develop and implement an action plan to meet the standard.

The LC Excel team strived to provide supports that were responsive to the needs of each site. For example, one site identified bilingual speech and language services as an area of need, so the coach suggested a book study to guide the team in redesigning their procedures. All the sites had different strengths and opportunities for growth, making the multiple support options available through LC Excel particularly effective in tailoring assistance to program needs.

After self-assessment, and ensuing learning and professional development, each site made pertinent changes. Evidence demonstrating implementation of the standards of the Linguistically and Culturally Appropriate Practice Award of Excellence was compiled in a portfolio, which included pictures, videos, written policies, transcripts of meetings, and other documentation. Portfolios that met or exceeded 80 percent of the standards received the award.

While achieving that distinction was important, program improvement was the core goal. Eleven of 23 applicants achieved the award between 2014 and 2016. Initially, 43 sites began applications and engaged with the LC Excel resources and team, but 20 of them did not feel they were prepared to submit portfolios. These 20 nonetheless said that the process raised their awareness of linguistically and culturally appropriate practices, led to some positive changes, and motivated them to continue advancing their work with DLLs and their families.

Lessons Learned

While Illinois's 2008 law and changes in code signaled recognition of demographic shifts, it also acknowledged the particular learning needs and potential cognitive and socioemotional strengths associated with DLL status. Moreover, it highlighted the importance of cross-agency collaboration in maximizing quality coverage for young emergent bilinguals.

Although some stipulations of the new school rules have yet to be fully realized, endorsing the right of DLL preschoolers for early education responsive to their developmental needs and competencies prompted changes in higher education. Illinois's state board subsidized a series of initiatives to help teacher education programs improve pertinent content and teaching methods coursework. Currently, a workgroup representing the early care and education field, accrediting agencies, and institutions of higher education is generating recommendations on how to translate knowledge of DLL development and learning into coursework leading to an associate's degree. This effort is meant to expand the early childhood workforce's access to knowledge and skills about linguistic and cultural diversity.

As one of us was a lead member of the LC Excel Project, we can attest to the potential of the award for excellence in recognizing and showcasing linguistically and culturally appropriate practices. There are caveats, the first dealing with the linguistically and culturally appropriate practice standards at each level of quality. Ideally, achieving standards at one level should prepare a program to attempt the next-level standard, but there was evidence that this was not the case. Adding more indicators to the standards at each level might provide a more viable pathway to incremental improvement.

Another lesson learned pertains to the process itself. Participants reported that embedded professional development was by far the most powerful tool for supporting change. However, many reported that the transformation of their practice was ongoing, and thus support and resources for sustained program quality need to continue beyond receiving the award.

Programs' capacity to serve DLLs varied widely, even among those receiving the gold level, revealing the complexity of linguistically and culturally appropriate early childhood practice across contexts. Programs displayed different levels of knowledge on the modes for serving DLLs, skills in implementing best

Interested programs engaged in self-assessment to ascertain how program practices aligned to the award standards and identify evidence of this alignment.

practices in instruction, use of the workforce's bilingual and bicultural abilities, and differences in the recruitment and retention of bilingual and bicultural staff. To address some of these variations, the ExceleRate website now includes exemplary portfolios that contextualize best practices across childcare, state-funded pre-K, and Head Start settings. LC Excel modules and coaches continue to be available to site teams.

At present, the 11 sites that received the Linguistically and Culturally Appropriate Practice Awards of Excellence have become models for others. Staff at these sites frequently welcome visitors, suggesting that peer-to-peer mentoring could be another tool for programs that want to serve DLLs better.

In sum, Illinois has invested in strengthening the foundation of quality for culturally and linguistically diverse children with initiatives that represent the potential of interagency collaboration. The challenge, as always, is to keep the momentum going. ■

Peer-to-peer mentoring could be another tool for programs that want to serve DLLs better.

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[1] DLLs are typically defined as children between birth and age 5 who are simultaneously learning English and another language or are starting to acquire English as a second language while they continue to develop their home language. Keira Gebbie Ballantyne et al., "Dual Language Learners in the Early Years: Getting Ready to Succeed in School" (Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2008), http://www.ncela. ed.gov/files/uploads/3/DLLs__in_the_Early_Years.pdf. See also W. Steven Barnett et al., "The State of Preschool 2015: State Preschool Yearbook" (New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2016); Alexandra Figueras-Daniel and W. Steven Barnett, "Preparing Young Hispanic Dual Language Learners for a Knowledge Economy," *NIEER Policy Brief* 24 (New Jersey: Rutgers Graduate School of Education, 2013).
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[3] Linda M. Espinosa and Miriam Calderon, "State Early Learning and Development Standards/Guidelines, Policies, and Related Practices: How Are They Responsive to the Needs of Young Dual Language Learners?" (Build Initiative, 2015), http://buildinitiative.org/Portals/0/Uploads/ Documents/BuildDLLReport2015.pdf; Eugene E. Garcia and Jose E. Náñez Sr., *Bilingualism and Cognition: Informing Research, Pedagogy, and Policy* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2011).

[4] National Center for Education Statistics, "Comparative Performance of English Learners (ELs) and non-ELS in 4th Grade Reading and Math Scores," NAEP Data Explorer, https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/dataset.aspx.
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Leveraging Early Childhood Data for Better Decision Making

Access to data on early learners is not enough.

by Philip Sirinides and Missy Coffey

Americans share an expectation that government will serve the common good, creating inescapable pressure for public agencies—especially those that serve young children—to perform well. Yet education and human services agencies continually struggle to respond to the complex conditions in which children are born. How can they address the practical challenges of public administration and give a bright start for all young children?

