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IN THIS ISSUE:

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Revitalizing At-Risk Neighborhoods

New Economic Development Strategies Find A Role For Family Support Centers

As family centers in Allegheny County and elsewhere demonstrate just how effective the family support model of human service delivery is at improving the lives of at-risk children and families, the idea of recruiting them in efforts to revitalize depressed neighborhood economies is increasingly seen as one that makes a great deal of sense.

This new role for family support is receiving serious consideration for a number of reasons. For one, family support centers operate within some of the county's and the nation's poorest neighborhoods – neighborhoods that have proven themselves highly resistant to traditional economic development strategies.

"Nobody has figured out how to lift whole segments of the population out of poverty," said Rebecca Stone, Senior Research Associate at the Chapin Hall Center for Children, University of Chicago. "We have figured out how to help individuals. An enormous number of families have been helped. But nobody has figured out how to lift whole neighborhoods out of poverty."

It is unclear whether family support can help solve what has resisted solution for so long. Family center involvement in economic development is a relatively new idea. But many basic family support principles appear to compliment fresh approaches to economic development, such as comprehensive community-building initiatives that involve human services perspectives in strategies for revitalizing poor neighborhoods.

What is clear is that interest in linking family support and community development is growing. In May, *Moving Forward: Family Support and Economic Development* was the theme of the annual family support conference convened in Pittsburgh by the University of Pittsburgh Center for Social and Urban Research.

Community Voice

Family support itself is a relatively new approach to human service delivery. In Allegheny County, which boasts perhaps the largest concentration of family support centers in the nation, there are 24 family centers, some only a few years old.

Several principles separate family support from traditional human service delivery systems. For example, the families themselves are handed the role of governing the centers and designing the services that centers provide. Family centers rely on building strong relationship among parents, their peers, and human service professionals. The approach focuses on building upon a family's strengths.

Another aspect of family support that makes it attractive to economic developers is that family centers reside in the neighborhoods they serve with the idea of becoming a community resource.

"Family support is a way to bring the community voice to the table and the needs of families to the table," said Deb Dunton, Director, Providence Family Support Center in the North Side neighborhood of Pittsburgh. "We have insight into the needs of our families. We've developed a trust. We work with them from a strengths-based perspective. We should be pretty well integrated so that we have our finger on the pulse of the community, or at least have a way to determine that pulse."

Rethinking Economic Development

Accurately measuring the pulse of a neighborhood is important to new economic development strategies that view revitalization initiatives as creating more than just jobs.

While job creation may still be the most important piece of neighborhood development, comprehensive community building approaches argue that to be successful, revitalization efforts need to boost not just incomes, but the kinds of supports that families need to survive and grow.

Comprehensive community building initiatives, "share one basic operating assumption – that attempts to improve the lives of children and families will reach maximum effectiveness when they alter the neighborhood condition in which these families live," Stone told the audience at the May family support conference in Pittsburgh.

Family support, Stone said, can provide answers to many of the questions community building initiatives need to consider if they intend to strengthen the social fabric in tandem with creating economic opportunities.

"What do we know about children, youth, and family development that might inform aspects of neighborhood economic planning? For example, what sorts of local economies give children the best introduction to the value of entrepreneurship, civic involvement, the idea and goal of finding a vocation – not just a job – and the opportunity to be involved in key relationships with responsible adults? How does the organization of businesses and services within a neighborhood affect the living patterns of families to give them a sense of life as multidimensional and encourage their participation in community decisions?

"What does a family supported economy look like if it is assumed that the local economy does more than just provide avenues to adult employment? Designing local economies in this way is a role the family support movement can take."

Lessons Learned

In Pittsburgh, one recent effort that joined family support and economic development provides a glimpse of the road that lies ahead for comprehensive strategies for revitalizing at-risk neighborhoods.

