

# Trends in Education and Care for Young Children

If your state is going to ride the trend horse, you have to get on it in the direction it's going

by Gwen Morgan and Sara Nadig

This final of three articles further addresses the trend toward universal pre-kindergarten as a means to integrating care and education and increasing quality, both essential ingredients to successful universalizing of pre-kindergarten.

A number of states are talking about early education for all children. "All" may mean free for all children; it may mean parent fees based on family income; it may mean prioritizing low-income children; it may mean adding a grade before kindergarten to the public

schools. Different meanings have very different cost implications.

This article focuses on what states are currently doing. There seems to be two different approaches. One focuses almost entirely on the pre-kindergarten age group in the public school system. This approach aims to increase the amount of state education dollars to schools in order to make our school systems more equitable and more effective. These states have maintained a separation of care from education by expanding only programs funded through the education system, usually in the schools; but in cities like Milwaukee, the schools offer many alternative options for parents through vouchers.

The second, systemic approach aims to increase and combine the investments of state, federal, and private dollars in all forms of early education and care. This approach aims to create a new and better system of education and care that can incorporate public and private money, combine education and care,

and reduce fragmentation. Their success will require more than just "reorganization;" it will require aligning governance and administrative policies across funding streams, new common measures for quality, innovations, changes in higher education, and bold steps into territory for which there is no road map.

## State efforts to improve early education and care: some history

Before 1962, the only federal dollars for early education and care were during the Depression and war times. States licensed private programs for all children, and joined with charitable organizations to provide social services as treatment for family problems. The preventive support for healthy families and their children was seen as the responsibility of parents, not government. By the 1960s, research in the United States led to new Head Start and other programs for low-income children, primarily with a deficit or treatment model.

Ms. Morgan has been at Wheelock College since 1972 as adjunct faculty, and as a leader in national research projects. Currently, she is Senior Fellow for Early Education and Care Policy. In her years in the field, Ms. Morgan has worked with others to found many new organizations, including: The KLIH Child Development Center; The Advanced Management Seminars for Child Care Directors at Wheelock; The National Association of Regulatory Administrators (licensors); Work/Family Directions; Wheelock's Center for Career Development in Early Care and Education; The Child Care Action Campaign; and The Forum on Professional Workforce Development at NAEYC.

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Check out Exchange Articles on Demand:

"ECE Meets Economics: The changing world of early education and care"  
(Morgan & Helburn, May/June 2006)

"Is Education Separate From Care?: Financing education and care for children younger than kindergarten age" (Morgan, November/December 2005)

However, states and the federal government were aware of the preventive, supportive potential that these programs have for all children and their families. Private parent cooperative nursery schools were popular in the '50s. They influenced the design of Head Start. Funds were made available, but separately, for improving education in schools, also for child care in three sections of the Social Security Act for child care, and for various other programs for preschool children and/or their families.

In the '70s and '80s, a number of states created new state agencies for child care services: with names like Child Development Bureaus or Offices for Children. These innovations did not bridge the separation between education and care; and the states continued to try to bring together the growing number of federal, state, and local funding streams through reorganization<sup>1</sup>, advocacy, coordination, lead agency structures, children's cabinet structures, and other experiments. Legislative Commissions and research studies made recommendations. Legislators became increasingly frustrated in states where rivalry between education and care defeated their initiatives.

### **Workforce development planning group: paving the way for change**

The states' systemic approach was in part stimulated by "career development," "professional," or "workforce" development planning groups<sup>2</sup>. These cross-agency planning groups worked toward a coherent professional development set of policies for the early education and care workforce. These planning groups have stimulated a large number of some systemic changes — such as consolidating funding streams, career lattices, core competencies, training approval, T.E.A.C.H.<sup>™</sup> and other scholarships for developing the workforce.

State incentives for quality improvement included articulating levels of quality and addressing other unintended negative consequences that resulted from numerous, unconnected, and differently funded programs. The workforce planning groups pushed the states in a direction that was more systemic and less a school-based "program," primarily because they join care with education regardless of funding source.

Over the past 15 years, such planning groups<sup>2</sup> existed in most of the states and developed a new set of assumptions for professional workforce development. The newer assumptions make professionalism more accessible to more of the workforce, and quality early education and care more accessible to all children. Many low-income adults do not form an intention to get a college degree before they take a job; intentionality unfolds gradually. The preparation of qualified professionals for high level roles remains rigorous, but additional new pathways are also developed in higher education and in the field of practice. Those entering work roles prior to gaining degrees can ultimately meet the same high professional standards as younger students starting four-year colleges, but it takes them more time. Qualifying education for earlier roles can count toward degrees. By, identifying a lattice of roles across auspices, the cross-agency planning groups contributed to an emerging broader view of the fields that serve young children.