One strategy for fostering effective, responsive government is evidence-based policy and decision making.[1] Just as data and analytics have been used to improve performance in private business, professional sports, and social media, state agencies that serve children and families have been building sophisticated systems to gather and link administrative data for over a decade. States have developed early childhood integrated data systems (ECIDS) to address the challenges.[2]

So how are they doing? It is clear there is still a gap in evidence use by public institutions that serve children and families.[3] We can discern this gap in the progressive shift in federal funding for early childhood agencies toward requirements for data and evidence use. Despite large investments in data infrastructure,

evidence-based decision making has not taken hold.[4]

State agencies have been building systems that include a set of technical features, believing that technical specifications will position them to answer an endless list of questions—answers that have no actionable use and lead only to more questions. Technical and nontechnical factors prevent states from using their data effectively and sustainably. Specifically, there are three sorts of gaps: technical capacity for organizing data, analytic capacity for understanding data, and organizational capacity for learning from data. If innovative uses of data are to bolster public institutions, then each of these gaps must be closed.

Like other state decision makers, state boards of education must build the organizational capacity to learn from data, recognizing that to do so they must engage in an authentic process for rigorous problem diagnosis and needs identification that drives clearly stated goals. A data system doesn't replace the need for this hard work; it requires it.

What Is an ECIDS?

The term ECIDS arose in 2013 to differentiate the integrated data needs across

early childhood programs from the longitudinal link between early childhood programs and K-12 provided in the statewide longitudinal data systems (SLDS).[5] States like Pennsylvania had been working toward an ECIDS before 2009,[6] but at that point the U.S. Department of Education began providing grants to states to integrate early childhood, higher education, and workforce data into their SLDS.[7]

In 2009, 27 states received an average of $5.6 million each to integrate K-12 data with that of one other sector and 20 received an average of $12.5 million each in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds to integrate data from all sectors. Although this federal investment provided the initial opportunity for states to integrate early childhood programs, many states focused on preschool data. It was not until 2011, when 16 of the 20 Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant awardees applied to use part of their grant to support early childhood data systems, that the conversation across state agencies truly started.

An ECIDS "collects, integrates, maintains, stores, and reports information from early childhood programs across multiple agencies within a state that serve children and families from birth to age 8."[8] Since the U.S. system of early care and education comprises many service models and funding streams, families access a range of programs to meet their child's needs. Yet many states cannot provide a distinct count of the number of children served across programs. A common approach that states took when developing ECIDS was to focus on determining how many children were being served.

Another approach was to articulate and answer key research questions. A group called the Early Childhood Data Collaborative outlined five essential questions in 2010.[9] But as states tried to answer them, they were overwhelmed by the need to rephrase and expand the questions to address particular contexts, available data, or political priorities. Recently, the Center for IDEA Early Childhood Data Systems also listed critical questions to guide data systems development.[10]

Across the country, at least 37 states are working toward developing ECIDS. A handful have operational systems. North Carolina has prioritized work on its system to provide researchers with data aimed at informing policy and practice conversations. Minnesota created a public portal that makes early childhood program data available, and state staff are now working with local practitioners to develop uses for the data. For states such as these two that are further along, it is natural that the conversation shift toward data use.

Gaps in Capacity

Even as public agencies integrate and expand their collection of data, it's clear that ECIDS implementation has yet to achieve what many had envisioned. In a situation by no means unique to sectors that serve children and families, data producers are often disconnected from information users and thus fail to understand who uses the data and for what purposes.[11] Among early childhood agencies, there are clear gaps in their capacity to advance policy and programs through strategic use of integrated data.[12]

Technical capacity for organizing data: Grade B+. One reason public agencies struggle is that their technology does not organize data in ways that are useful for analytics and reporting. Front-end systems through which data are collected and stored must support back-end linking of information across systems. The current focus is on developing data models that connect data systems and elements. Newer state systems are doing better at integrating and organizing data.

Analytic capacity for understanding data: Grade C–. A second reason that ECIDS' potential has not yet been realized is that states are still devising strategies for analyzing and reporting the data they collect. Current analytics and information management systems have emerged more slowly, started later and often in response to the availability of the data. There is an emerging gap between the systems that collect data and states' capacity to access and report out data.

Organizational capacity for learning from data: Grade F. A third reason is that states often lack a coherent strategy to connect program analytics with policy and operations. Developing organizational capacity for learning from data requires the regular, systemic practice of reviewing and using data analytics. State administrators have positioned themselves

States often lack a coherent strategy to connect program analytics with policy and operations.

as data producers rather than strategic planners. But if the definition of success in ECIDS is limited to making data available, state leaders risk providing data that no one understands or knows what to do with.

To address these capacity gaps, the Consortium for Policy Research in Education at the University of Pennsylvania, along with national experts and innovators, launched the ECDataWorks project with grant funding from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. The project partners with states to develop and implement innovative reports from their ECIDS. It provides technical, financial, and organizational support for improving policymakers' use of data related to early childhood programming and policy.

The project's goal is to build states' analytic capability through new tools that close the gaps in early childhood data use. Together with teams from selected states, we conceptualize and develop solutions that address a state's priorities within the context of their ECIDS efforts. We are working with four states: Minnesota and Utah were in the first round (see box 1); round two brought us to Georgia and Texas.

Develop a Culture of a Learning Organization

What can be done to increase organizational capacity to learn from data? Nationally, policymakers of all stripes and taxpayers want evidence that public investments are being used effectively, practitioners are adequately supported, programs are held accountable, and the quality of services is continuously improving. Data are not just useful for providing this evidence; they can help accomplish these things.