On one hand, the experiences of the Providence Family Support Center provides an example of the kinds of ventures that meet the needs of at-risk families and shows some of the ways a family support center can contribute. On the other hand, it demonstrates just how difficult the road from idea to reality can be.

"It occurred to us that family support wasn't enough, that other issues needed to be addressed, like housing and employment, and that we needed to figure out ways of helping families with those," said Dunton, the family center director. "It was like a puzzle, some of the pieces were in place, but there were some pieces missing that people needed to achieve stability and security and those kinds of things."

An opportunity for the family center to address some of those issues arose when the Northside Civic Development Corporation initiated an economic development project aimed at helping single mothers. Northside Civic was looking to develop a labor pool of single mothers. The family center provided women for the focus groups that were conducted to determine the needs of single mothers and other issues that might suggest how to tailor the project to those needs. A core group of women emerged. And the idea of starting a sewing co-op to produce children's clothing was born.

It appeared to be a good fit, combining the prospect of employment, a sense of what being an entrepreneur is like, business skills, and the kind of flexible hours were helpful to women raising young children. Despite initial skepticism, Dunton said, "once the women determined that it was going to be their own kind of creation, most of them were very interested."

They toured a co-op in Ohio. They were given basic instruction in operating a business and training in sewing and other skills they would need to manufacture clothes. The family center arranged for sewing machines and classroom space for their training, provide some of the child care that was needed, and offered personal development courses covering topics such as leadership development and communication skills.

There were difficulties. Some women felt overwhelmed by the complexities of running a business. And most carried the added pressures of having to deal with poverty, domestic violence, and others issue that often beset women in at-risk neighborhoods.

But two issues emerged that could not be overcome and the project began to unravel before the co-op could be opened.

Under new Temporary Assistance for Needy Families legislation, the women were required to embark on a structured job search and the need to find a job became an urgent one when new restrictions limited their benefits to five years. "Welfare reform hit and a lot of women went into employment and training programs set up by DPW. We lost a lot of the potential workforce," Dunton said.

At the same time, raising start-up funding for the co-op hit a snag. Short on funds and suffering from a shrinking labor pool, the project lost momentum. "We just could not devote any more resources from our center. We just had to move on," Dunton said.

Nevertheless, the notion of engaging family support and economic development is one Dunton believes has potential. "There are lots of opportunities out there that can be explored. But it's tricky. Family support is a different way of doing business. It's non-traditional. And merging of family support with more traditional systems takes a lot of work to meld the two and find a comfort zone. It's been my experience that those kinds of issues need to be thought about and dealt with very carefully and collaboratively."

Focus On State Policymakers

OCD Informing Broader Audience About Children and Family Issues

Profound changes in social welfare policies, the shift away from federal control of human services, and the growing complexities of modern parenting are among the factors whetting the appetite of policymakers, practitioners, and parents for more information about issues important to children, youth, and raising families.

Responding to these demands, the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development (OCD) is redoubling its effort to provide information about children, youth, and family issues to a broad audience of state and local policymakers, practitioners, faculty, parents, funders, and the news media.

Most recently, OCD and the Prevention Research Center of Pennsylvania State University began collaborating to provide information to state policymakers on children and family issues specified by Harrisburg and tailored the needs of lawmakers and others who, under new federal welfare law, have assumed a greater role in the design and management of human services.

"More policy is being made at the state and local levels now and state legislators need a source of information like a Rand (Corporation) or a Brookings (Institute) to provide them with a knowledge base to help them develop programs," said Robert B. McCall, Ph.D., Co-Director of the Office of Child Development. "OCD and Penn State are attempting to provide that knowledge base."

Special Reports

Producing special reports, policy analysis, and other information on children and family issues is not a new role for OCD. In fact, producing, publishing, and distributing such information is among the tenets found in the OCD mission statement and is an important aspect of its Core Program.

