

New Head Start Research
Shows Kids Bound Ahead

PAGE 3

State Pre-K Moves Ahead
But Quality And Funding Lag

PAGE 5

Preschool matters

A Publication of the National Institute for Early Education Research
Winter 2004 Volume 2, No. 1

FUNDED BY
THE PEW CHARITABLE TRUSTS
Advancing Quality Pre-Kindergarten for All



FROM THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR

2 PRESCHOOL MATTERS

A Nation Watches Florida Strive For Pre-K Quality

Florida stepped into the national spotlight two years ago when voters there approved—overwhelmingly—a ballot initiative calling for a universal prekindergarten program. It marked the first time the people of a state ordered their legislature to build a “high quality” prekindergarten program. And, Floridians said they wanted it in place by the fall of 2005.

That’s a tall order to deliver in a relatively short time. Along the way, the Legislature has veered, at times, toward trading quality education for political expediency. That could still happen if lawmakers waver when it comes to setting in concrete

the corner stones of the “high quality” program voters ordered—fully qualified teachers, small classes, and a strong curriculum.

While research can never provide all the answers, it does provide key guidance for any state designing a preschool program:

- The link between the education level of preschool teachers and children’s learning and development is strong and established in many studies as shown by NIEER’s policy brief *Better Teachers, Better Preschools*. Teachers with college educations have more positive, sensitive and responsive interactions with children.

They individualize teaching according to a child’s temperament and learning style. And, they tailor their approach based on their knowledge of how young children learn.

- Keeping class size reasonably small is important for children’s learning. The National Research Council’s *Eager To Learn* report on school readiness cited studies showing that child-initiated activities are more common in small groups. This dynamic is crucial to successful early childhood education as qualified teachers in small-class settings are able to support exploration and problem solving by children.

- Although Florida has strong curriculum standards that provide sound guidance, some legislative proposals have mandated detailed prescriptions specifying that all teachers be trained in a particular approach to literacy that has not been proven effective. Yet, other, broader curricula have been demonstrated to produce substantial gains in reading achievement without neglecting gains in other subject matter and social development. When it comes to specifying curriculum approaches, these ought to have the inside track.

Florida’s leaders must recognize that it is far better to create a prekindergarten

program with solid standards—even if they can’t implement it all at the outset—than to swap quality education for a standards-optional program. This is likely to be true in every state that adopts universal preschool education. It takes time to produce the highly qualified teachers, supervisors, and ongoing professional development systems required for quality universal preschool.

Finally, the Legislature must provide enough funding to support a quality program. As a forthcoming NIEER policy brief comparing targeted and universal programs points out, some approaches to universal pre-K can skimp on the funding provided to all children while allowing more advantaged families to obtain higher quality through their own or local school districts’ additions to funding. Such approaches risk losing much of the benefits to taxpayers and exacerbating the achievement gap between more- and less-advantaged children.

As the eyes of a nation focus on Florida’s education leaders (see Dave Lawrence interview, p. 11), they have the opportunity to lay foundation for a universal preschool program—not just for their children—but, through example, for children across the nation.

W. Steven Barnett
Director, NIEER

The National Institute for Early Education Research supports early childhood education initiatives by providing objective, nonpartisan information based on research. NIEER is one component of a larger early education initiative designed, funded and managed by The Pew Charitable Trusts.

W. Steven Barnett, Director
Carol Shipp, Communications Director
Mary Meagher, Communications Assistant
Betty Holcomb, Editor
Sandy Ogilvie, Art Director

© 2004 National Institute For Early Education Research

Send comments, opinions, and news to editor@nieer.org.
Address Changes: Please include mailing panel on page 12 when requesting address changes.



NIEER is a unit of Rutgers University



National Institute For
Early Education Research
120 Albany Street, Suite 500
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
732-932-4350
Fax: 732-932-4360
www.nieer.org

First Randomized Trial

New Study: Head Start Children Bound Ahead

As the debate over the effectiveness of Head Start rages, a new and rigorous study provides evidence of just how effective the program can be in boosting children's language skills and health.

