

Summary Notes
Advancing Quality Preschool for All
Sunday, March 21, 2004

Notes prepared by staff at the Council of Chief State School Officers

Welcome Remarks

G. Thomas Houlihan, CCSSO Executive Director

Elizabeth Burmaster, Wisconsin Superintendent

8 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.

G. Thomas Houlihan welcomed the audience to Advancing Quality Preschool for All. He described the Pew Charitable Trust's commitment to early education and thanked them for making this meeting possible. He introduced Elizabeth Burmaster, state superintendent of Wisconsin.

Elizabeth Burmaster stated that early childhood education is one of the best strategies to close the achievement gap. She added that, "powerless children need powerful friends" and encouraged the audience in the room to continue to serve as advocates for children. Burmaster described 4 major issues surrounding early childhood in Wisconsin. The four issues are:

1. Perception that free 4K competes with childcare centers
2. Conflicting values: Should 4 year olds be in school?
3. Funding
4. Mobilization of state and national political leadership to support early education.

She underscored the importance of a quality preschool experience with qualified teachers to develop social, emotional, and cognitive development in a child's growth and development.

Opening Address – A History of Urgency

Introduction – Susan Gendron, Maine Commissioner

Betsy Rogers, 2003 National Teacher of the Year

8:30 a.m. – 9:30 a.m.

Susan Gendron stated that as a former kindergarten teacher, she sees the importance of early childhood education. She stated that any good education program starts with a high quality teacher. Ms. Gendron then introduced Betsy Rogers, the 2003 National Teacher of the Year.

Betsy Rogers of Leeds, Alabama shared her unique experiences and encounters as she traveled across the country as the National Teacher of the Year. She learned that no matter where she traveled, how strange and peculiar particular customs are across the country, people are essentially the same everywhere. She then shared her personal history of the events and people who have influenced her growth as a person and as a teacher, including family members and students in her class. Ms. Rogers has been an

elementary school teacher, primarily first grade, and has been exposed to schools and settings that are affected by poverty. She stated that all children, no matter what their background, come to school with a look of hope and excitement in their eyes and look to teachers to provide them with the opportunity to learn. However, the resources available to children vary significantly depending on their socio-economic status, and she described the huge discrepancy of local funding in Alabama. Through the process of National Board Certification, Ms. Rogers realized that she had a teaching practice, much like a doctor or a lawyer. Part of being a professional includes knowing the research to guide her lesson plans and teaching methods. Ms. Rogers will return to her teaching practice after her commitments as the National Teacher of the Year are over and plans to provide professional development for teachers in a Title I school. Ms. Rogers stressed the need for academic content for preschoolers and children in the lower grades and she also highlighted the importance of maintaining the beauty of childhood.

No Child Left Behind – Challenges and Opportunities for Preschool

Introduction – Susan Zelman, Ohio Superintendent

Dorothy Strickland

9:30 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

Ms. Zelman described the early childhood activities in Ohio. Ohio's goal is to make progress in closing the achievement gap. Ohio has developed an integrated management system, a tool for teachers to align their teaching practice to state standards and assessments. Ohio has preK standards in science, social studies, math, and language arts as well as new standards for K-12. Ohio is currently developing an aligned system of pK-20 education. Ms. Zelman advised the audience to avoid early childhood politics. She stated that it was time to move past the ideology debate and to work in cooperation with one another to build a system of early childhood education.

Dorothy Strickland's presentation focused on the Reading First and Early Reading First components of No Child Left Behind. Key elements of Reading First include accountability, coordination, professional development, and scientifically based reading research. With respect to scientifically based research (SBRR), Dr. Strickland stated that there is controversy surrounding SBRR because only one type of research is considered SBRR. SBRR does not take into account a variety of research including qualitative and correlative research, and Dr. Strickland stated that it is important to review a variety of research. Ultimately, Dr. Strickland believes that choosing a reading program is a local decision.

The National Reading Panel Report is the backbone in reading education and describes the essential components of effective reading programs for kindergarten through third grade programs. Dr. Strickland predicts that the National Reading Panel Report will increase in scope and focus on the transition between preschool and elementary school. Early Reading First is unique because the local entities apply directly to the federal Department of Education as opposed to Reading First grants in which states apply to the federal Department of Education. The key elements of Early Reading First include a

language and literacy-rich environment, language and literacy activities, accountability, and professional development.