More than 40 Special Reports drawn from the best available research have been produced as summaries of what is known about topics such as medically fragile infants, preventing teenage pregnancy, resilient children, child poverty, Head Start, and the effectiveness of treatment for violent juvenile delinquents.

Most of the Special Reports have been published in *Developments*, OCD's quarterly newsletter devoted to issues and news related to children, youth, and families. In addition, OCD staff has published a number of papers on topics such as runaway and homeless youth, multi-institutional service delivery, and early childhood services.

Reports, policy analysis, and other information produced by OCD has been viewed favorably by faculty, practitioners, funders, and others. However, recent trends, particularly far-reaching changes in human services policy, called for new initiatives.

State Policymakers

Recent strategic planning within OCD recognized that the growing responsibilities of state policymakers to design and manage human services is creating a greater demand for timely, comprehensive, objective, and accurate information about issues facing children and families.

OCD previously has provided such information to city and county policymakers and foundations. And on the state level, OCD has contributed policy studies such as the *State of the Child in Pennsylvania*, a report prepared with Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children that takes a county-by-county look the well being of children across the state.

OCD, however, has decided to step up its efforts to bring useful information to policymakers in Harrisburg.

Earlier this year, OCD and the Prevention Research Center of Pennsylvania State formed a partnership to provide state policymakers with information on children and family issues tailored to their needs.

The Universities Children's Policy Partnership taps the resources of both universities in preparing research-based reports on children and family issues and presenting it to state policymakers in a timely manner and through a variety of formats.

State policymakers have the option of identifying the issues to be researched and following up with requests for clarification or additional information.

"It's the two large, state-universities responding to real world issues in a very applied, direct way," said Christina Groark, Ph.D. Co-Director of the Office of Child Development. "Both have many experts in children and families and this helps policymakers in that they don't have to fish around for information. We do the fishing for them."

Among the early requests from state policymakers has been information on the effectiveness of abstinence programs to prevent teen pregnancy, and information on home-based child care.

"By setting up this collaboration and dealing with policymakers, we're starting to build a relationship that will help us determine what issues they want to look at and make a more useful contribution to policy development," Dr. Groark said.

Parenting

Another important audience is parents. Producing a series of parenting guides is the focus of a project OCD launched earlier this year with help from the Frank and Theresa Caplan Fund for Early Childhood Development and Parenting Education.

The idea is to offer useful, concise, user-friendly, research-based information on a range of parenting topics. Caseworkers and other human services professionals contributed suggestions about design, tone, and topics to shape the guides to the needs of parents. Nearly 40 topics have been identified, including how to handle problems such as temper tantrums and sibling fighting, how to ready children for school, tips on toilet training, and understanding children's fears.

"Parenting seems today than it has ever been," said Dr. McCall. "It's useful for parents to have information that comes from research and has a broader base than the experience of one particular writer. That's the niche we're trying to fill.

"Sometimes common sense isn't so common. While research often does validate what Grandma knew all along, sometimes it does not. For example, a lot of people believe that sparing the rod will spoil the child. But, in fact, research tends to show that the rod is less effective than people think. There are other more effective means of discipline and guidance."

News Media

Also this year, OCD expanded the audience of its reports on children and families to include the news media. The reason is simple. The public, for the most part, gets its news and information from the popular press and television and radio.

There is also evidence of a growing demand for substantive, accurate background information about children and families among news reporters and editors. Several news organizations assign reporters to cover children, family, and parenting topics. And general news coverage of topics such as welfare reform policy, school issues, and youth violence stand to benefit from background information drawn from the best available research.

In response, OCD is publishing sets of "background" reports on a quarterly basis and sending them to reporters and editors across Pennsylvania. These reports, most of which are based on OCD's Special Reports, provide brief overviews of topics such as adolescent suicide, the impact of television violence on children, child poverty, why some children develop into serious delinquents, and trends in early childhood education.