In particular, 4-year-olds who attended Head Start in Georgia emerged with a much broader vocabulary and were far more likely to have had dental care, immunizations and regular health screenings than their peers in a control group.

The study is garnering particular attention among education researchers because it clears a major scientific hurdle that makes the findings more useful for policy-makers. "It's the first field study (of Head Start) with randomized assignment, which makes the results extremely important," says Martha Abbott-Shim, principal investigator of the federally funded research while at Georgia State University.

What they found was truly significant. On receptive vocabulary, for example, the Head Start children bounded ahead. They could recognize and understand more words—and use them in a way their peers outside the program could not. "The assessments showed the progress, but we could also see it happening in the classroom. The Head Start children came into the program unable to write or recognize their names. By the end of the year, they were signing in, using their names," says



Children who attended Head Start programs could recognize and understand a much larger number of words than peers who did not attend Head Start.

Abbott-Shim. "They not only recognized words, but learned that words are a real form of communication. The children who didn't get into Head Start did not have that same experience. They just didn't develop their skills the way the Head Start children did."

Just as important, the study showed the value of Head Start's attempts to improve child health. The Head Start children were more likely to visit the dentist and the pediatrician, to be screened for healthy development and to have better health habits than peers who did not get into the program. "This study shows that the whole child approach that Head Start uses can be extremely valuable," says

Richard Lambert, professor of education at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte and co-author of the study. "That alone is an important finding from this study, because it relates to controversies in the field of early education. Many people now favor literacy intervention, without addressing the needs of the whole child. The Head Start approach shows that the 'whole' child approach can have a big impact. These results show that it's possible to address literacy and health concerns in the same program and have some real success."

The research represents the first Head Start study to create a rigorous comparison between children who

received the Head Start 'treatment,' and peers who received no preschool 'treatment' at all. "We had comprehensive studies of the value of early intervention on its own, but we didn't have a true comparison of children in Head Start with their peers—children who were like them, but just didn't make it into the program. That's what makes this study so important," says Abbott-Shim.

It was the sort of study educators and policymakers had been calling for, since at least the mid 1990s, as debates broke out over the relative quality and impact of Head Start programs. Indeed, Abbott-Shim and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12 >>



THE COMMITTEE'S CORNER

4

PRESCHOOL MATTERS

The Smartest Business Investment Of All: Public Education That Starts With Preschool

When it comes to making a smart business investment, you can't go wrong putting money into the workforce. That's a given in the business world.

Now we're finding the earlier that investment begins, the better. Art Rolnick, a top researcher at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, has calculated that early education programs, when properly funded and managed, yield returns that far exceed those of most private or public investments—a 12 percent return.

This news complements a growing body of research showing that prekindergarten and other early education programs help children succeed in school and life. Pre-K graduates are half as likely to need special education services in later grades, according to the New York State Department of Education. Other studies around the nation have found that children who attend quality preschool programs are less likely to go to

jail, become teen parents and collect welfare, and are more likely to graduate from high school, attend college, and own their own home.

"Investing in human capital breeds economic success not only for those being educated, but also for the overall economy," Rolnick says in his recently released report, "Early Childhood Development: Economic Development with a High Public Return."

Rolnick's report provides further evidence that offering state-funded prekindergarten to all families who want it should be a critical priority for the nation. New York's nationally recognized program—and those in other states, such as New Jersey—are already making good headway.

Unfortunately, though, few states are yet creating universal access. In New York, for example, only about one-quarter of the school districts participate because state funding has been frozen since 2000, with UPK under the gun for most of its existence. Earlier

this year the governor proposed to eliminate UPK funding altogether from his 2003-04 budget. State legislators stepped in and saved the program yet again, but we've seen this sort of threat nearly every year since the state launched the pre-K program back in 1997.

It's time to save Universal Prekindergarten permanently by transforming our K-12 system to a PreK-12 system. What's more we now have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to do so as part of court-ordered school-finance reform.

Last June, the New York State Court of Appeals gave state leaders a year to fix funding for New York City's schools so they provide a "sound basic education." Most observers say we can't address the city's needs without overhauling the entire state system. I would add that we cannot provide that sound basic education without offering prekindergarten to the parents of every preschooler in the state.