For years, states have worked to develop the technical infrastructure of the ECIDS, yet they struggle to demonstrate its effective use. Discussion of leveraging ECIDS for evidence-based decision making creates uncomfortable pressure on state agency staff who build the systems to discover uses for whatever data are available—putting the cart before the horse.

Begin with the End in Mind

ECDataWorks starts by helping states articulate their policy and program priorities, explore the obstacles to achieving the priorities, and design data reporting solutions to close the gaps in a practical manner. The overall aim is to bolster public institutions that serve children and families by defining a clear goal and leveraging state data for reporting tools that are anchored in use cases.

Initially, public institutions need to improve their ability to identify their information needs. Instead of asking for outcome data to judge

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Box 1. Use Cases in Utah and Minnesota

In Utah, system leaders wanted to support local groups in their coordination, planning, and implementation of services. Local partners worked with state leaders to articulate actions they would take if new data were provided. They identified many diverse use cases related to community needs assessment, infrastructure development to address access gaps, advocacy efforts, and quality improvement. Utah is developing a community dashboard to give local users access to state data specific to them. Data in the report are organized based on four basic types of activities related to eligibility, access, services, and improvement. This framework will support specific decisions for improving local programs and services.

In Minnesota, impressive amounts of data are available in the state's system, but they have been underutilized. State and local leaders said they wanted to use data to communicate about state services. ECDataWorks project staff are designing a tool for Minnesota users to construct message points and stories with data. Through an innovative data hub and a story builder tool, users will have access to integrated data and be able to add narrative explanation and interpretation. Reporting solutions are also being developed for communications purposes, the intent being to let leaders support what they are saying more substantively with data.

whether a program is producing results, state agencies should ask for data about the integrity and efficiency of program inputs and activities. In other words, state boards of education (and other state agencies) should ask different questions of these systems. Where do we as a state, city, or district see ourselves in five years? What are the specific policies, operations, and outcomes that are envisioned?

Then consider what actions are needed to reach that goal. Logic models or strategic plans are useful methods for mapping the inputs and activities required to achieve a goal. It is critical that state agencies answer these questions before they design a data system or report. Only after they have a plan to achieve a clear goal will it be useful to consider how data can be leveraged to facilitate and enhance required activities.

Without a clear strategy, evidence-based decision making will rely on data epiphanies. Rather than making data available with the hope they will be useful, it would be far better to design data systems and data reports with use cases in mind. A use case describes a report and how it is used. To develop such a use case, the system designer will need to articulate the specific data needed by a specific person to do specific job and achieve a specific outcome. Representatives from the intended user group are always required in the development of use cases. By working backward to identify goals, individuals, and planned activities, the group can design useful, actionable data reports.

Expect Incremental Progress

What does successful use of an ECIDS look like? People in the organizations that use it will be asking better questions and making course corrections based on the answers. An impediment to successful use of integrated data systems is the lack of capacity to operate as a learning organization and modify programs and behaviors based on the data. ECIDS work is expensive and time consuming. It can be hard to be reflective, especially when funding is sustained by a series of short-term grants.

As states develop systems to collect, maintain, and integrate early childhood information, they should not wait for more data to come online before mapping the use cases that will position those data for a role in day-to-day decision making. Often, data do not need to be comprehensive to be useful. States can cultivate the structures and practices that enable a virtuous cycle of reflection and learning about information needs.

Peer communities of practice, projects such as ECDataWorks, and national partners are discovering the contexts that enable states to use ECIDS for planning and evaluation. After more than a decade of work across the country in building ECIDS, it is time to match the technical tools with nontechnical capacity building: learning to use evidence to better serve children and families. ■

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It would be far better to design data systems and data reports with use cases in mind.

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The NASBE Interview

Aisha Ray is professor emeritus of child development at the Erikson Institute, and former senior vice president for academic affairs and dean of faculty. She studies cultural and situational contexts of child development, early childhood professional development, father-child relationships in urban communities, and early childhood services for immigrant children and families. She co-leads the Equity Leaders Action Network for the Build Initiative. NASBE interviewed her during the annual conference in Atlanta.

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Where have you seen the most progress in the last decade in the early childhood education space?

We understand more about the value of high-quality yearly education for young children, and we're beginning to tease out specific components. For instance, teacher quality is huge, so there is increasing focus on the capacities of teachers. Implicit bias shapes their interactions with culturally, linguistically, and racially diverse kids—particularly boys—and that influences outcomes for children. We know more about teachers' capacities to create real communities within their classrooms and the power of that for advancing learning. We know that kids have unequal childhoods, and those unequal childhoods lead to unequal outcomes. Part of what makes childhood unequal is the quality of the school, the district over all, and its capacity to respond.

This is a place where state boards of education can have influence. Too many children—particularly kids in poverty—are going to schools that are poorly resourced with teachers who are less well prepared than those who teach middle class children. To come to school already behind and then to be in a school that does not have a rich curriculum or an effective teacher exacerbates the problems kids have. Over time, it becomes a cumulative effect of disadvantage and inadequacy that leads to and reinforces the negative outcomes we see in high school graduation rates. So that foundation in early childhood and the quality of it are critical. We need to get that right to improve outcomes in fourth, sixth, twelfth grade.

Many advocates have urged streamlining teacher competencies and qualifications and requiring bachelor's degrees. Are these efforts leading the system in the right direction?