The reports, free from copyright restrictions, are intended as useful tools for reporting on children and family. "In the past, we've sent our Special Reports but they rarely got used," said Dr. McCall. "This is an attempt to package information in ways that is more useful to journalists. It's part of our effort to be user friendly with scholarship for a variety of audiences."

Allegheny County Juvenile Court

Court Masters Hired To Lighten Caseloads And Improve Permanency Planning

The workload of an Allegheny County Juvenile Court judge is grueling by any standard. On days when dependency hearings are scheduled, each judge can expect an average of 55 cases. When shelter hearings, adoption, and termination of parental rights hearings are added in, the average daily workload of a juvenile judge rises to 64 cases.

It has been a long-standing problem in Juvenile Court: too many cases; too few resources. And the consequences extend beyond an overworked bench. Unmanageable dockets lessen the chances that timely, permanent solutions to children's dependency issues will be reached.

This month marks the beginning of a new project that court and juvenile authorities expect will ease each judge's caseload, allow for more careful consideration of cases, and improve efforts to reach timely decisions on placing children in permanent homes.

Three new hearing officers, or "masters," have been hired to assist judges in handling dependency matters. Authorities estimate the work of the masters will triple the capacity of the court to hear dependency cases.

The Masters Project, which is initially being funded with money raised from private foundations, is a collaboration between Juvenile Court and the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, Office of Children, Youth, and Families (CYF).

Court Caseloads

In 1997, Allegheny County Juvenile Court judges heard a total of 17,713 cases. Dependency reviews, by far, represented the largest volume of work with 13,526 cases. Dependency petitions numbered 1,011 last year. The court also heard 2,352 shelter hearings, 480 termination of parental rights hearings, and 344 adoption hearings.

Court statistics report that each judge hears an average of 51 dependency reviews per day; 4 dependency hearings; 6 shelter hearings; 1.8 termination of parental rights hearings; and 1.3 adoption hearings per day.

Resources available to hear cases in Allegheny County Juvenile Court compare poorly to those found in other urban counties of similar size, according to a report by the Pittsburgh-based National Center for Juvenile Justice.

Courts in the urban Ohio counties of Cuyahoga (Cleveland) and Hamilton (Cincinnati), and in Baltimore County/City in Maryland were all found to have juvenile hearing resources significantly greater than those in Allegheny County.

Masters Project

Allegheny County Juvenile Court will team each of the new court masters with a juvenile judge.

Four days a week, the masters – attorneys who serve in a quasi-judicial manner – will hear case reviews that have been assigned to their judge at the CYF regional offices. On the fifth workday of each week, masters will be free to schedule special cases or to complete administrative work.

It is anticipated that these judicial teams will influence the continuity of individual cases. In an overcrowded court, it is not uncommon for a family's case to be shuttled between different judges over the weeks, months, and years the case is before the court. Under the Masters Project, each master-judge team is expected to be involved with the same family from the time their case enters the court until permanency is achieved.

The Masters Project also calls for the hiring of three additional child advocates and three additional parents advocates. Three county solicitors are also expected to be added and security at CYF regional offices will be tightened.

In general, a dependency case would work this way under the Masters Project:

- Following a dependency hearing before a judge, the case is set for a review before a master in 30 days. The master reviews issues such as why the child was removed from the home, the need to make reasonable efforts to reunite child and parent, and whether prescribed services are being provided to help the parent regain custody.

- The master reviews the case as frequently as every month and no less frequently than every three months.

- Six months after services for the parent begin, the master assesses the progress made toward reunification.

- In cases where the master finds that the parent has made little or no progress at 6 months, reunification efforts continue, but CYF is instructed to begin identifying potential adoptive parents.

- If after a 12 months the master finds that the problem that led the child to be removed from the parent's custody has not been corrected, a goal change hearing is scheduled before a judge.

- If the judge grants a goal change, the case goes on the court's permanency list and remains on the judges list for involuntary termination of parental rights and/or adoption. If the judge denies the goal change, the case goes back to the master with instructions on what steps to take to help the parent achieve reunification.

