

Fact Sheet: Early Childhood Education in NH 11/13/17 by LWVKearsarge/Sunapee study committee

There are five main points that have come from our research on early childhood education and its implementation in New Hampshire, leading to our recommendations for consensus discussion:

- Education Begins at Birth. All attempts to improve the quality of public education in New Hampshire must begin with the understanding that education begins at birth. The years from 0-3 and from 3-5 before children enter kindergarten are the years in which the child's brain is going through its most rapid development and all of the foundations for the academic learning that begins in elementary school are being laid down. In addition, the quality of the child's basic early childhood experiences is setting the stage for whether the child will be emotionally able to benefit from learning in elementary school. All of the research gathered by the ACES study (Adverse Childhood Experiences) tells us that children who are experiencing a significant number of these adverse childhood experiences will exhibit extreme difficulty from the beginning of their schooling.
- Educational Inequality Begins at Birth. NH's inattention to the quality of the lives of the state's children who are from 0 to 5 years in age is reducing equal opportunity to education at all levels. While the parents of middle class children are able to afford quality child care and preschool often beginning at age 2 or lower, parents with less means are not. This means that by the time many children enter kindergarten they have already had very different educational experiences. All young children, regardless of their parents' means should have access to high quality early childhood experiences in day care and pre-kindergarten classrooms.
- Full Day Kindergarten Should be Fully Implemented Across NH. NH is lagging in its implementation of full day kindergarten. No other state is still addressing whether or not full day kindergarten programs are necessary. It is fully understood as a necessary component of education in every other state.
- NH Should Implement State Funded Pre Kindergarten for Three and Four Year Olds. The research on the benefits of quality Pre Kindergarten education has reached a critical mass. Forty-two states now have some form of state supported pre kindergarten education for three and four year olds. It is time for NH to recognize that this state needs to be part of this trend sooner rather than later.
- NH Should Mandate Developmentally Appropriate Curricula for Pre K and Kindergarten. Developmentally appropriate early childhood curricula matter. What a developmentally appropriate education looks like for children from 0-5 and 5-6 is well understood by early childhood educational experts. But the push for testing and a focus on math and reading to the exclusion of all else have resulted in pushing academic learning down to earlier and earlier ages including didactic teaching, workbooks, restrictions on play and physical education that, unchecked, will result in a stifling of children's natural curiosity and love of learning.

Education Begins at Birth

- The Period from Birth to Age three is the most promising and consequential stage of human development

The huge amount of research on how a baby's brain develops in the first three years has finally reached the point where most people are aware of this. "The neuroscience literature, which has vastly expanded over the last twenty years, has shown the importance of the earliest period of life for the brain's developing architecture. There is now strong evidence of the importance of early learning opportunities for basic skills development, school readiness and lifelong learning trajectories." (Chaudry, Morrissey, Weiland and Yoshikawa, 2017). Parents understand this and want high quality learning environments for their children when they must return to work.

- The quantity and quality of the words a child hears in his/her first three years is critical for brain development

Hart and Risley (1995) studied the number of words that children heard in the first three years. They found a huge gap between children who were on welfare, children of working class parents and children of professional parents. The children whose parents were on welfare heard half the number of words per hour as those of working parents and one-third those of professional parents. Over the first three years of life this is a gap that cannot be compensated for. Early vocabulary development is strongly related to reading skills and school success.

- Adverse Experiences in Early Childhood and Kindergarten Outcomes.

One of the most critical research studies in recent years has been the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) research that shows the relationship between the number and severity of adversities suffered by children and subsequent negative lifestyle decisions and the onset of illness and early death. In a study published in *Pediatrics*, Jimenez et al (2016) looked at the relationship between ACEs in early childhood and teacher-reported academic and behavioral problems in kindergarten. ACEs that were assessed for this study included parental mental illness and drug use, and the child experiencing physical, emotional or sexual abuse. The study found that children who had experienced one or more ACE had increased odds of having below-average academic skills as well as poor literacy skills, attention problems, and social problems putting the child on a path associated with academic and behavioral problems that have implications for education and health trajectories.

- The Role of Family Resource Centers

Family resource centers provide trained home visitors whose role is to visit families even before birth, and continue during the first three years when all these marvelous developments should be taking place. Parents want their children to learn and to do well in school but often they do not understand the ways in which their interactions with their children can help or hinder this learning. Home visitors help parents articulate their goals for their children's development and learn the skills that foster that development. For example, when parents understand how important it is to talk to a baby they are often able to increase their vocalizations with their

infants. Understanding ACES and how toxic stress affects young children can help parents make better choices in their own lives.