Dr. Strickland was a member of the National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) that addresses the needs of early literacy and family literacy. NELP utilized a variety of research including qualitative research in developing its report. Dr. Strickland summarized four research questions that guided NELP's report. These questions include predictors of reading, influence of environment and setting of children's learning, child characteristics as indicators of reading, and programs that affect children's learning. Dr. Strickland clarified that NELP does not recommend a list of specific commercial products.

NELP's findings include implications about instruction. The NELP's report was written to inform teachers of strategies and methods to help children develop foundational skills needed to become good readers and writers and to equip parents to support their children's literacy development. The report states that teachers should be purposeful and intentional about teaching literacy skills and recommends avoiding skill and drill activities. Instead, literacy skills should be embedded in rich experiences around content. Children need to understand the letter sound correlation, but it is critical to teach comprehension, not just decoding the text. Comprehension should be taught at an early age instead of waiting until the middle grades.

Dr. Strickland stated that the stakes for literacy are higher in today's than in the past and multiple literacies, including oral language, technology, social skills, and behavior are important. No Child Left Behind has good intentions but has created an environment of anxiety and pressure. She stated her concern about the imbalance in the curriculum if there is too much emphasis on literacy at the expense of other experiences. Social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development are important components of developing the entire child. There is unevenness across the country in setting standards and stated that now is a good time to make progress. She also stated that it is important for children to have teachers who look and sound like them. Early childhood programs need the support of the local people and from local communities.

Media Panel - Making the Message Sing

Gene Maeroff, Senior Fellow, Hechinger Institute on Education and the Media

John Mellow, Executive Producer/Host and President, Learning Matters, Inc.

Kirk Smith, Co-founder, Smith-Mumford

10:45 a.m. - Noon

Kadesha Washington, the director of communications at CCSSO, welcomed the audience to the media panel and introduced the panel moderator, Gene Maeroff. Mr. Maeroff stated that this panel was designed to be an interactive session with the audience members. Mr. Maeroff posed questions to the panel that comprised of John Mellow and Kirk Smith.

Q: Why should preschool advocates be concerned with the media?

Mr. Smith stated that it is important to know the given state's preschool needs and media maturity. At the middle and local papers, reporters are often not trained in education media and need to be informed on education topics. Second, consider your goals. Is it to gather public support in order or influence the legislature?

Dr. Merrow stated that the media is often contentious and contains negative headlines. If the public constantly reads negative headlines about preschool, they may be turned off to the topic. Mr. Smith stated that the placement of the story would determine if there is positive or negative coverage of the subject. In New York's Winning Beginning campaign, the tactic was to fill positive news holes. The panelists agreed that it is possible to get preschool coverage on the business pages of the newspaper but that the story must be tied to a credible business leader. And most importantly, there must be a *story*.

Q: Why should a journalist value preK if the legislators don't?

Mr. Smith stated that legislators must be educated on the topic of preschool. Their knowledge of preschool should not be assumed. For example, in New York, many school board members do not work in the field of education are not aware of the importance of preschool. However, in his experience, when given information on the benefits of preK, they welcome the opportunity to be educated on the topic.

Dr. Merrow stated that it is important to ask the right questions when considering the media. These include "where's the story?" and "where's the data for growing support for preK?"

In some instances, the public is ahead of the state legislature and other instances, vice versa. When the public is ahead of the legislature, advocates can connect the public with the media in order to push the legislative body in a particular direction.

Dr. Merrow stated that he was not overly impressed with the television coverage of preK and described much of the coverage as "puffery." He also stated the need to compare preschools in America with preschools in other countries, e.g., France and Spain.

PreK is a relatively new topic for the media. The media is generally receptive to information and reports about preK. When providing information to the media, always be credible and accurate. Mr. Smith stated that 80% of stories placed by outside sources are positive and 80% of stories generated by the newspapers are negative. No one article makes or breaks a story. Reporters conceptualize articles with a chapter focus. The most successful articles are narrow in focus which also helps to maintain control of the story. Advocates can pose questions to reporters but should be ready to have the answers to those questions.

Q: What are three questions to engage the media?

In the Winning Beginning Campaign, preschool advocates published articles, each with a different focus on the outcomes of a quality preschool program. The three topics of the articles were crime reduction, economic benefits, and higher student achievement linked

to preschool. The most popular article was the Fight Crime Invest in Kids article that focused on the influence of preschool on the crime rate. The least interest was the article that focused on the economic effects of preschool including the money that is saved from the investment in preschool. Mr. Smith advised that stories focus on individuals in a community and to tie the local story to policy issues. In New York, Mr. Smith created articles with stock information that could be tailored to a local community. Mr. Merrow and Mr. Maeroff objected to the use of stock articles for reasons of journalistic integrity.