Some of the nation's most prominent business organizations recognize the value of early education. Earlier this year, the Business Roundtable called on state and federal governments to make high-quality early education a top priority.

"The business community supports high-quality early education programs because they lead to improved education results, a world-class workforce, a healthier society, and ultimately a stronger economy," said Joseph M. Tucci, chairman of the Business Roundtable's Education and Work Force Task Force, in releasing "Early Childhood Education: A Call to Action from the Business Community."

The appeals-court demand



"Investing in human capital breeds economic success not only for those being educated, but also for the overall economy."

*Art Rolnick,
Federal Reserve Bank
of Minneapolis*

for reform in New York represents a critical opportunity—and threat—to state-funded prekindergarten. Because the court only covers the current K-12 system, pre-K could end up left out as an unmandated extra when fiscal push comes to shove.

That would be a short-sighted shame. Early education is not "nice to have"; it's essential in New York State. And as the Federal Reserve study shows, it's one of the most effective investments we can make for long-term economic development.

*Roy J. Bostock
Chairman, Committee for
Economic Development*

Law Center's New Initiative Hopes To Spread New Jersey's Model For Quality

Starting At 3! A New Program Aims To Establish Legal Right To Preschool Programs

Back in 1998, New Jersey's Supreme Court changed the face of public education in that state, ordering the state to almost instantly create "well-planned, high-quality" preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds in the state's 30 poorest school districts.

That was some order.

In effect, the justices added pre-K to the public school curriculum, declaring more than 50,000 of the state's 3- and 4-year-olds suddenly eligible for publicly funded preschool classes. No matter that the public schools did not have the space or enough qualified teachers to provide the service at the time. Based on the carefully-constructed

case by lawyers from the Education Law Center (ELC)—and underscored by expert scientific studies—the justices insisted the state get the program in place within a year by collaborating with community-based programs already serving many of the eligible children.

"No other court has yet issued such a mandate," says Ellen Boylan, preschool advocate and head of a new initiative, "Starting At 3," funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts and housed at the ELC in Newark, N.J. "But we hope to see more of these decisions. That's why we're here—to offer technical assistance and support to other lawyers with

such cases. We want to help to establish a right to preschool as part of an adequate public education."

Certainly, the impact of the New Jersey decision is historic, setting the bar for high quality and defining it as a necessary element in closing the achievement gap between poor children and their more affluent peers. In 2000, the court grew even bolder, spelling out the parameters of "well-planned, high-quality" preschool: A teacher with a bachelor's degree and certification in early childhood education must be in every classroom. Class size would be strictly limited to 15 children. And teachers must

be paid the same as public school teachers, generally.

At the time, state officials protested the mandate as far too ambitious. But the arguments in the case—and the scientific studies presented to prove their merit—convinced the court that such a program was necessary and must be launched immediately. In addition, the court insisted that all teachers be credentialed by September, 2004. At the time, only a third of the teachers in community-based programs had a degree. Many had never been to college. "Many people thought it would be absolutely, positively impossible," says Cynthia Rice, policy analyst for the Association for Children of New Jersey. "And it's certainly been a struggle. We still need better data, and more support. But we are getting there."

Indeed, today, more than 42,000 New Jersey 3- and 4-year-olds attend public preschool programs in the 30 targeted districts, about 80 percent of those eligible. About two-thirds of the teachers now have their college degrees and virtually all are on their way toward certification in early education. Many teachers in community programs now earn more than \$40,000 a year, doubling their salaries and catching up to their public school counterparts. And, every teacher follows new curriculum guidelines vetted



The value of public preschool programs is now at the center of several school reform lawsuits, and could establish the right of many 3- and 4-year-olds to publicly-funded early education.

Invest In Pre-K Now, Stop Crime Later

Cincinnati's Police Chief might seem like an unlikely proponent of early education, but there he was this winter, calling a press conference to urge Ohio's Congressional delegation to invest in high-quality early education for the nation's children. "By investing now in our most vulnerable youth, we can guarantee they never grow up to become our most wanted youth," said Chief Tom Streicher at a news conference held at a local YMCA child care facility.