The answer to that should be yes. A teacher's qualifications are critical. If you look at Head Start, the Abecedarian Project, the Perry Preschool project, The Chicago Child Parent Center Project, those programs all had a set of characteristics: high-quality teachers who were credentialed, rigorous curriculum, depth and duration—there was greater impact from a full-day program over a full year than from a half-day program;

wraparound services; small teacher-to-child ratios; and teachers who understand and can use children's culture and language in instruction and as a platform for learning. There's evidence to show that these characteristics matter.

The reality is that the vast majority of U.S. children do not receive high-quality education in early childhood. Having a great teacher will help, but it's not sufficient. You have to have a broader set of supports for kids who are already starting behind. The thing for state board leaders to understand is that that's the majority of kids now.

In early childhood, the key demographic imperative that is driving a lot of concern about the quality issues is that young children of color—African American, Latino, Native Americans, Pacific Islanders, Asian Americans—they're going to drive this demographic change. For my age bracket, the diversity is 18 percent. But for young kids, it's 50 percent. States like New Mexico and California already have a majority of kids of color. We need to understand this complex dynamic between quality, teacher qualifications, who the kids are, and what they need. That is not just a teacher but a teacher with another set of supports.

So having a bachelor's degree doesn't necessarily touch that question, right?

The quality of the education teachers get matters. It also matters how supported they are in those first couple of years. We also know—for example, from the research by [Thomas] Dee—that kids of color and children for whom English is a second language may feel more attached to school, do better on assessments, and do better generally if they have a teacher who shares their language and their culture, ethnicity, and race. The implications are profound. We have an overwhelmingly white teacher workforce. We don't want white teachers not to work at schools—we want them to improve their practice with all children—but we also want to increase the numbers of teachers who represent these diverse communities

children are coming out of and who come with what Dee calls "cultural capital" and are able to use their capital for children's instruction.

How do you increase the cultural competence of those who don't have it?

All teachers need to develop cultural competency because all teachers are going to encounter children at some point for whom they will not share a culture and language. The typical early childhood classroom right now in the major U.S. cities is multicultural and multilingual. Not Spanish-only or English-only. They are classrooms in which the majority of kids may be Spanish speakers, but there are kids who speak Urdu and Haitian Creole and Twi. Teachers may have the cultural and linguistic capital for some, but they also have to know how to support the child who speaks Urdu or Haitian Creole if that's not their cultural/language background. We tend to think, "If we've got kids who speak Spanish, we just need to go find a great bilingual teacher who can do instruction in Spanish and English." That's important, but we have to think about how we serve all kids.

What levers can state boards pull to bring cultural competence to the early childhood classroom?

There are a couple of examples. A number of years ago, Minnesota passed legislation that every teacher who worked in child care had to take cultural competency courses. They wrote a curriculum on cultural competency in Minnesota that is quite good. That is the kind of thing state boards can do. You might have teachers who work in rural communities who say, "Well, we don't have to deal with diversity because we don't have any here. We're all the same." The reality, of course, is that diversity is a complex thing, but there's diversity everywhere—family structures, even dialects within communities where people feel they all speak the same language or they understand each other, and other social class issues.

State boards have to feel that this is a standard all teachers have to meet and create the opportunities to do that, working with institutions of higher education. In all 50 states, they are primary sources of the expertise and the mechanisms for delivering professional development. The University of Arizona School of Education passed a requirement that all teachers who graduate from their teacher education program have to speak a second language at the sixth-grade level—not with the idea that they are going to be proficient at the level of instruction. The idea was really to be able to communicate effectively with children who speak the language you've learned and to work effectively with families. It is a powerful message to the field and to educators generally that bilingual education is beneficial for all children. There is a lot of research on this that being a dual language speaker makes your brain better. But we keep relentlessly pushing this "we're all going to speak English" strategy, so we're not incorporating the evidence into our teacher education programs.

The second piece—which is probably more practical and right in the moment—is that teachers need to be able to communicate with children on all kinds of things. A kid is crying in your class. Whether he's six years old or sixteen years old, you need to be able to find out why he is upset. Very often the language we use when we are emotionally distressed is the language in which we are most comfortable. Teachers educate children but also care for them. They are our children for those moments to make sure that they're safe and feel good and supported. It is helpful if the teacher can speak to the child about what is bothering the child. It's a critical piece of this interaction.

Third, communicating effectively with families is enormously important. We use this language of parent engagement. If you can speak to them—even in basic language and even if you make mistakes—parents appreciate it.

Is cultural competency more than linguistic competency?

They are linked. You can be a monolingual speaker and be highly culturally competent as an educator. For most people who are working in classrooms right now, lifting that group up to the point where they're culturally competent—even if we don't get them to all speak at the sixth-grade level—that would be fantastic. The extra level of expertise and competency is being able to get teachers to speak at this level of sixth-grade language to gain the benefit of being able to communicate effectively with families and communities and to understand much more what's going on inside of kids' heads when they're in their classroom and to manage the interaction between children in an effective way.

From work that Walter Gilliam has done, we know the rate of suspension and expulsion is higher in preschool programs than it is in elementary school. Three- and four-year-olds are being kicked out of programs for perceived behavioral problems. The data are quite clear that African American and Latino boys and maybe Native American boys—although they are in smaller numbers so it's harder to tell—have the highest expulsion rates, followed by black girls, almost always around behavioral issues. But it's unclear whether the behavioral issues are developmentally appropriate and the teacher just doesn't know how to manage it, or whether there really are more serious issues behind the behavior that need an IEP or more intervention from a psychologist or some other expert. Because kids get kicked out, there isn't follow-up.