Dr. Merrow suggested several angles to present preschool. These include the history of kindergarten, brain research, economic benefits for the community, and public private roles in preschool. A potential story could stem from the question, “who benefits from bad schools?” In California, he stated the answer to this question includes agribusiness and manual labor employers.

Mr. Maeroff asked the panel if it was reasonable for the media to function as advocates for preschool. Both he and Dr. Merrow stated no while Mr. Smith answered yes. Mr. Maeroff believes that the media loses its credibility once it becomes an advocate.

State of Preschool

W. Steven Barnett, Director, National Institute for Early Education Research

12:15 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.

Dr. Barnett’s presentation focused on the recent report released by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) entitled the *State of Preschool*. He began his session by describing the increase in the rate of preschool enrollment. The rate increase for preschool enrollment is equally high for working mothers as it is for mothers who stay at home. This points to existing and sustainable growth in preschool enrollment. The NIEER report analyzes state preschool programs based on factors including access, quality standards, and state policy. NIEER plans on having tools available on their website so that users can manipulate the data in the report, and Dr. Barnett believes that the NIEER report can be used as an agent for change

He stated that preschool programs are failing children. Resources and standards need to be improved in order to have better preschool programs. Dr. Barnett stated that state preK programs for 4-year old children serve more students than high school. However, the report found that most of the work in preK can be found in ten states and only two states put more funding for preK than high school. There is a current debate over funding full day kindergarten or half-day preschool. He stated that this debate needs to be reconceptualized and rather than favoring one program over another, to find a solution to fund both programs if they are found to be beneficial for children. Early childhood education is a patchwork of systems and better data is needed on programs.

The report received broad media coverage. States without preschool programs examined why they did not have programs, and states with an existing dialogue on preschool in the media received additional media coverage as a result of the report.

An audience member asked Dr. Barnett for the most surprising findings of the report. Dr. Barnett stated that the data from the report showed that the number of 4-year olds served by state exceeded Head Start. Second, he found just how far Georgia and Oklahoma preschool programs are ahead of the other states and the large drop off between tiers of programs offered by the states. Lastly, the report shows how little states are spending on preschool.

Building a Cadre of Champions

Introduction – Jana Martella, CCSSO Project Director

Moderator Lindy Buch, NAECS/SDEs President

Cecil Picard, Louisiana Superintendent

Marilyn Howard, Idaho Superintendent

Tom Watkins, Michigan Superintendent

Sandra Garrett, Oklahoma Superintendent

1:45 p.m. – 2:45 p.m.

Jana Martella introduced the session by highlighting the connections CCSSO hoped to make during the preschool meeting in order to build capacity to support preschool in state education agencies. She introduced Lindy Buch, a state director of early childhood education, as the moderator of the panel. Ms. Buch served as moderator to the panel and posed several questions to the chief state school officers.

Question: Why is preK an important issue? How has your background influenced your views on preK?

Tom Watkins stated that previous to his position of state superintendent in Michigan, he was president and CEO of the Economic Council and former mental health director in Michigan.

Cecil Picard stated that brain research has influenced his decision to place preschool as a priority. Louisiana has a high poverty rate. Louisiana's preschool program LA4 has produced highly effective results. He is currently working with the Delta consortium to expand and to improve preschool and has most recently met with Tommy Thompson at Health and Human Services and presented the positive effects of LA4. Mr. Picard would also like to see the House Head Start bill that includes the state demonstration grants to pass legislation.

Sandy Garrett spent thirteen years as a first grade classroom teacher where she witnessed children learning how to read. As state superintendent, she works in collaboration with other state agencies to build a system of preK. She also stated that the media are key partners to spread the message of the importance of preschool.

Neurological research and her experience as a teacher shaped Marilyn Howard's views on preschool. Dr. Howard spent twenty-eight years in the classroom including

kindergarten and first grade and ten years as a school administrator. Idaho does not have a state preschool program. However, over the last five years, she has been working to increase the culture of awareness for preschool programs. Three times per year, kindergarten students are given a ten-minute assessment on literacy in order to help guide instruction. The results of this assessment made people aware of the uneven playing field. Governor Kempthorne is also a preschool advocate and participated in the recent NGA Forum on Preschool.

Question: What are some of the barriers to preschool?

