



early developments Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center

Fall 2002 | Volume 6, Issue 3

Child & Family Policy

ED News

Informing Public Policy

Jim Gallagher - Legend & Legacy in Special Education

The Impact of Welfare Reform

Supporting IDEA

A Seamless System of Services

FPG Recent Publications

Prekindergarten Education in the US

NCEDL Publications

news



MARY RUTH COLEMAN, FPG Scientist and Clinical Associate Professor in the UNC-CH School of Education, was recently elected for a three-year term to the Board of Directors of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). CEC is the largest organization for special educators, individuals with special needs and their families in the world.



LYNETTE AYTCH, FPG Investigator, was recently elected to the Board of the Division of Early Childhood (DEC), a sub-division of CEC.



PAM WINTON, FPG Senior Scientist and Director of Outreach and Research Professor in the UNC-CH School of Education, now serves as Associate Editor of the *Journal of Early Intervention*.



ELEANOR RICHARDSON, longtime volunteer and former employee in the nursery of the FPG Child Development Institute, received this year's C. Knox Massey Distinguished Service Award for "unusual, meritorious or superior contributions" by UNC employees. Honorees receive an award citation and a \$5,000 stipend.



contents

early developments
Fall 2002 | Volume 6 #3

ISSN 1536-4739

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Early Developments is published three times a year by the FPG Child Development Institute at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. It is funded in part by UNC-Chapel Hill and in part by PR/Award Number R307A60004, administered by the office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Institute on Early Childhood Development and Education, US Department of Education. Content of articles does not necessarily represent the position of the US Department of Education. Endorsements by the federal government should not be assumed.

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Total design, production, & printing costs of this issue of *Early Developments* were \$7602.

10,000 copies of this document were printed at a cost of \$5383, or 54¢ each.

Informing Public Policy
4

**Jim Gallagher—
Legend & Legacy in Special Education**
5

The Impact of Welfare Reform
8

Supporting IDEA
7

**A Seamless System
of Services?**
9

FPG Publications
13

Prekindergarten Education in the US
14

NCEDL Publications
15



Informing Public Policy

by Don Bailey, Director

IF INVESTIGATORS AT THE FPG INSTITUTE studied astronomy, we probably would not be concerned about public policy. But since our work focuses almost exclusively on programs and services for children and families, it is of enormous relevance to policy makers. These individuals in local, state and federal government must make decisions about which programs to fund, how much money to allocate and what regulations are needed to assure equitable access and achieve the program's desired outcomes.

Just think about the array of laws and regulations that directly affect children and families. Head Start represents a large federal commitment to improving the health and development of children living in poverty. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act requires free, appropriate, public education for all children with disabilities and provides financial incentives and guidelines to assure that states comply with this requirement. And the list goes on. Welfare reform, childcare subsidies, Medicaid, child care regulations and state initiatives for prekindergarten programs all represent policy decisions that commit public resources and establish standards by which those resources are to be used.

How are public policy decisions made? Research informs public policy, but ultimately policy decisions are based on factors that include cost, public demand, timing and politics. Policy research attempts to understand the various factors influencing policy development. Policy research also examines specific policies and determines whether they really result in the intended outcomes.

Jim Gallagher, former director of FPG, has always believed in the power of policy to make a real difference in the lives of children. He should know. In 1967 he was asked to serve as Associate Commissioner of Education, and Chief of the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped in the US Department of Education. This was a very prestigious appointment, as the BEH had just been established and the

role of the federal government in the lives of exceptional children was just beginning to be formulated. Jim's work at the Department of Education had a profound influence on setting standards and directions for a federal role, and his mark on the department can still be seen today in what is now known as the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.

When he came to FPG, he began a series of policy studies that have helped the field understand the role of policy and what it takes for policy to be implemented effectively at the local level. He trained several generations of policy researchers, and his influence is evident both here at FPG and in many places around the country.

As an institute, we try to shape policy by providing information to help policy makers make informed decisions. We distinguish this work from advocacy, in which an individual or organization pushes for a particular piece of legislation or funding. Many advocacy groups exist, and they play an extremely important role in fostering social change. What we can do is provide objective information and systematic analysis of issues so that both policy makers and advocates will have as many facts at their disposal for weighing the costs and benefits of various programs.

This issue of *Early Developments* highlights some of the policy work currently underway at FPG. We also use this issue as an opportunity to celebrate the many contributions Jim Gallagher has made to the field and his influence on the current generation of policy researchers.

On a personal note, I have now served as director of FPG for 10 years. Jim Gallagher was one of the major reasons I joined the center and his legacy as director has continued to serve as both a challenge and an inspiration for me. Never one to interfere, but always available to listen and support, he is often the first in line to volunteer to help with any project. I was hoping to catch up with him someday, but Jim, you are one of a kind. Carry on! | **ed** |