Gilliam had teachers look at video clips of racially diverse groups of kids and then make attribution about what they thought was going on. But he also monitored teachers' eye movements. They found that both black and white teachers scrutinize the behavior of black boys more than they did other boys. Teachers were unaware of these eye movements of course, but this is connected to implicit bias research. We all carry around in our heads these very unconscious ideas about others. We project those ideas in our interactions with them and our judgments about them, and teachers are doing this all the time. It's not just the teachers who are walking around with these ideas. All of us are. How is that shaping the way in which we look at certain children and not

The rate of suspension and expulsion is higher in preschool programs than it is in elementary school.

other children? Look at their futures? Look at them in the present? I think what state boards might do is support professional development for districts or make available conferences or speakers. Having workshops on implicit bias doesn't always change behavior, but it makes people more aware of it.

The fourth leg of the stool is the fact that there is pretty strong evidence that kids of color are more likely to get a less-qualified teacher. In Montgomery County, Maryland, [then superintendent] Jerry Weast improved outcomes for black boys. He changed the way teachers worked together to learn how to be better teachers—more teacher-built professional development, teacher involvement, communities of practice, coaching. But he also moved good teachers toward the kids having the biggest challenges. That is an intervention that can work. You can incentivize teachers' pay to do this—things districts can do to make this happen.

But the idea of having the least experienced teachers with the kids who are having the biggest challenges is an equity issue of enormous implications that are all bad. State boards at least can raise it as an issue: "How are we distributing our best teachers? Where are they? Who are they? How do we make them take what they know, and give it to those teachers?" You don't have to necessarily move people. There are things one can do to improve weaker teachers, but it needs to be a target of change.

What questions should state boards ask when they're looking at these preparation programs for early childhood teachers?

Most institutions of higher education want to do a good job preparing teachers. They are challenged in many ways.

One is faculty. People are hired onto faculties because they have an area of expertise. They're the person who does early math, who does literacy, or they are a bilingual/ESL expert. They're not necessarily hired because they have cultural competency and the ability to educate students about it. Institutions of higher education need a lot of support to get better at that.

States have done things. For instance, Pennsylvania's Head Start office partnered with institutions of higher education on a yearly conference for three years to focus on cultural and linguistic diversity. Faculty came from all over the state, worked on syllabi, had expert speakers, and then went into workshops to ask, "What should we do in this course we're teaching; should we scrap it and start all over?" It stimulated conversations. That's one piece that state boards need to think about: How do you increase the expertise of faculty around cultural competency, understanding how culture shapes early development, and the implications for teaching and learning?

The second one is language. Multilingual children, bilingual children, and bidialectic children are in our classrooms. We tend right now to only be on the bilingual lane, but there's a lot of research that shows that bidialectic children—who are learning school English but speaking Appalachian or Hawaiian or African American English—are disadvantaged if they're not intentionally taught to code switch. If you speak Hawaiian English, you are less likely to get hired. Same is true of African American English. Linguists recognize them as languages, but kids are punished when they speak them. DeKalb County, Georgia, had a program for many years teaching kids to code switch. Again, how do educators make sure children get all the tools they need to succeed in society and hold on to their second language because that actually helps build their brains?

The District of Columbia adopted a policy requiring teachers in childcare centers to have an associate's degree by 2020. What do you think of the timeline?

The time line is probably unrealistic, and everyone knows it's not realistic. Without question, the field needs to increase the knowledge and expertise of people who work with young children, and we need clear career pathways. Setting goals like "by 2020, everyone has an AA degree" sends a signal that that's an important thing, and it does get people moving in the direction of getting credentials. One of the challenges is this issue of creating a diverse workforce that's highly competent. When we

State boards at least can raise it as an issue: "How are we distributing our best teachers? Where are they? Who are they?"

look at who is working in childcare, these are mostly women and very likely women with lower family incomes. Many of them are the primary breadwinners. They are earning insufficient amounts of money, and they have other kinds of life issues—kids, parents they are taking care of, transportation challenges.

If we create an expectation of an AA degree by 2020, we need to build in supports that help them get there. We know that the average student these days in higher education is an older adult—not a 19-year-old. That's driven a different conversation in higher ed. How do we need to make courses available to them? What are the cost points around what we're going to charge for tuition? One of the challenges we had in Illinois, or still have, is that low-income students are having a much harder time paying back their student debt. They also are more likely than students who go to elite universities to have terrible academic advising. One of the challenges at the AA degree level is that students tend not to be adequately advised about how to get through the program efficiently.

Just an anecdotal example: In work we were doing in community colleges on early childhood curriculum for culturally, racially, linguistically diverse children in Chicago and Illinois, a large number of students reported having poor advising, high debt they could not pay back, and they could no longer get loans. They were trapped in a particular spot. That reality creates problems for the profession.

In your work with the New York Board of Regents, what have you learned about the state board's role?

New York is unique in many ways, because they historically have had and continue to have a state board of education that is powerful, highly organized, and politically respected. The fact that New York is focusing on early childhood is a wonderful thing because of the stature they have nationally. They are struggling with many of the challenges I've already mentioned: inequality and how that gets expressed within early childhood education and elementary education, preparation of the

workforce, and fragmentation of the workforce. There are two are very large populations—teachers working in childcare versus those working in a preschool program in a public school—that are having different experiences around income and security of position. About two million people in the United States take care of young children in this country in all these sectors. We need to pay attention to it.

New York is identifying the real struggles districts are having when they decide to take this issue on and improve outcomes for children. They have lots of kids who are dual language speakers, multilingual speakers, and second-dialect speakers. The New York Board of Regents is definitely an activist board, and they already recognize how important it is to get behind the issue of early childhood. It can be instructive to other state boards as to what drove them to focus on early childhood and how they exercise their authority. I hope they will have lessons to teach all of us about how these things may be resolved.