Dr. Howard stated that one of the barriers is the cultural idea that children should not be moved out of the home too soon. Government is viewed as an interference with family.

Ms. Garrett faces a conservative population in her state – they feel that children should not be in school until the first grade. In addressing this population, she highlights state and local successes. Although preschool is voluntary in Oklahoma, sixty percent of four year olds in the state are in a public school preschool program. The positive results and successes of the preschool programs often win critics over.

Mr. Picard stated that the people in Louisiana see the importance of preschool but funding is an issue. Louisiana has a half billion-dollar deficit. During the gubernatorial election, Mr. Picard received promises from each of the candidates that they would continue to support Louisiana's preschool program. The newly elected governor, Kathleen Blanco, is a former teacher and a supporter of LA4. Mr. Picard would like to see preschool as an investment rather than expenditure.

Mr. Watkins stated that there are pockets of conservative areas in Michigan. Governor Jennifer Granholm is a big supporter of early education. The care and education of zero to five year olds is the number one issue for her. A factor in the Michigan's success has been the diverse supporters of preschool, especially unlikely partners such as business people.

Q: Who are partners who support preK?

Mr. Watkins stated that the Children's Action Network comprising of all state agency heads and business partners has been a support to preK in Michigan.

Mr. Picard stated that the LA4 evaluation was conducted in partnership with the Louisiana State University. Other preK partners include the Pennington Biomedical Center that addresses childhood obesity.

Ms. Garrett stated that preschool has the support of a large group of business people and the Governor's office. In Oklahoma, the state's wealthiest individual has singled out preK as the individual's sole area of financial contribution.

Dr. Howard stated that Idaho has grassroots programs to reach families, including the Dinner and a Book program and a Spanish radio program. Idaho has roughly one million

people in the state of which ten percent are Hispanic. Recently Hispanic representatives and five Native American tribes held a summit that resulted in a commitment to take ownership of finding a solution to their societal challenges.

Mr. Watkins stated that when there is no money, creative approaches are needed. Governor Granholm partnered with Meier, a statewide grocery store, to print messages about school readiness on their shopping bags. Mr. Picard stated that in Louisiana, McDonald's printed sample questions for fourth and eighth grade assessment on their placements to prepare students for the tests.

Question: Within the Department of Education, how can capacity be built?

In Oklahoma, there is a team environment within the department of education. In Idaho, program standards, learning standards, and preschool assessment are important indicators to measure student progress. In Louisiana, clear standards about preK have been established. In Michigan, Mr. Watkins recommended inviting all staff who deal in any way with preschool to a meeting. This will accomplish eliminating program silos and encourage collaboration within the department of education.

Question: Can you describe the relationship between state and local education entities?

Ms. Garrett stated that the preK standards were developed in vertical alignment with the other grades. Most elementary schools consider preK as part of the education system. However, facilities and space is a big problem. Mr. Picard stated that local areas see the positive results of LA4, and the number of LA4 programs has increased. Mr. Watkins described the relationship as messy, chaotic with productive tensions.

Ms. Buch asked the chiefs to provide any additional advice to the audience to close the session. Ms. Garrett stated that it is important to know your local districts and to collaborate with all the players in the state. She also thanked NIEER for bringing national focus on preschool. Mr. Picard advised the audience not to give up when funding seems to be an issue. He said that it is important to focus on high standards and quality when developing preschool programs. He also stated the need for collaborations and to give other partners credit in successes.

Moderated Q&A and Closing Remarks

John Merrow

3:15 p.m. – 3:45 p.m.

John Merrow fielded comments and questions from the audience members, and all presenters, with the exception of Dr. Strickland, were present to address audience questions. Audience comments and questions focused on the role of private providers of early education, Title I dollars for preschool, the Bush Administration Initiative -- Good Start Grow Smart, and parents as teachers, among other topics.

Dr. Merrow shared his summary thoughts on the day's events. He advised the audience to think big. There are opportunities to re-think preK in non-traditional ways and to think "outside the box." He said that states with no preK programs have a great opportunity to be creative when developing their programs. He compared preK to the US interstate highway system. When the highways were built, they were constructed to suit the needs of both *Lexis* and *KIA*. Because the quality standards were high, the highways meet the needs of all types of cars. In the same way, preK should be developed with the highest standards in order to serve all children. He stated that there are multiple ways of advocating preK including, using international comparisons, brain research, and arguments with a moral, practical (e.g., personal safety that comes from a lower crime rate), and economic perspective.