Educational Inequality Begins at Birth

Children's development is impacted by everything in their environment from the number of words they hear to the skill of their parent's care giving, but these differences could be mitigated if children have access to high quality care and education as soon as their parent(s) returned to work, as they almost always do. While some parents can afford high quality child care, which is exorbitantly expensive, many are forced to patch together a system of low quality care. "As presently structured our system of early childhood care replicates social stratification rather than reducing it." (Chaudry, Morrissey, Weiland and Yoshikawa, Cradle to Kindergarten, 2017). The learning gaps that often have their beginning in the first three years set the stage for failure right from the beginning. The United States is far behind most other modern nations in the investments that it makes in children's lives during their first three years. The above authors propose that this system of early care and education must be radically restructured to avoid this inequality and the results that it causes in children's development. They posit that this restructuring must include a focus on paid parental leave so that parents can form a strong nurturing bond with their children in the first few weeks of life. Next, a variety of quality childcare options should be available to parents who need them. This means requiring that child care workers (teachers?) are qualified and are paid a living wage. Finally, Pre Kindergarten programs for all three and four year olds need to become a part of the public school system. Currently, middle class and upper class children often attend excellent private preschools; poor children who qualify for Head Start are educated apart. If public school Pre K with qualified teachers were open to all children it would be embraced by the public and all children from the age of three would have access to the same high quality educational experience. It's a long time from birth to age 5 when kindergarten begins – almost as long as the elementary or high school years and it is high time that we begin to pay attention to all the learning that occurs during these years. The success of the five year old entering kindergarten has a lot to do with what his or her first five years have been like.

Full Day Kindergarten Should Be Fully Funded Across NH.

New Hampshire Governor Chris Sununu signed legislation for additional funding for full day kindergarten programs on July 12, 2017. Under this law the state will provide an additional \$1,100 per student starting in 2019. Depending on how much money is generated by the legalized keno lottery, more will be allotted. On Nov. 7, 2017, residents in Berlin, Claremont, Somersworth, Laconia, Manchester and Nashua all voted to approve keno in bars and restaurants in an effort to raise money for full day kindergarten. Concord, Dover and Keene rejected keno. Voters in Franklin had already approved keno and officials in Portsmouth declined to put it on the ballot.

Currently, the state pays only half the standard per student amount for kindergarten, or about \$1,800. Some opponents complain that keno will take money from those who can least afford it and

encourage addictive behavior. State lottery commission officials estimate keno could raise \$443 million for education. They state of Massachusetts takes in \$900 million a year in its keno game and about 2.5 percent of the money comes from NH residents (Concord Monitor, Nov. 8, 2017.)

At the LWV Education conference on Nov. 4, NH Rep Rick Ladd (R Grafton 4) reported that about 80% of districts currently have full day kindergarten. He stated that some districts will need to acquire additional facilities before they are able to implement the full day program.

The National Education Association advocates for full day kindergarten when taught by qualified teachers using age appropriate curricula and in small classrooms. Studies show the longer day enables teachers to assess student needs and abilities more efficiently, boosts students' growth in reading and math, improves students' social and emotional skills and is an essential bridge between pre-school and primary grades. It can produce long-term gains especially for low-income and minority students. Full day kindergarten is also a sound investment to lower grade retention and dropout rates (Elicker and Mather, 2005). Parents prefer all day kindergarten (Education Commission of the States, 2005).

NH Should Implement High Quality State Funded Pre Kindergarten for Three and Four Year Olds.

- The Current State of Scientific Knowledge on Pre Kindergarten Effects

Chaudry et al (2017) argue that the United States is at a crossroads in regards to Pre Kindergarten. The United States ranks near the bottom in terms of support for early care, development and education of three and four year olds compared to other high income countries. At the same time, the U.S. public is highly supportive of new legislation to expand high-quality preschool for every child in America. Children of parents with higher income levels generally attend two years of high quality preschool before kindergarten. But the cost of private preschool is higher than the cost of college in some states, and children with families from lower economic means are typically only attending one year of preschool, often of poor quality. Meanwhile, the rationale for Pre Kindergarten is generally accepted by the public and bolstered by an increasing amount of research that demonstrates its benefits.