The cost of a high-quality education for a 3- or 4-year-old is now well out of the reach of many Ohio families, Streicher noted, with an annual tuition of nearly \$6,000. Indeed, tuition for two preschool

children can exceed the entire annual income of a parent working at a minimum wage job.

Yet that preschool education can make the difference between a child who succeeds in school or fails, a child who grows up to be a productive citizen or turns to criminal activity. "When Congress fails to support child-care programs, it forces police to fight with one hand behind our backs," he added.

Streicher and his fellow police chief, Matthew Fruchey, from Glendale, Ohio, released a new report showing that Ohio could save \$7 for every \$1 it invests in high-quality early education, by reducing the need for remedial education, helping children succeed in school and growing into productive citizens.

The report was prepared by Fight Crime: Invest In Kids, a bipartisan, non-profit organization of more than 2,000 police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors and victims of violence who have banded together to urge a larger investment in early education and other childhood and youth programs.

For more information on the group, or surveys and reports it has prepared, visit www.fightcrime.org.

Pre-K Price Tag

How much do states invest for each child in a public preschool program? Not nearly enough, according to a new NIEER study, "The State of Preschool."

Only one state—New Jersey—funds the full cost of high-quality by investing more than \$10,000 per child to cover a six-hour day in its "Abbott District" programs. New Jersey invests another \$2,500 per year for students who need an extended day and summer care.

Other states fail to even come close. On average, most states budget less than half of what it costs to provide a high-quality program—just \$3,455 per child. That's only about half of what the federal government pays for a half-day of Head Start.

"You just can't get quality on the cheap," says Steve Barnett, NIEER's director. "If you want to have good teachers in the classrooms, you have to pay for them."

It's worth it, however. Barnett finds that such programs more than pay for themselves. (For more on "The State of Preschool," see pp. 8-9.)



Mayors See Preschool As Top Priority

The need for preschool is acute, according to the mayors of the nation's largest cities. One in four rate preschool as one of the most critical needs for all children and families in their communities, according to a recent survey by the National League of Cities.

The league asked its members to name the most critical issues in their communities in an open-ended survey. Most named housing costs as the most pressing problem, but preschool in big cities ranked nearly as high. The league noted that early childhood care and education is steadily rising as a key concern among mayors because the needs of young children are not yet adequately met. Nearly 40 percent of the mayors say there are still major gaps in addressing the needs of children under the age of 5 and urban governments are increasingly finding it necessary to address those gaps by paying for more preschool and early care programs. For more information on the poll, visit www.nlc.org.

California Poll: African-Americans Want Preschool For All



A new survey shows that four out of five African-Americans in California support free public preschool for all the state's children as a way to help children succeed in school. The poll, conducted by Peter Hart Research on behalf of First 5 California, the state commission that advocates for free preschool for all 4-year-olds in the state, also found a majority of state residents are dissatisfied with current public efforts to prepare young children for kindergarten.

But it was African-Americans, more than other ethnic group surveyed, who squarely supported preschool reform. Virtually all—96 percent—of the African-Americans surveyed said they would

enroll their 4-year-olds in free, voluntary preschool if it were offered through their school system.

Overall, Californians highly value the importance of initiatives that prepare children for kindergarten. Sixty percent of Californians rated the importance of school readiness as 80 or above on a scale of 1 to 100, while 65 percent gave the same score to the importance of public schools, and 59 percent said the same about health care.

When asked at what age California children should start public education, 60 percent of respondents said 4 or younger. The results were even more dramatic among ethnic groups. Seventy-four percent of African-Americans and 66 percent of Hispanics believe the state should offer organized education programs to all children no later than age 4.

The survey also found that among African-Americans, 72 percent felt voluntary preschool should be available to all, regardless of family income. A majority of all Californians—56 percent—said the state should offer voluntary preschool to all children and 83 percent of parents with children ages 4 and under say they would enroll their child in a free, voluntary preschool program if it were available through a local school system.

For more information, visit www.cfcf.ca.gov.



One Penny On Each Sale Makes For Quality Pre-K?