Should states focus on narrowing licensure by, for example, offering preK-3 licenses?

Licensure reflects a set of assumptions teacher educators make about the knowledge clusters that teachers need to work in certain grades. There should be a process that engages higher education in the discussion—amongst other partners, but certainly state boards of education—of how expertise and research are driving licensure changes. That process needs to be inclusive.

There are many early childhood educators who believe birth to age 8 is the important developmental continuum. Their rationale is that what occurs in those first eight years in terms of all the domains of development needs to be understood in a deep way by people who work with young children. Third grade children are going to be assessed on the NAEP. Therefore, early childhood educators and early childhood education need to lay down the developmentally appropriate foundation for literacy and numeracy in particular, social and emotional development, and executive function so that we don't see the fourth grade drop in achievement.

There are all sorts of arguments in between, where people say, "Infancy is a special developmental domain. People working with infants should be experts on that." This circles back to the other problem with the brackets, and this is a more practical problem. People at the district level and principals—particularly in rural communities and suburban communities—want the maximum amount of flexibility in the preparation of people. They do not want a teacher who simply comes with an infancy certificate. This is why you see K-6 certification. It is a labor force capacity issue at the district level.

Could an endorsement be a good add-on to a certification?

It depends on what the endorsement contains, how many hours, and how much thinking has been put into what the endorsement should be. Endorsements have typically been a strategy in states where there is no early childhood certification. Teachers take maybe 12 hours in early childhood, and that's considered the early childhood piece. The last time we did research on this, only 12 states had an early childhood degree certification. There were many more states that had elementary education with an early childhood endorsement.

Do you have expectations for the field?

We're going to get our act together and make the world better; that's my big expectation. Little children will be coming out of our programs fully prepared. We need all hands on deck, including state boards of education. They can become more aware of the importance of early childhood and begin to make a significant contribution to how professional development is provided in their state, the quality of it, and address those inequalities. That would be lovely. ■

(2009): 55–63; Lieny Jeon, et al., "Pathways from Teacher Depression and Child Care Quality to Child Behavioral Problems," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 82, (2014): 225–35; R.C. Whitaker et al., "Workplace Stress and the Quality of Teacher–Children Relationships in Head Start," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 30 (2015): 57–69.
[12]Ruben Fukkink and Anna Lont, "Does Training Matter? A Meta-Analysis and Review of Caregiver Training Studies," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (2007): 294–311; U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, "Toward the Identification of Features of Effective Professional Development for Early Childhood Educators, Literature Review" (Washington, D.C., 2010).
[13]IOM/NRC, "Transforming the Workforce"; McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership, "Quality Standards Drive Professional Development Opportunities" (Wheeling, IL: National Louis University, 2016).
[14]The program is described here: http://www.naeyc.org/profession/overview.
[15]The states participating are Indiana, Iowa, New Mexico, New York, and Wisconsin.
[16]IOM/NRC, "Transforming the Workforce." The project is described at http://www.nas.edu/i2I. The states participating are California, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, Nebraska, New York, Virginia, and Washington, and the region of Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Northern Virginia is also participating.
[17]Governors in the following states participated: Iowa, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Utah, and Washington.
[18]States participating in these efforts are Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. In addition, T.E.A.C.H is also active in Colorado, Delaware, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Utah, Vermont, and Washington, D.C.
[19]The states that participated are California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Jersey, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Washington.
[20]The states participating include Iowa, Michigan, Nebraska, and New York. The cities participating include Hartford, Connecticut; Jacksonville, Florida; Kansas City, Missouri; and Richmond, Virginia. Rochester, New York, San Francisco, and Seattle serve as advisor cities.
[21]Winona Hao, "Advancing the Early Learning Workforce through State Policies," *Policy Update* 23, no. 25 (Alexandria, VA: NASBE, 2016); email communication from Winona Hao, September 22, 2017.
[22]See IOM/NRC recommendations 1, 2, 3, and 8.
[23]The four states in NASBE's early learning group will be considering these competencies as part of their efforts.
[24]IOM/NRC, "Transforming the Workforce," p. 496–501.
[25]Table 1 shows state boards could be instrumental in implementing IOM/NRC recommendations 4 and 5 regarding preparation and high-quality practice.

■

funds can be used to assist pre-K students in the transition from early childhood education programs to elementary school programs. Title I plans must include a description of how local education agencies will "support, coordinate, and integrate" Head Start services to enable smooth transitions between Head Start and elementary school programs. ESSA requires that districts reach agreements with Head Start programs and other early education programs. These agreements should include plans to organize joint transition-related training between child care providers and kindergarten teachers and specific instructions regarding the transfer of student records.

2. Provide tools and guidance to assist in local planning of transition activities. While it is important to preserve local flexibility when it comes to decision making, states have a role to play in establishing best practices around the transition process. Resources such as West Virginia's Ready, Set, Go! School Readiness Framework and the Colorado Department of Education's catalog of training videos are good examples of how states can provide tools that can be easily modified for a local setting.

3. Consider establishing a grant program to encourage districts to prioritize transitions. A grant program can be an effective means of allowing for local flexibility and innovation while still allowing for state guidelines around the most effective use of funds. States can use a grant program similar to Oregon's KRPI program to encourage districts to make the kindergarten transition process a priority. Grants can be structured to incentivize research-informed transition activities, such as joint planning, data sharing, and professional learning opportunities.

