

March 21, 2004

CADRE OF CHAMPIONS—A YEAR IN REVIEW

1:45 P.M.—2:45 P.M.

Cadre of Champions—a Year in Review

By Jinhee Lee
Council of Chief State School Officers

One year ago, member chief state school were enlisted to serve as national, regional, and state spokespersons for expanded quality and access to early childhood education. Today, there are twelve chief state school officers who form the Cadre of Champions for high quality preschool. The Cadre roster includes chief state school officers from Delaware, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Ohio, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin. Although each state has its own distinct early education program and are confronted with unique circumstances, the Cadre were bound together by a common passion for elevating the importance of early childhood education. Throughout the year, the Cadre worked to build support and bring increased attention for high quality preschool education in local and national venues.

The Cadre served as spokespersons for advocating and informing legislators and the general public the importance of a high quality preschool experience. At a time when state preschool programs were in jeopardy of budget cuts and even proposed elimination due to state budget shortfalls, chief state school officers worked tirelessly to maintain funding for preschool programs, including using media outlets such as news conferences and op-editorials to emphasize the critical role of preschool to help students to reach their full potential. On the national front, chiefs from the Cadre participated in the National Governor's Association's Forum on Quality Preschool. This forum provided a venue for governors to discuss the opportunities and challenges they face in promoting high quality early education in their states.



Chief state school officers took an active role in panel discussions and presentations to underscore the importance of investing in preschool programs.

Beginning with the 2003 Legislative Conference, early childhood experts and policymakers addressed the issue of the importance of a high quality preschool education at each of the CCSSO member meetings. High school reform was the theme at both the Summer Institute and the Annual Policy Forum, and the direct impact of preschool education on high school outcomes presented a fitting opportunity to focus on early childhood education. The presentations included perspectives from a researcher, an early childhood advocate, and a businessman. Dr. Steven Barnett, director of the National Institute for Early Education Research, Amy Wilkins, executive director of the Trust for Early Education, and Rob Mosbacher, president of Mosbacher Energy, offered their unique perspectives on the benefits of preschool education, including decreased high school dropout rates, lower grade retention rates, and fewer special education placements. During each of the member meetings, the Cadre convened for an informal session in order to share successes and challenges surrounding their state preschool initiatives.

CCSSO staff continue to support the Cadre through facilitating regular electronic communications, creating spotlight articles on state preschool issues, and building partnerships with other K-12 national organizations in order to build support for high quality preschool.

Upcoming 2004 Cadre Activities

Building upon the momentum and progress made through last year's activities, CCSSO will continue to provide support and find opportunities for chief state school officers and state education agency staff to promote high quality preschool programs. Below are several highlights of upcoming activities:

Regional Meetings

In partnership with local education leaders, CCSSO will conduct the first in a series of three regional meetings on successful practices in promoting quality and access to preschool. In each of the three regions, CCSSO will pay travel expenses for small teams of education leaders from five states consisting of the chief state school officer and two influential district superintendents who will be chosen based on their ability to convey the pre-kindergarten message to other local education officials. The first regional meeting will be held in the western region October 12-October 14, 2004.

Member Meetings

CCSSO will continue to highlight the importance of high quality preschool at each of the CCSSO member meetings. At the upcoming Summer Institute and the Annual Policy Forum, a pre-kindergarten topic will be presented in a general session, and the Cadre will be given an opportunity to meet and discuss preschool issues in their states.

Instate workshops

CCSSO will conduct three instate workshops for the chiefs and SEA staff linked with the Trust for Early Education (TEE) advocacy teams, anticipating that TEE will initiate activities in three states in 2004.

Chiefs as Spokespersons

As opportunities present themselves, CCSSO will arrange for chiefs to participate in or speak at state

or national events, briefings, or forums. In addition, CCSSO staff will provide support to Cadre members for placement of op-editorials in local and state newspapers.

Electronic Communication

The Cadre will continue to be connected through an electronic message that disseminates recent research publications, news clippings, legislative updates, and monthly articles written by CCSSO staff.

A description of Cadre activities and additional resources can be found at http://www.ccsso.org/projects/Early_Childhood_and_Family_Education/Projects/2973.cfm. If you would like to join the Cadre of Champions, please contact Jana Martella at "janam@ccsso.org" or Jinhee Lee at "jinheel@ccsso.org."

Advancing Quality Preschool for All is a meeting hosted by the Council of Chief State School Officers as part of The Pew Charitable Trusts' initiative to advance high quality prekindergarten for all of the nation's three and four year olds through objective, policy-focused research; state public education campaigns and national outreach.

As part of the Trusts' early education initiative, CCSSO will educate and serve its membership to build support among chief state school officers for expansion of high quality, universal preschool opportunities for 3 and 4 year-olds.