Washington State Governor Gary Locke has proposed a new, dedicated and stable funding source for public education in his state—education that would start with preschool.

Locke proposes—and a host of business, education and civic groups support—the creation of a brand new education trust fund, paid for with a new 1-cent-per-dollar state sales tax. That extra penny on every sale in the state would raise \$1 billion in new dollars for education. “We have made great strides in education reform, but we must do more to make sure our children are prepared for the global, high-tech 21st century economy that awaits them when they graduate,” Locke said, as he unveiled the proposal this winter. “This proposal is about three things—our kids, our jobs, and our future.”

The trust fund would raise \$100 million a year for

early education, creating 10,000 new high-quality preschool slots for low-income children. Plans for the new preschool programs are scant, but Locke proposed that standards “that are tied to learning outcomes” and “kindergarten readiness benchmarks” be established to align preschool with K-3 education programs.

The new proposal gained almost instant support from the state's most powerful newspaper, the *Seattle Times*. Polls also show broad public support, but it remains to be seen whether state lawmakers will endorse a new tax in a state that has been traditionally averse to new taxes. A new organization, the League of Education Voters, comprised of education activists from around the state, including parents, teachers, school board members, and other community leaders, spearheaded the effort. The League is now championing it in the state Legislature. To learn more about the proposal, visit the league's website at educationvoters.org.

Many States Make Progress On Pre-K, But Most Still Fail To Boost Quality

Only Three States Make The Grade, More Funding, Better Teachers

The good news is that America has changed the way it educates its children: Nearly every state in the union now invests in some form of public preschool.

The bad news is that America fails to invest enough in the new venture—leaving a tab that will be painful for both children and the public to pay later on.

That's the verdict in a new report on progress of all fifty states in getting high-quality public preschool

NIEER's director and lead author of "The State of Preschool," a yearbook which tracks state-funded pre-K programs across the country. "This report shows that we've made a start, but we still have a long way to go if we are to assure every child the education they deserve."

The new report, the first-ever annual state-by-state check-up on government-funded prekindergarten programs takes a close look at how many 3- and 4-year-olds now have access to such programs, the quality of those programs, and the investment made by each state in such early education programs.

No state yet makes the grade in providing the highest-quality teaching and access to all the children who can benefit, the researchers found. Indeed, most states invest \$3,500 less per child than the going rate for a Head Start program. And, few states insist on having qualified teachers and small class sizes even though studies show that children will reap little or no benefit from attending preschool with unqualified teachers. "A high-quality program takes significant resources to assure that children gain the language, reasoning and social skills they need when they hit kindergarten," says Barnett.

Still, three states—Georgia, New Jersey and Oklahoma—now have programs that meet critical benchmarks. Georgia and Oklahoma have created access for large numbers of 4-year-olds—60 percent in



Progress in creating high-quality prekindergarten programs is wildly uneven across the country, with many states still failing to establish good benchmarks for quality.

Oklahoma and 55 percent in Georgia in 2002-03. New Jersey sets the highest standards in the nation for quality and provides more funding, per child, than any other state. "These three state preschool programs stand out as exemplary in one or more ways that make them useful models for other states," says Barnett.

Forty states now run preschool programs, but progress is wildly uneven across the country. New Jersey's "Abbott District" program, for example, scores high on access, quality and investment in the 30 districts where it operates. It is open to all 3- and 4-year-olds in those districts—a total of 58,000 children in 2004. Lead teachers must have a bachelor's degree as well as certification in early

childhood education. Only 17 other states require four-year college degrees—even though the National Research Council recommends this level of education.

Illinois and Arkansas also ranked relatively high on quality standards, with both meeting nine out of ten benchmarks the researchers set for good programs. Like New Jersey, they required teachers to have a bachelor's degree, set standards for curriculum, limited class size and required teachers to be grounded in early childhood education.

The total state investment in public preschool came to about \$2.4 billion in 2001-2002, with 10 states accounting for almost all—83 percent—of the spending. On average,

"We see this as a critical investment.

Children will have the language skills, especially, that will help them succeed throughout life.

For me, this is the most exciting job in education today—it's a man-on-the-moon mission.

