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Meets with State Representatives

THE PICTURE OF HOW PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS (state-funded educational programs for children prior to kindergarten entry) are faring among states that have invested significant resources in those initiatives came into sharper focus when state representatives met in Chapel Hill, NC, April 28 and 29, 2003. The meeting was sponsored by the National Center for Early Development & Learning (NCEDL) as part of its groundbreaking multi-state study on prekindergarten. The study's findings are eagerly awaited by states as they consider how much to invest and how best to invest in prekindergarten programs to improve children's educational outcomes.

Under the collaborative leadership of researchers from FPG, the University of California at Los Angeles and the University of Virginia, the multi-state study has been gathering data from 40 classrooms across 6 states—California, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, New York and Ohio. The data includes detailed information about instructional practices, student performance in both prekindergarten and kindergarten and students' home life with respect to socio-economic status, family educational practices and beliefs, and the nature and quality of home-school relationships. The study is the first to examine in detail the interrelationship among classroom

settings, family settings and student performance from prekindergarten to kindergarten.

An important part of NCEDL's study design includes on-going dissemination of information among the participating states, as well as feedback from those states on further interpretation and refinement of the data. With the first year of data gathering complete, the April meeting provided a forum for the release of preliminary findings. Representatives of nine states attended the meeting, 6 of those from participating states and 3 from a larger group of 10 states that serve as an advisory group.

The meeting included presentations of preliminary data on teacher and child characteristics, classroom quality, classroom practices, child outcomes and family data. Discussion sessions were held on subtleties in the data and how those should be interpreted. For example, the study gathered data on whether or not child care instructors held

state teaching credentials (asked as a "yes/no" question.) State officials pointed out that a "yes"

response could have different implications, as some states require coursework in early childhood education as a condition of receiving teaching credentials and others do not.

"This kind of thing will lead to a reanalysis or reinterpretation of the data, as need be," says Diane Early, assistant director of NCEDL. "This is the nature of data collection and analysis in a large, complex study."



The meeting also served as a forum for participants to talk informally about the particular challenges of implementing the study in their states. Sharon Hawley, administrator with the Childhood Development Division in the California Department of Education, serves as a liaison between state officials, child care program operators and data gatherers in the field.

“The real challenge has been to track kids from a pre-k to a kindergarten setting,” Hawley says. “After pre-k, these kids scatter out to all different schools. We had to get cooperation from the teachers and parents to follow these kids at each location. No state had a ready way to track these kids, so we had to improvise.”

Hawley compliments NCEDL project managers for their willingness and ability to work with each state to structure the study in a way that will help them provide the most valuable information and to accommodate the needs and desires of state and local officials.

“I’ve really appreciated the contact that NCEDL has maintained throughout the process,” Hawley says. “They’ve helped us do things like write letters to the school districts explaining what the



Don Trull

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—Sharon Hawley

study is about and the importance of being able to follow these kids.”

Bob Pianta, William Clay Parrish Professor at the University of Virginia, serves as one of the Principal Investigator for the study. He has been impressed with how well the regional coordinators have worked together and how smoothly the data collection has gone.

“As researchers, we didn’t know whether this type of data collection was really possible,” Pianta says. “Here we are in Virginia trying to coordinate data collection in Ohio and New York. It’s actually worked quite well, thanks in large part to information technology. We get daily emails from our data collectors, so we can keep abreast of their work.”

“In a lot of ways, this study has been a model for how you can do larger scale research across universities and have a high quality of data,” Pianta says.

At this point, NCEDL has finished its kindergarten data collection and is preparing first grade teacher questionnaires to track children’s progress. NCEDL will be submitting findings to peer-reviewed journals, where colleagues in the field will have a chance to examine them. |ed|

To Learn More

National Center for
Early Development & Learning

www.ncedl.org



publications

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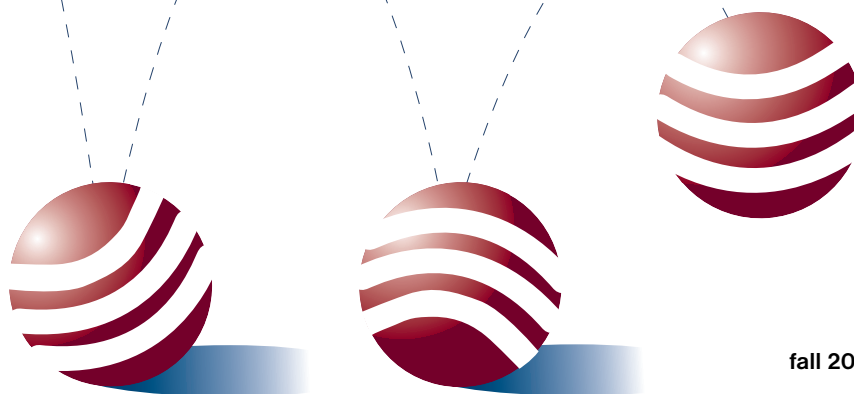
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