4. Bring child care center directors and principals together to improve transitions and alignment between early learning and elementary school settings. Bringing center directors and principals together to discuss transition practices, share data, and coordinate standards, curricula, and assessments is an effective method for breaking down barriers that have traditionally hindered a smooth transition between early education settings and elementary schools. The opportunity for principals and directors to connect also makes it more likely that principals will begin building relationships with students and families prior to kindergarten entry. ■

[1]Amy B. Schulting, Patrick S. Malone, and Kenneth A. Dodge, "The Effect of School-Based Kindergarten Transition

Policies and Practices on Child Academic Outcomes," *Developmental Psychology* 41, no. 6 (2005): 860–71, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16351333.

[2]Michael H. Little, Lora Cohen-Vogel, and F. Chris Curran, "Facilitating the Transition to Kindergarten: What ECLS-K Data Tell Us about School Practices Then and Now," *AERA Open* 2, no. 3 (2016): 1–18, http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2332858416655766.

[3]West Virginia's Universal Access to a Quality Early Education System (2525), 126 CSR 28, August 2016, https://apps.sos.wv.gov/adlaw/csr/readfile.aspx?DocId=27726&Format=PDF.

[4]Beth L. Green et al., "Oregon Early Learning Division Kindergarten Readiness Partnership and Innovation Grants Year 1 Evaluation Report" (Portland, OR: Center for Improvement of Child and Family Services, August 2015), https://www.pdx.edu/ccf/sites/www.pdx.edu.ccf/files/KRPI%20Year%201%202014-15%20Report.pdf.

■

cont'd from page 28...Fully Funding Pre-K

For starters, the public and their elected officials may need education about the role high-quality pre-K plays in enabling all children to meet state standards.[8] Unless pre-K is adequately funded to support a well-educated, stable teacher force, reasonable class sizes, plus embedded coaching and other aspects of a strong continuous improvement system, state pre-K investments are unlikely to be produce the desired outcomes.[9]

Simply making the case for high-quality pre-K is unlikely to be sufficient. In our experience, wishful thinking often prevails in state discussions of what it should cost to fund high quality pre-K. The best way to combat this problem is for each state to engage in a formal process to determine the resources required for high-quality pre-K and how that might vary by child and community, as happens in the creation of K-12 formulas.

States can make use of the Cost of Preschool Quality (CPQ) Tool, an Excel-based model available from the federally funded Center for Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes (for which we both work). The CPQ lets policymakers calculate the full cost of quality (statewide or by community) and to estimate the cost of a new program or policy change to an existing program (e.g., changing class size or teacher qualifications, requiring salary parity between public schools and contracted providers, and expanding enrollment). The model also highlights inputs related to each of the National Institute for Early Education Research's 10 research-based preschool quality standards.[10]

Wishful thinking often prevails in state discussions in what it should cost to fund high-quality pre-K.

For those states that have engaged in such a process to inform pre-K funding, the results have been better than for those without the process. This approach can guide the adaptation of K-12 funding formulas to provide adequate and fair funding for pre-K based on careful appraisals of what is required to achieve a state's goals for its young children. ■

[1]Flavio Cunha et al., "Interpreting the Evidence on Life Cycle Skill Formation," *Handbook of the Economics of Education* 1 (2006), 697–812; James J. Heckman, "The Economics of Inequality: The Value of Early Childhood Education," *American Educator* 35, no. 1 (2011), 31.

[2]W. Steven Barnett and Richard Kasmin, "Funding Landscape for Preschool with a Highly Qualified Workforce" (Rutgers University, National Institute for Early Education Research, 2016), http://sites.nationalacademies.org/cs/groups/dbassesite/documents/webpage/dbasse_175816.pdf.

[3]U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, "The Current Population Survey October 2015: School Enrollment Supplement," table 3 (Washington, DC: Bureau of the Census, 2015).

[4]W. Steven Barnett et al., *The State of Preschool 2016: State Preschool Yearbook* (New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2017).

[5]Bruce Baker and Kevin Welner, "School Finance and Courts: Does Reform Matter, and How Can We Tell?" *Teachers College Record* 113, no. 11 (2011): 2374–414; Timothy J. Gronberg et al., "The Adequacy of Educational Cost Functions: Lessons from Texas," *Peabody Journal of Education* 86, no. 1 (2011): 3–27; Eric Hanushek and Alfred Lindseth, *Schoolhouses, Courthouses, and Statehouses: Solving the Funding-Achievement Puzzle in America's Public Schools* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

[6]Bruce Baker et al., "Is School Funding Fair? A National Report Card" (Newark, NJ: Education Law Center, 2016).

[7]Details of the calculations behind these estimates are in Barnett and Kasmin, "Funding Landscape."

[8]Lynn Karoly et al., "Early Childhood Interventions: Proven Results, Future Promise" (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2006); James E. Ryan, "A Constitutional Right to Preschool?" *California Law Review* 94, no. 1 (2006): 49–99.

[9]W. Steven Barnett and Ellen Frede, "The Promise of Preschool: Why We Need Early Education for All," *American Educator* 34, no. 1 (2010): 21.

[10]The free, flexible tool is preloaded with state-specific data such as teacher and administration compensation rates. It enables comparisons of virtually any program design or policy change. The CPQ web page (http://ceelo.org/cost-of-preschool-quality-tool/) has a quick start guide, user guide, and access instructions, and technical assistance is available.

On the Agenda

Preventing Student Suicides

Sarah-Jane Lorenzo
Research Associate

Suicide rates have been rising for more than a decade, affecting youth in every age group. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among 15- to 24-year-olds and the third leading cause of death for 10- to 14-year-olds. Each one devastates an entire community and school. Educators are at the front lines of suicide prevention efforts, and their interactions with students can be transformative.