Anticipated Benefits

The addition of three court masters is expected to lighten the caseloads of judges and allow them more time to examine individual cases, a family's situation, strengths, and the progress being made toward goals, including placing the children in a permanent homes, whether means returning them to their parent's custody, or placing them in adoptive homes or other permanent settings such as long-term foster care.

Cases are also expected to be reviewed more frequently. Reviews before masters are to be scheduled at least every three months. Previously, judges typically reviewed case every six months.

CYF has set two goals for the Masters Project. One is to reduce the number of children in placement by at least 1% a year. In January, about 2,900 children were in foster homes or other placement situations. A second goal is to reduce by 2% a year the average length of time children stay in out-of-home placement. In Allegheny County, children currently remain in out-of-home placement an average of 23 months.

Focus on Foundations and Corporations

RGK Foundation

The RGK Foundation, headquartered in Texas, places an emphasis on supporting programs to improve education and the health and well-being of children.

The foundation's major giving priorities include programs that promote academic excellence in institutions of higher learning; raise literacy levels; attract minority and women students into the fields of math, science, and technology; improve the health and well-being of children; and medical and educational research.

Recent grants include $30,000 to a leadership development nonprofit in Alexandria, Va. to fund science, technology, and public policy seminars; and $14,000 to an Austin, Texas, high school to support a "Talk-It-Out" program that encourages collaborative problem solving as the primary approach to resolving disputes.

The foundation awarded a total of $3.7 million in 1997. Nonprofit organizations are eligible to apply for funds. Grants are usually not given for the purpose of buying equipment.

There are no deadlines for applications. The foundation reviews and awards proposals throughout the year.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, contact Gregory Kozmetsky, President, RGK Foundation, 1301 W. 25th St., Suite 300, Austin, TX 78705-4236; (512) 474-9298; fax, (512) 474-6389; e-mail, jhampton@rgkfdn.org.

Note to University of Pittsburgh Faculty: It is University policy that foundation and corporate funding sources may be approached only through, in cooperation with, or with the approval of the Vice Chancellor for Institutional Advancement. Interested faculty should contact Al Novak, Associate Vice Chancellor for Corporate and Foundation Relations at 624-5800.

Announcements

Grants Available for Faculty Development

The State System of Higher Education (SSHE) Faculty Professional Development Council Annual Grants Program provides awards for professional growth opportunities for SSHE faculty or teams or groups of faculty.

Categories include: Joint faculty-student research, basic or applied; scholarly research, basic or applied; scholarly research for non-tenured faculty, basic or applied; joint faculty-student public service; creative and performing arts; individual faculty projects in curriculum, instruction, and assessment; group projects in curriculum, instruction, and assessment or in the design of learning communities; academic department projects in curriculum, instruction, and assessment; individual career enhancement; completion of an advanced degree; and individual career enhancement in off-site academic or non-academic settings.

Campus deadlines vary at each campus. Faculty Professional Development Council deadline is Nov. 2.

Interested faculty must contact the Faculty Development Office at their university.

Grants Available to Study Perception, Cognition

The Air Force Office of Scientific Research is offering grants for basic theoretical and experimental research that clarifies the fundamental mechanisms underlying human performance.

Research can use behavioral methods alone or in combination with biological and computational methods to study the higher order aspects of information processing involved in perception and cognition to further understanding of how humans process information.

Focus can be on research in learning abilities, intelligence tutoring, team performance, and performance in demanding environments.

Awards average $300,000 a year for up to three years. Higher education institutions, other nonprofit research organizations, and industry are eligible. There are no deadlines for applications. Applicants should contact program staff before submitting proposals.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, contact John Tangney, Air Force Office of Scientific Research, (202) 767-8075; fax, (202) 404-7475; e-mail, john.tangney@afosr.af.mil. For information on AFOSR research programs, visit the following site on the Internet, http://web.fie.com/fedix/afosr_.html.

