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**early developments** Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center

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*Improving Early Child Care and Education*

From the Director's Office:

Targeting the Right Stuff

Focused Use of Money, Activities Can Improve Child  
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**Child outcomes IMPROVE if aid to child care centers is DIRECTLY RELATED to quality improvement**

# Targeting the right



Smart Start assistance to child care centers helps young children come to school ready to succeed if the assistance is directly related to quality improvement, according to a new study conducted by researchers at the Frank Porter Graham Center at UNC-Chapel Hill.

Specifically, children who attended child care centers that participated in Smart Start activities directly related to improving quality had better cognitive and language skills when they entered kindergarten than did children from other child care centers or family child care homes. Additionally, fewer children in the Smart Start-Direct group were rated as having behavior problems by their kindergarten teachers.

Smart Start is a partnership between North Carolina state government and local leaders, service providers, and families to better serve children under six and their families. The state distributes money to county partnerships, which are non-profit corporations established specifically for the purpose of administering Smart Start activities. The primary goal is to ensure that all children enter school healthy and prepared to succeed.

This new study, which included a total of 508 children, looked at a group of children attending Smart Start centers and children attending other child care centers or family child care homes. Within the Smart Start group, researchers identified 142 children who attended centers participating in activities directly related to improving child care quality. The others in the Smart Start group attended centers with activities described as supportive. (See sidebar.)

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“Findings suggest that program change efforts need to be directly related to improving the quality of child care if they are to have an effect on children’s school entry skills. To affect school entry skills, the type—not just quantity—of support is important,” said **Kelly Maxwell**, lead researcher on the project.

“The findings and recommendations from this study should not be construed to mean that local partnerships should provide none of the activities listed under the indirect category,” said **Donna Bryant**, principal investigator of the FPG-UNC Smart Start evaluation team.

“Ensuring that all teachers are certified in CPR, for instance, is important for children’s health, but should not be expected to raise children’s kindergarten entry skills,” she said.

Bryant said she thinks the local Smart Start partnerships need to pay more attention to the linkages between the activities they fund and the outcomes they intend to achieve. 

#### Activities DIRECTLY RELATED to improving quality

- Enhanced subsidies for higher child care quality
- Enhanced subsidies for higher teacher education
- License upgrades
- On-site technical assistance
- Quality improvement and facility grants
- TEACH (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) scholarships, which provide education scholarships and support for release time for child care teachers.
- Teacher education scholarships
- Teacher salary supplements

#### Activities INDIRECTLY RELATED to improving quality

- CPR training
- Developmental screenings
- Director administrative training
- Enrichment activities
- Expansion and start up grants
- Health and safety assessments
- Playground safety
- Teacher substitutes
- Transportation
- Specialists
- Subsidies (not tied to quality)
- Workshops

the right stuff

# Focused use of money, activities can improve child care quality




**A comprehensive community initiative can improve child care quality if significant funds and activities are focused on the issue, according to a study by researchers at the Frank Porter Graham Center at UNC-Chapel Hill.**

The quality of child care, as measured by the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS), at 180 child care centers in North Carolina was significantly higher in 1996 than 1994. The quality was significantly related to the number of local quality improvement activities in which the child care centers participated.

Some of the centers in this study were part of the state's Smart Start initiative; others were randomly sampled. The state gives money to county partnerships, which are established specifically for administering Smart Start. These partnerships plan how to best meet their own community needs, improve existing programs and design new ones.

Changes in quality were related to Smart Start participation. Quality ratings were specifically tied to the number of Smart Start quality improvement activities in which a center participated, the percent of full-funding allocation received by the county, and the proportion of Smart Start funds designated for child care. Many centers took advantage of multiple Smart Start opportunities.

Further, the rate of increase in the proportion of centers licensed at the higher AA level was higher in Smart Start counties than in other N.C. counties. 

#### Other findings:

- Overall, only 14% of the preschool classes in 1994 were providing good quality care. In 1996, 25% of the preschool classes were providing good quality care.
- Money spent on child care quality improvement efforts was related to ECERS quality, particularly for counties that received more Smart Start funding.

Researchers cautioned that there was still much room for improvement, however, with 75% of the centers still below the quality threshold.

*NOTE: Since data were collected for this study, North Carolina has directed that at least 70% of the Smart Start partnerships' budgets be allocated to child care.*

**Editor's note:** The above excerpts are from Effects of a Community Initiative on the Quality of Child Care by FPG researchers Donna M. Bryant, Kelly L. Maxwell & Margaret Burchinal. The article appeared in *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 1999, Vol. 14, pages 449-464.