We are making education history."

*Gordan MacInness,
New Jersey State
Education Official*

underway. "High-quality preschool can make a critical difference for children, especially those disadvantaged by poverty," says Steven Barnett,



however, that investment per child was too low to assure high-quality programs, the researchers found. Only New Jersey invested an amount—about \$10,000 per child—that approximated what the state invests in public school for older children. That investment translated into higher salaries for better-qualified teachers, a key ingredient in ensuring that a preschool program is educationally sound. Teachers in that program now earn as much as public school teachers.

“When you work with children who never had the exposure to preschool, you really appreciate the difference it can make.”

*Steffani Allen,
Preschool Teacher,
Norman Oklahoma*

“We see this as a critical investment,” says Gordon MacInness, the NJ state education official in charge of implementation of preschool and other school reforms. “We know that figure is one that will pay for itself over time. Children will have the language skills, especially, that will help them succeed throughout life. For me, this is the most exciting job in education today—it’s a man-on-the-moon mission. We are making education history.”

The researchers chose to create the state-by-state profile since education is a state and local responsibility and the nature of preschool education has shifted so dramati-

cally in recent decades. In 2001, the enrollment of 4-year-olds in early education programs nearly matched the enrollment of 5-year-olds in kindergarten in 1970. “The shift is dramatic because the new evidence on the value of early education is so dramatic,” says Barnett. “Studies show that we cannot afford to waste the learning opportunities in our children’s early years.”

That pay-off is already apparent in early studies of the emerging preschool programs. In Oklahoma, for example, a study last fall found that low-income children made significant, solid gains. “The effects were robust, especially for low-income children. The children’s ability to name colors, shapes, numbers, tell the meaning of words, count objects and sort objects by category all improved,” says William Gormley, researcher from Georgetown University who studied the Oklahoma effort. “The gains for Hispanic children are truly phenomenal.”

That progress is good news for all the states pressing ahead to fund preschool. “When you really work with children who never had the exposure to preschool, you really appreciate the difference it can make,” says Steffani Allen, preschool teacher in Norman, Oklahoma. Allen previously worked as a reading recovery specialist, trying to catch children up on skills they could easily have acquired in a high-quality preschool program, like the one she works for today. “They just didn’t have the basic foundation skills they needed, so everything was a struggle. I moved to early education to help see to it that all children start kindergarten with basic foundation skills.”

How Does Your State Rate?

For a copy of “The State of Preschool,” with in-depth data on publicly-funded preschool programs, visit www.nieer.org.

States With The Highest Quality

No state scored a 10, but three state programs scored the highest quality—nine out of 10 of the research-based quality standard benchmarks.

- Arkansas
- Illinois
- New Jersey Abbott Districts

States Without Pre-K

Ten states do not yet invest in public preschool, despite the evidence showing its value. That’s a shame, since nearly half a million 3- and 4-year-olds—about six percent of the nation’s preschoolers—live within their borders.

- Alaska
- Idaho
- Indiana
- Mississippi
- Montana
- New Hampshire
- North Dakota
- South Dakota
- Utah
- Wyoming

Law Center's New Initiative Hopes To Spread New Jersey's Model For Quality

Starting At 3! A New Program Aims To Establish Legal Right To Preschool Programs

>> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5
by some of the nation's experts in early education. "We hardly ever get to step back and take it all in, but when we do, it is a pretty breathtaking accomplishment," says Cecilia Zalkind, spokesperson for the Coalition for Early Care and Education, which represents 40 organizations across the state. "It's far from perfect. But what's happened already is almost a miracle, given where we started out."

hope to see happen around the country."

"This initiative is called 'Starting At 3' for obvious reasons," Boylan says. "We believe public education should start at the age of 3, to ensure that every child enters school with the skills they need to succeed. That's what New Jersey's Supreme Court saw as key—that preschool must be part of guaranteeing every child in this state the constitutional right to an adequate education."