NIH Offering Award for Clinical Research Curriculum

The National Institutes of Health is offering a new clinical research curriculum award to stimulate the inclusion of high-quality, multidisciplinary didactic training as part of the career development of clinical investigators.

U.S. non-federal organizations, such as medical, dental or nursing schools, or other higher education or research institutions that have well-established clinical research or clinical research training programs are eligible. The applicant must have a highly-trained faculty active in clinical research.

Awards generally average $200,000 a year. In fiscal 1999, $4 million is set aside for about 20 awards.

Deadlines are Sept. 23 for optional letters of intent and Oct. 21 for applications.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, contact Lawrence Friedman, Epidemiology and Clinical Applications Division, National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, (301) 435-0422; e-mail: friedmal@gwgate.nhlbi.nih.gov; Ronald Geller, Extramural Affairs Division, National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, (301) 435-0260; e-mail: rg33k@nih.gov; Belinda Seto, Office of Extramural Research, National Institutes of Health, (301) 402-9128; fax: (301) 402-2642; e-mail: bslle@nih.gov; or http://www.nih.gov/grants/guide/index.html. Refer to RFA OD-98-007.

Grants Offered in Mental Health Education

The National Institute of Mental Health is seeking applications to develop innovative programs that encourage persons to pursue mental health research, enhance research, and improve career skills in areas of need. Individual awards are as high as $150,000 a year.

Applicants should propose education experiences to motivate high school, college and graduate students, postdoctoral fellow, and other scientists to pursue careers in mental health fields. In addition, applicants should provide research and related experiences to students, fellows, and scientists to enhance their skills in neuroscience, psychology, and other mental health fields.

Deadline for applications is Jan. 1, 1999. For-profit and nonprofit organizations are eligible, including colleges and universities, hospitals, laboratories, and state and local government agencies. Applicants are advised to contact NIMH before submitting materials.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, contact Henry Khachaturian, Office of Science Policy and Program Planning, National Institute of Mental Health, (301) 443-4335; fax (301) 443-3225.

Coming Events

Partnerships for Children Topic of Conference

Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children is sponsoring a statewide conference on children's issues September 28-29 at the Harrisburg Hilton and Towers, downtown Harrisburg.

The conference, "Forging Partnerships for Pennsylvania's Children," features national and state experts and policy updates on child health, child care, welfare reform, family support, education, and other issues that affect the state's nearly 3 million children and families.

National speakers include Tamara Copeland, President, National Association of Child Advocates; James A. Levine, Director, The Fatherhood Project, Families and Work Institute; Wendall Primus, Director, Income Security, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities; and Lisbeth B. Schorr, Lecturer in Social Medicine, Harvard University, and author of "Common Purpose: Strengthening Families and Neighborhoods to Rebuild America."

Skill-building workshops are planned on topics that include working effectively with the news media and state legislators, successful budget advocacy, building effective coalitions, and developing successful fund-raising strategies. Presenters represent the Children's Defense Fund, state Department of Public Welfare, the state General Assembly, Center on Law and Social Policy, American Academy of Pediatrics, and other organizations.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, contact Teri Weldin, PPC Special Projects Coordinator, at (717) 236-5680 or 1-800-257-2030; e-mail: info@papartnerships.org, or hn3169@handsnet.org.

Vulnerability and Illness Focus of Conference

The 20th Annual Pittsburgh Family Systems Conference and Symposium, entitled *Relationships, Vulnerability, and Illness: A Systems View*, examines what Bowen theory offers toward understanding individual variation in vulnerability to physical and emotional illness.

The conference and symposium, sponsored by the Western Pennsylvania Family Center, is being held September 25 and 26 from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Western Pennsylvania District Council of Carpenters, 495 Mansfield Ave., Pittsburgh.