# Recent Publications

**Issues in Disability & Health.** Simeonsson, R.J., & McDevitt, L.N. (Eds.). (1999). Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center.

**The Transition to Kindergarten.** Pianta, R.C., & Cox, M.J. (Eds.). Bailey, D.B. (Series Ed.). (1999). Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing.

**Family systems.** Winton, P.J., & Winton, R.E. (2000). In J. Solomon (Ed.), *Pediatric skills for occupational therapy assistants* (pp. 11-22). St. Louis, MO: Mosby.

**Moving towards cross-cultural competence in lifelong personnel development: A review of the literature.** Hains, A., Lynch, E., & Winton, P.J. (1999). Champaign, IL: Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Service Institute.

**Lives in Progress: Case Stories in Early Intervention.** McWilliam, P.J. (2000). Baltimore: Brookes Publishing.

**Effects of a community initiative on the quality of child care.** Bryant, D., Maxwell, K., & Burchinal, M. (1999). *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 14, 449-464.

**Quality of early childhood programs in inclusive and noninclusive settings.** Buysse, V., Wesley, P. W., Bryant, D., & Gardner, D. (1999). *Exceptional Children*, 65, 301-314.

**The environment and mental retardation.** Bryant, D., & Maxwell, K. (1999). *International Review of Psychiatry*, 11, 56-67.

**A review of interventions for preschoolers with aggressive and disruptive behavior.** Bryant, D., Vizzard, L. H., Willoughby, M., & Kupersmidt, J. (1999). *Early Education and Development*, 10(1), 47-68.

**Qualitative analysis of Latino parents' religious interpretations of their child's disability.** Skinner, D., Rodriguez, P., & Bailey, D.B. (1999). *Journal of Early Intervention*, 22, 271-285.

**Educating exceptional children** (9th ed.). Kirk, S., Gallagher, J., & Anastasiow, N. (2000). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

**Policy and the transition process.** Gallagher, J. (1999). In R. Pianta and M. Cox (Eds.), *The transition to kindergarten* (pp. 351-362). Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing.

**Knowledge versus policy in special education.** Gallagher, J. (1999). In R. Gallimore, L. Bernheimer, D. MacMillan, D. Speece, & S. Vaughn (Eds.), *Developmental perspectives on children with high-incidence disabilities* (pp. 245-261). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

**Unthinkable thoughts.** Gallagher, J. (2000). *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 44(1), 5-12.

**Child care licensing regulations and child care quality in four states.** Gallagher, J., Rooney, R., & Campbell, S. (1999). *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 14(3), 313-333.

**Policy options for early childhood: A model for decision making.** Gallagher, J. & Rooney, R. (1999). *Early Education and Development*, 10(1), 69-83.

**Early development, temperament, and functional impairment in autism and fragile X syndrome.** Bailey, D.B., Hatton, D.D., Mesibov, G., & Ament, N. (2000). *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, (30), 557-567.

**Taking the Lead: 1999 Highlights from 10 local education agencies serving preschool children with disabilities.** Weston, M. (1999). Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, FPG Child Development Center.

**It's only natural...to have early intervention in the environments where it's needed.** McWilliam, R. A. (1999, September). *Top Notes* (Alabama Early Intervention Newsletter).

**Integrating therapies into the classroom.** Scott, S. M., McWilliam, R. A., & Mayhew, L. (1999). *Young Exceptional Children*, 2(3), 15-24.

**Interpreting infant conceptual categorization.** Reznick, J. S. (2000). *Journal of Cognition and Development*, 1, 63-66.

**Can prenatal caffeine exposure affect behavioral inhibition?** Reznick, J. S. (1999). *Review of General Psychology*, 3, 118-132.

**Influences on maternal attribution of infant intentionality.** Reznick, J. S. (1999). In P. D. Zelazo, J. W. Astington, & D.R. Olson (Eds.), *Developing theories of intention: Social understanding and self control* (pp. 243-267). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

**Measuring infant spatial working memory using a modified delayed-response procedure.** Schwartz, B. B., & Reznick, J. S. (1999). *Memory*, 7, 1-17.

**What twins can tell us about the development of intelligence — a case study.** Reznick, J. S., & Corley, R. (1999). In M. Anderson (Ed.), *The Development of intelligence* (pp. 105-136). East Sussex, UK: Psychology Press. 