The "Starting At 3" program got its start a few years back as the lawyers at the ELC found themselves fielding calls from education reformers around the country, when news of the state supreme court's decision spread. The lawsuit started out, like so many others around the country, as a challenge to the state's system of education finance. The ELC's attorneys argued the state's method of using property taxes to pay for public education translated into gross inequalities for children in the state's 30 poorest school districts, robbing them of their right to the "thorough and efficient" education guaranteed by the state's constitution.

The judges initially agreed, but it has taken decades for the state to find and fund a remedy. As the case evolved, the lawyers used science and compelling legal arguments to make a case for public pre-



New Jersey's court is the only one to rule public preschool a necessity so far, but others may follow.

school. But to win, Boylan notes, they had to make the case in a specific way. "Preschool is emerging as an issue in many cases, but if it's not argued correctly, it won't win," says Boylan. "What we want to do now is help people win—teach them how to make a convincing case."

For starters, lawyers must make the case specific to their state, collecting data on children's achievement, available programs, and how preschool will remedy local disparities. "Judges might be somewhat moved by the national statistics, but it's just not the same as telling them that children in two different towns in the same state are not getting an equal education. That's what we proved in New Jersey, and that's what attorneys in other states must prove," she says.

Already, Boylan is working with lawyers in Arizona, Colorado, Massachusetts, Nebraska, and Virginia who

are interested in securing the right to preschool for their state's children. As the newsletter went to press, Massachusetts was the only state to have an ongoing case that strictly adhered to the same arguments used in New Jersey, drawing on evidence and case studies of children in different towns in the state. "We are quite hopeful about the arguments in that case," says Boylan. "And we also think, with proper technical assistance, lawyers and activists in other states can use these tools to win similar mandates around the country."

The "Starting at 3" initiative also seeks to build a network of knowledgeable attorneys, publish articles in legal journals on the new approach, and present the case to lawyers and education activists. For more information, call Boylan at 973-642-1815, ext. 42, or write to her at eboylan@edlawcenter.org.

"New Jersey has conceived of this as a critical piece of education reform, the constitutional right of every child, and that's what we hope to see happen around the country."

*Ellen Boylan,
Program Head,
Starting at 3*

Which is why the ELC hoped to work with other states, offering technical assistance and support to other states hoping to get high-quality public preschool off the ground. "New Jersey has conceived of this as a critical piece of education reform, the constitutional right of every child," says Boylan. "And that's what we

Dave Lawrence: Champion For Florida's Kids

Florida voters passed a constitutional amendment last year requiring the state to offer publicly funded preschool to all 4-year-olds. It's the first time a state has amended its constitution to secure this right. Dave Lawrence, former publisher of the *Miami Herald* and president of the Early Childhood Initiative Foundation in Florida, was one of the prime movers behind the



Dave Lawrence, former publisher of the *Miami Herald*, helped raise \$60 million for and champions public pre-K.

amendments and was recently appointed by Florida Governor Jeb Bush as a special advisor to help shape the program. Here, Lawrence tells *Preschool Matters* about his conversion to the cause of universal preschool.

Q: You were in the news business for a whole career. Then you "retired" to work in the early childhood field. How did that come to be?

A: Seven summers ago, when I was still publisher of the *Miami Herald*, then-Governor

Lawton Chiles asked me to serve a two-year term on the Governor's Commission on Education. I ended up being euchred into chairing one of six committees—the one on school readiness. At the time, even as the father of five, I had never heard of the topic. What I came to learn so energized my thinking that it energized my life. When I retired at the beginning of 1999, I devoted myself full time to working on high-quality early childhood development, care and education.

Q: What's the most effective strategy for preschool activists to take?

A: First, start locally. The power closest to the people in America is local. Besides, the best you can do in this world is set a good example for others to follow. With 2.3 million people in Miami, we have every possible challenge facing the 31,000 children born here each year. So that's a good place to start.

Q: What are the issues that move the public and policy-makers?

A: Those elements that speak to high-quality education, health and nurturing. That would include such matters as parent skill-building, high-quality early education and care and health insurance for children. People want the best for their children, and they want to know their children will achieve their potential.

Q: Fair enough, but how did you create a vocal, active constituency for early education?