The first day conference features keynote speaker Cynthia Larkby, PhD, ACSW. The following day, symposium papers include titles such as, "Factors Influencing Bowen's Understanding of Working Systems," and "Emotional Process and Physical Symptoms."

FOR MORE INFORMATION, the Western Pennsylvania Family Center at (412) 362-2295.

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SPECIAL REPORT
Early Childhood Education: Benefits, Needs, And The Role Of The School District

Children stand a much better chance of succeeding in school when they enter ready to learn. From recent brain research to comparative studies of preschool children, a growing body of evidence suggests that high quality early care and education can accelerate the development of children, especially those who live in poverty.

In Washington, a blue-ribbon panel of educators and policymakers placed school readiness at the top of the list of National Education Goals. In Pennsylvania, getting children ready to learn tops the list of nine education strategies recommended by the Legislative Commission on Restructuring Pennsylvania's Urban Schools.

Evidence of the benefits of early childhood learning has turned attention to the issue of access. Clearly, not all children have ready access to quality early care and education in Pennsylvania and across the nation.

The most obvious barrier is family income. In 1991, 45% of the nation's 3-to-5 year olds from low-income families were enrolled in preschool, compared to 73% of those from high-income families. The gap in participation rates had not improved by 1996.[1]

As the Clinton Administration urges the nation to invest in the well-being of children and public and private sectors dollars are directed to early childhood initiatives, the role of school districts in caring for and educating young children begs to be defined.

This report presents an overview of the research into early care and education and examines the roles schools can play in making high quality early childhood education available to all. To supplement the research literature, current and former western Pennsylvania school district officials were interviewed:

- *Stanley Herman, Ph.D., Superintendent of the Woodland Hills School District.* Woodland Hills is participating in a community-based early childhood program recently funded by the United Way of Allegheny County Early Childhood Initiative.

- *Anthony T. Skender, Jr., Assistant Superintendent in the Sto-Rox School District.* Sto-Rox helped to draft a proposal for a district-wide, community-based early childhood program that is seeking private sector funding.

- *John Sava, Vice President of Early Care and Education Services, United Way of Allegheny County*. Sava, as superintendent of the Farrell Area School District, was an architect of the district's 14-year-old "cradle to grave" community education network, which includes an ambitious early childhood program.

Potential Early Childhood Benefits

Early childhood programs typically aim to improve educational achievement by offering a network of services that target children and, in many cases, their parents. Child care and preschool are the chief components, but programs often include other services such as child health screening and parent skills training.

Intellectual Performance

In intellectual performance, the strongest gains associated with early interventions are generally short term. Whether the intellectual improvements can be sustained may be associated with the quality of schools and other environmental circumstances surrounding the child after preschool.

Recently, a Rand Corporation study of nine early childhood programs found that early childhood programs for disadvantaged children can yield substantial benefits, at least in the short term. For example, the April 1998 Rand study reports:

- IQ scores for early childhood participants were significantly higher than those of students who were not enrolled in the programs. In three programs, the IQ differences favoring program participants approached or exceeded 10 points.

- When school achievement was measured, children who participated in early childhood programs performed much better than those who did not.

Other studies also note short-term school performance gains among children who participated in early childhood programs. At least 50 Head Start studies report evidence of immediate improvements in children's intellectual and socio-emotional performance and health that lasted for several years.[2]

Retention & Graduation

Research suggests that early childhood programs have other, longer-lasting positive effects on children:

- Fewer children who participate in early childhood programs are placed in special education classes compared to matched groups of non-participating children.[3, 4]

- Fewer children who participate in early childhood programs are retained a grade.[5]

- High school graduation rates are higher among students who had early childhood education than among those who did not have quality early learning experiences.[6]

Behavior

How early childhood programs influence a child's behavior later in life is less clear because there are few long-term studies to draw from. However, much of what has been reported is encouraging.