This concept adds additional economic importance to community colleges. They will continue their important role in preparing individuals with terminal certificates and degrees for roles in technical areas of work. Certificate and two-year degree programs are not just the final preparation for a lifetime role, but are also qualifications for progressive roles that a person can choose as a career, moving vertically or laterally in a

variety of auspices. What is newer is that these jobs are not necessarily terminal jobs, but are also, for many, preparation that can be applied to the next roles, more specialized degrees in four-year academic institutions and graduate schools. Progressive roles for work with children and families are developed in fields of health, education, care, and family support. Barriers at the level of the four-year degree institutions inhibit reasonable transfer credit policies. These higher education barriers have been overcome; but only in states where the higher education institutions work together and with other stakeholders, committed to making improvements in the whole system.

### **What the states are doing: a handful of examples**

There are preschool classrooms in many school districts already. School districts are numerous. The number of children overall is still small in contrast to the number of children in Head Start and licensed early education and care. Schools have their own problems in financing their K-12 grades; many rely on the local community to support a large share of costs through property taxes. They also have a strong tradition of local control and do not take kindly to "unfunded mandates." In contrast, a few states are investing large amounts of public and private dollars in early education and care. These large-investing states appear to be states that are changing the whole system, rather than just adding another competing program for four year olds.

In California, the recent and well-publicized ballot initiative to create a statewide system failed this year. California is unique because, to some extent, it already has a system. All the federal and state dollars for early education dollars and care dollars flow through the California Department of

Education. California's extensive professional development planning developed over time with leadership from Pacific Oaks College.

In Massachusetts, the new Department has responsibility for administering all funds for early education and care, for licensing and quality improvement, and for creating a workable infrastructure system. It is partly staffed with transfers from Departments previously responsible for administration of some early education and care funds, Education, Transitional Assistance, Social Services, the Health Department, and some Family Support programs. The Massachusetts Legislature wrote detailed landmark legislation creating the Massachusetts Universal Pre-Kindergarten Program to be delivered through a "mixed system" of public and private programs.

Washington State is planning a systemic approach, supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, with access both to foundation dollars and the active planning participation of the Gates themselves, in collaboration with Washington State. Its base will be a public/private partnership named "Thrive By Five."

Illinois is a state in where the Governor supports early education and care in the state budget. Their system has ten systemic characteristics — strong emphasis on high quality, a broad approach to career development, and the commitment of dollars.

Oklahoma has made innovations in quality, through developing levels of quality child care and implementing a tiered set of standards. It also has early education for all children in the schools. The universalizing program in schools has expanded, but the number of children in private child care initially decreased.

The authors are especially interested in identifying which states are moving in the direction of system building, the barriers they encounter, and the solutions they evolve. System building will take time, patience, steady consensus, and public and private investments.

One key question is this: Will the providers of early education and care be willing to join together for a better system? Providers must trade off their small pieces of the current pie for larger and more systemic financial support, or succumb to their fears and cling to what they know, with all its associated problems and anxieties.

It is too early for predictions. To get a picture nationally of what is happening in each state, it would be helpful to distinguish between these different approaches to changing the system. Is the state changing its programs into an organized system? Or is the pre-kindergarten expansion simply adding one more "program" to an unconnected non-system? The following are some possible clues to an unpredictable future.

#### Clues — We are moving toward a system when:

- The governance structure administers all the state's early education and care programs in a "mixed system" (FL, GA, MA, NC)
- Public/private entities are being created for certain infrastructure functions (GA, NC, PA, WA)
- State funds a universal pre-k program (FL, GA)
- State funds flow directly to programs, whether centers, public schools, family child care, infant/toddler, or school-age programs (MA)
- State has emphasized quality, usually through the development of a Quality Rating System, or requiring a "developmentally appropriate curriculum" (GA, FL, MA 2007, NM, NY, NC, WV)

- There is strong support in the State Legislature, little partisanship, and reasonably good consensus among stakeholders and advocates (GA, MA)
- Amount of public and/or private dollars is expected to be large (WA, MA, GA, IL)
- The State Department of Education funds or the schools administer a wide range of options and auspices through a voucher program (IL, OR)

#### Clues: We are moving toward creating one more competing program when . . .

- Most programs are in public schools, with unintended negative effects on private programs (OK)
- The State or County Department of Education administers the state's early education programs in schools (IL, NY, OK, TN, WV)
- Funds are divided between two or more departments (NM)
- The Early Education and Care in the schools is targeted to at-risk children or families (IL pre-2006)
- State child care funds flow directly to centers, family child care, infant/toddler, and school-age programs. State education funds flow to schools. (OK)
- Voucher system and entire school budget is administered by local school and funded through a formula distribution of state aid (NY)

#### References

1. *"We trained hard, but it seemed that every time we were beginning to form into teams we would be re-organized. I was to learn later in life that we tend to meet any new situation by re-organizing; and a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency, and demoralization."* — Petronius Arbitr, 210 BC.

2. By 1990 a trend was emerging in the field of practice, to develop a “career lattice” of progressively qualified roles for work with young children. In 1991, a number of foundations began to support a project based at Wheelock College to study, evaluate, and expand the number of such groups and to support their work. With support from Wheelock, these groups grew in number and became more effective through sharing with each other.

Download the chart  
“Moving Towards a System or  
Creating Another Program:  
The Direction States are Moving”  
from our web site:  
**[www.ChildCareExchange.com](http://www.ChildCareExchange.com)**  
— go to “Free Resources”