A. The public awareness campaign helped, but we also created the best local early childhood website in the country, the "Teach More, Love More" site, which spoke directly to parents about what they care about most—the well-being of their children. At that site, we could provide concrete information on how parents can help children learn and what the community could do to ensure that every child starts school ready to learn. We also created 24-hour phone lines to answer parents' questions. New parents are especially hungry for information. We built partnerships with 13 birthing hospitals and nine midwifery centers to staff those phone lines and to create packets for new parents which included information on the importance of high-quality early care and education. We also send a high-quality newsletter to more than 19,000 homes each month to help parents build their knowledge and skills.

Q. You have a diverse community in Miami. How did you reach everyone?

A: For one thing, we embarked on a major study in 162 child care centers as to what early learning curricula—Spanish and English—would work best. When we created our website and our phone lines, we made sure that we had bilingual and even multilingual services and experts available. We also launched—with a five-year W.K. Kellogg Foundation grant—a readiness project working with

1,600 children in 68 child care centers and eight elementary schools.

Q: You not only reach so many people, but you talk frequently about "universality" as an ingredient in early education. What do you mean by that?

A: I feel very strongly that every child deserves high-quality, affordable, accessible basics. Yes, I do realize that significantly disadvantaged families have higher hurdles to leap in behalf of their children but the principles are the same. When we instead focus on particular neighborhoods, then others tend to say: "Oh, I see; it's about those children." Building a real movement involves thinking about all children. We've made great progress in our community by seeking to embrace everyone's child.

Q: What are the most persuasive arguments for pre-K? Is research an important part of this?

A: Absolutely. Indeed, it is the research, which I now quote all the time, that convinced me that real "school readiness" would make such a difference in the future of children and our schools. None of this will mean anything unless it's about quality. The research shows that means credentialed teachers, the right child-teacher/caregiver ratios, the best curricula and enough hours to make a difference. Those are the elements we are advocating for here in Florida.

First Randomized Trial

New Study: Head Start Children Bound Ahead

>> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

her colleagues specifically stepped up to the challenge after the General Accounting Office issued a report in 1997, contending that Head Start's true effectiveness had yet to be scientifically proven. Wide-ranging research did show preschool programs could boost school readiness, but they did not offer a true experimental study of Head Start—the same sort of randomized trial scientists demand in many other fields.

Federal Head Start officials approved Abbott-Shim's study as a field trial of the methodology—to see if her approach might open the door to large-scale evaluations. The field test included several hundred children. In the end, the findings resulted from about 80 who attended Head Start and 80 who did not. By some indicators, the programs were of above-average quality; all having received accreditation from the National Association for

the Education of Young Children. Yet, they were not remarkably different in other respects from Head Start programs elsewhere. Teachers did not necessarily have college degrees, for example.

Creating such a study took vision and creativity—given the real life difficulties of mounting a randomized trial that have prevented such research from being done before. “It's always hard to set up a true randomized study, when you are dealing with real world families,” says Abbott-Shim.

Abbott-Shim had long-standing relationships with Head Start programs, which gave her both the idea and the access to families who could create the two ideal groups—the ones who received the program and a ‘control’ group consisting of applicants to Head Start who never made it off the waiting list. They came from similar circumstances and were randomly accepted to the pro-

gram. “In other studies, it was hard to know what was being measured, because you didn't have a control group,” says Abbott-Shim. “But in this case, because of our long-standing relationships with Head Start programs and the trust we had created, we gained access to families in the program and on the waiting list, which made them true peers.”

The control group, those receiving no Head Start program, was also unusual in that the children lacked access to any other preschool program. Thus, researchers could study children who were matched in nearly every way, except for the Head Start experience, and see what difference it made when children did have access to Head Start. Unlike other studies, they also had a clean sample—children with no other intervention at all.

The research findings appear in the *Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk*, Vol 8, No. 2, pp. 191-



By year's end, Head Start kids made significant gains in the programs.

214. For more information on the study, contact Abbott-Shimm at masqcounts@aol.com or call her at 404-327-9896.



National Institute For
Early Education Research
120 Albany Street, Suite 500
New Brunswick, NJ 08901

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ
PERMIT NO. 157

ADDRESS SERVICE
REQUESTED