The Brookings Institute/Duke University (2017) study of the evidence regarding Pre Kindergarten effects generated a consensus statement and concluded that "The scientific rationale, the uniformly positive evidence of impact on kindergarten readiness, and the nascent body of ongoing inquiry about long-term impacts lead us to conclude that continued implementation of scaled-up Pre K programs is in order as long as the implementation is accompanied by rigorous evaluation of impact." The report notes that states have used a variety of means of designing and implementing their Pre K programs. NH could benefit from the experience of other states, especially that high quality matters. Chaudry et al (2017) summarize some of the facts supporting the implementation of high quality public Pre Kindergarten:

- Gains from high quality programs represent between a half year to a full year of extra learning before kindergarten.
 - Children from lower income families appear to benefit more, although children from all income levels make gains.
 - High quality programs have sound structural quality and high process quality.
 - Studying high quality (Tulsa, OK) vs low quality (Tennessee) reveal why high quality programs produce lasting benefits to children who participate.
 - There are proven pathways to increasing preschool quality. The combination of developmentally focused curricula and integrated in-classroom professional development has the largest effects on children’s school readiness. The detailed description of the Boston Public Schools implementation of the “Proven Pathways” model demonstrates how a careful implementation of curricula resulted in some of the largest impacts on children’s kindergarten readiness.
 - High quality programs feature a full school day, longer school year and wraparound care options.
- How States are Implementing Pre Kindergarten for Three and Four Year Olds.

The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at Rutgers Graduate School of Education has published a report on state preschool yearly since 2002. At that point only two states served 50 percent of 4 year olds and just three served more than 30 percent. No state met all the quality standards benchmarks. There has been a great deal of progress since that first report in 2002. The Executive Summary of the 2015-2016 report states:

In 2015-2016, three states and the District of Columbia served more than 70 percent of 4 year olds, a figure not reached by any state in 2002, and 18 states and DC served more than 30 percent. With respect to quality, six states had programs that met all 10 current benchmarks for policies related to quality. This remarkable progress largely reflects changes in states that committed to offer every child a high quality early education. For example, Iowa went from serving just 4 percent of 4 year olds and meeting three benchmarks for quality standards to serving 64 percent with six or seven benchmarks. In another example, Maine has gone from 10 to 40 percent of 4 year olds enrolled and raised its quality standards from meeting three to nine benchmarks. Both states are continuing to move forward.

the report goes on to note that 7 states (including NH) have no program at all and 8 other states have made negligible progress.

Nationally, there are 1,487,728 children enrolled in state Pre K classes. Thirty-seven of the states have part-day programs; 9 have full day programs, 7 have extended day. Special education preschool enrollment for 3 and 4 year olds is 440,931, and federally funded Head Start is 745,190. Most of the children enrolled in state Pre K programs are four year olds. The average is 32%, with 8% in Head Start, 3% in special education and 57% receiving no services. For three

year olds the coverage is much less. Only 5% receive state Pre K, while 3% are in special education and 8% are in Head Start.

Total state spending for preschool programs now stands at \$7.4 billion for the 43 states that offer Pre Kindergarten. This increased more than \$564 million in 2015-16. The funding per child averages \$4,976, but it varies dramatically state-by-state with the District of Columbia spending \$16,812 to Mississippi spending \$2,000 per child. Many states rely on additional funds from local and federal sources to help fund their preschool programs. The Preschool Development Grants (PDG) are competitive federal grants awarded to 18 states to build the state's capacity to provide high-quality preschool or to expand access. 2015-2016 was the first year of these grants and several states have used them to significantly increase their enrollment.

The NIEER has updated their quality benchmarks to reflect current research and focus on policies that directly influence classroom experiences. Many of the states that have implemented program evaluations are also leaders in quality.

- Vermont's Pre-Kindergarten Program

Vermont passed Act 166 in 2014. Act 166 provides universal publicly funded Pre Kindergarten education for a minimum of 10 hours per week for 35 weeks annually for all 3, 4 and 5 year old children who are not enrolled in kindergarten. This law was fully implemented on July 1, 2016. Because Vermont's program is so new it may provide a model for how New Hampshire could implement Pre Kindergarten. Vermont's Pre K program mandates that it use a developmentally appropriate curriculum which is aligned with Vermont's early learning standards. The Pre K program may be provided by a private program as well as a public one as long as the program meets the state standards. These standards include: teachers must hold a valid VT educator license with endorsement in early childhood or early childhood special education; child assessments must be conducted twice a year; and opportunities for parent involvement must be provided. Title 1 funds may be used to supplement the public 10 hours per week by extending the school day or school year.

Our subcommittee visited the Dothan Brook Elementary School to observe a unique program which combines a public Pre K classroom with wrap-around child care in an adjoining classroom. This is an example of one of the ways that states are experimenting with creative ways of implementing Pre K in public school settings. The Dothan Brook Pre K program is providing more than the required 2 hours of Pre K a day (10 hours a week). They are instead providing 2.75 hours (13.75 hours a week). Green Mountain Children's Center (GMCC) is providing wrap-around child care in an adjoining classroom (provided gratis by the school). Parents pay regular, sliding scale tuition for this program to GMCC. Children can be dropped off as early as 7 am and picked up at 5 pm. When it is time for them to attend the Pre K program they simply go to the classroom located next door. In this way, children are receiving a quality public Pre K program in addition to the child care that permits their parents to work.

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