Yet state boards of education are considering statewide strategies to support these efforts. In 2017, state boards promoted suicide prevention in myriad ways: through initiatives on school personnel training, a comprehensive school mental health framework, and an innovative student helpline. In states such as Louisiana, Kansas, and Illinois, state boards have provided professional learning materials and model guidance for schools on preventing student suicides and promoting mental health by creating caring, well-resourced environments.

Boards can intensify the focus on students' mental health within their states. In 2017, Kansas board members oversaw development of a comprehensive school mental health framework and established a School Mental Health Advisory Council. Board members began their process in March, when they first requested an outline for a school-based mental health model inclusive of supports and training to help schools better commit to trauma-informed care. As the model was developed, board members received monthly updates. They stressed the importance of collaborating with legislators and community partners before the plan's release to ensure schools are equipped to implement it. As they developed the model framework, board members collaborated with the Kansas State Department of Education, invited stakeholder representatives for conversations, and publicly emphasized community partnerships as essential to building strong local networks of support.

Utah's suicide rate is among the highest in the nation. Thus student mental health is an urgent concern of the Utah State Board of Education. In August, Utah board members focused on expansion of the state's prevention toolkit: a suicide and mental health tip line that helps students in crisis connect with counselors 24/7. The tip line is accessible through an app called SafeUT, which lets students text or call licensed counselors or submit confidential tips to school administrators on bullying, violence, and threats. Like many states, Utah has a large rural population, which can mean limited access to psychiatrists and clinical therapists. Utah board members recognized that obstacle during their August conversation and discussed the challenge of funding more school counselor and school psychologist positions.

Suicide prevention requires a comprehensive approach, with schools, communities, and state-level agencies working together. Through thoughtful resources and supports, state boards of education can elevate and foster a focus on students' mental health.

How does your state board help address student suicide and mental health, and what role do you play in bringing those issues to the table? To learn more about state board strategies across the country, visit stateboardinsight.nasbe.org and browse the Student Support category.

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's guide to suicide prevention statutes by state includes information on roles and opportunities for state boards within existing legislation. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is accessible online at http://www.suicideprevention-lifeline.org or by calling 1-800-273-TALK (8255). ■

Kristen Amundson
President/CEO

Sixty Years of State Board Leadership

The start of a new year is a great time for looking back. In 1958, Elvis made headlines by joining the Army. The Hula Hoop craze swept the country. And Jack Kilby, newly hired at Texas Instruments, figured out a way to miniaturize and connect the parts of a transistor circuit. He called it the "microchip."

That same year, eight members of state boards of education met at the annual conference of the National School Boards Association. (Even then, some of the best discussions took place outside the formal meetings!)

They talked about the differences between state and local boards and determined that their interests would be better served if they established a new, independent organization. They called it the Associated State Boards of Education.

A few years later, the new organization—now named the National Association of State Boards of Education—established its first headquarters in Colorado, perhaps because Anna Petteys from that state was the first president. (Rumor has it that the first office was a repurposed closet.) Except for one half-time staff member, all the association's responsibilities were carried out by board members.

2018 marks NASBE's 60th year. For our Annual Conference, we will gather again in Colorado—this time in a space much larger than a closet!

Although many things about NASBE have changed during the past 60 years, there are constants:

NASBE's only mission is to serve the needs of its members. There is a wonderful old photograph of eight NASBE members sitting around a table planning an upcoming conference. Their goal was to ensure that the sessions would address the top concerns of state board members. While our research methods are different today—we rely more on surveys and other electronic communications—our goal is the same.

NASBE has always led on issues that affect students. When many schools were struggling with an appropriate response to educating students with AIDS in the 1980s, NASBE held a national summit on HIV prevention and education. The organization also published "Someone at School Has AIDS," offering boards advice on how to set responsible policies. NASBE continues to help boards as they deal with challenging issues.

State governance will be even more important in the coming years. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) has triggered a tectonic shift in education governance. Instead of focusing on whether state policies comply with federal regulations, state boards need to ensure that they are meeting the needs of students in their state. NASBE's role is to support boards and share stories of successes across the country.

Issues come and go. But NASBE's core values remain unchanged. From that first meeting in 1958, a commitment to state leadership in education policy and high-quality education for each student has animated state board members. At the center of what NASBE stands for are the twin goals of equity and excellence. Those will continue to shape our work for the next 60 years.

The start of a new year is also a good time for looking forward, and that is exactly what NASBE plans to do. Join us as we chart the course. ■

My state board of education is a NASBE member. So what do I get?

- **NATIONAL MEETINGS** held every year: Annual Conference, Legislative Conference, New State Board Member Institute
- **REGIONAL MEETINGS**, such as ones held recently in St. Louis on standards-based leadership and in Pittsburgh on science standards
- **CONVENINGS** of states that receive competitive NASBE grants
- **NASBE STAFF VISITS** tailored to the needs of specific state boards: on standards-based leadership, school climate, student data privacy, deeper learning, leadership development, board governance issues, strategic planning, and more
- **CONNECTIONS WITH EXPERTS** through publications such as the State Education Standard, webinars, e-newsletters, conference calls, and face-to-face meetings
- **NATIONAL VOICE** on federal education matters before the administration, Congress, and the US Department of Education
- **OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE** on association committees and NASBE's board

"With the passage of ESSA, it is important that state boards of education remain engaged in fully understanding the changing federal landscape and in advocating for an implementation to that new federal law that does right by all of our students across this diverse country."

—Jay Barth, Arkansas State Board of Education

Be NASBE. Be engaged.

Contact Kristen Amundson, NASBE's President/CEO, with membership questions at kristen.amundson@nasbe.org

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