Findings of the extensive High/Scope Perry Preschool Study suggest that early childhood programs reduce criminal behavior and welfare dependency, and increase adult earnings and a person's commitment to marriage.[7]

- Significantly fewer arrests were reported among adult men who had participated in the early childhood program, compared to men who had not participated as children.

- At age 27 years, 29% of the early childhood participants reported monthly earnings of $2,000 or more compared to 7% of those who had not been in the program.

- 59% of the program participants received welfare assistance as adults compared to 80% of the adults who had not participated in the early childhood program.

Cost Benefits

The potential to reduce public spending is one of the broader benefits of quality early care and education. Fewer children in need of pricey special education can mean a considerable savings to

school districts. Reduced crime eases criminal justice expenses and costs to victims. Higher employment saves welfare assistance funds and contributes tax dollars.

In the Farrell Area School District, a "cradle to grave" education program is credited with having contributed to the financial recovery of the school system, which had once been classified as economically distressed. The district-wide initiative, begun in 1983, includes a comprehensive early care and education network of school-based child care, preschool, family support, health clinics, and other support services.

Between 1983 and 1997, the district's special education enrollment fell sharply, from nearly 20% of the student population to approximately 9%, according to former superintendent John Sava, now the Vice President of Early Care and Education Services, United Way of Allegheny County. "The ability to remediate problems early in the life of the child keeps kids off the special education rolls later. And when you can reduce special education rolls, you can save an enormous amount of money."

The recent Rand Corporation study provides cost/savings ratios for two early childhood programs whose participants were studied beyond early childhood.

- In the Perry Preschool Project, costs of $12,000 per child yielded an estimated savings of $25,000 per child.

- For high-risk participants in the Elmira (NY) Prenatal/Early Infancy Project, costs of $6,000 per child were offset by a savings of $24,000 per child.

Early Childhood & Schools

Early care and education is not a new issue to many school districts. A few, such as Farrell Area in Mercer County, have been involved in comprehensive initiatives for years. Others have built more limited programs on their own and in collaboration with agencies in their communities. Still others have found ways to work more cooperatively with existing programs, such as Head Start, to help children enter kindergarten better prepared.

However, access to high quality early care and education remains a widespread problem. Low-income children are the most likely to be excluded.

The United Way of Allegheny County Early Childhood Initiative estimates that fewer than 45% of the county's 18,800 low-income children are receiving child care, Head Start, or related early childhood services.

The results are that too many children are starting school a step behind, a school readiness gap is widening, and districts are being exposed to higher remediation costs and school failure rates.

School districts are increasingly being seen as important participants in ensuring that quality early care and education is available to all who choose it. The United Way, for example, places an

emphasis on school district participation when considering local proposals for Early Childhood Initiative funding.

But building new early childhood programs or broadening existing efforts can be difficult and complex undertakings for districts. Concerns include funding, regulations, and whether the will of the community can be rallied in support of major initiatives.

District Options

The role of school districts in early childhood initiatives varies as does the scope of individual programs.

Some districts, such as Farrell Area, take the lead in organizing and managing early care and education and operate many of the programs themselves. Others, such as Woodland Hills, participate in early childhood initiatives that shift management and fiduciary responsibilities to a designated community-based organization.

In either case, a significant amount of collaboration between districts and public and private agencies is a common ingredient of major early childhood initiatives.

School districts can contribute to early childhood initiatives in a number of ways:

- Providing early childhood services themselves.
- Providing classroom space.
- Providing staff and expertise.
- Contributing funds, such as a share of the district's Title I funding.
- Facilitating a network of public and private agencies and services.

Costs

The cost of early childhood programs is not insignificant and is one factor that can deter schools from becoming deeply involved early childhood education.

Startup costs are especially difficult in districts where money is the scarcest. Yet, financially-strapped districts are most likely to hold large populations of children who could benefit most from greater access to early learning.

Building costs, in particular, can chill a district's efforts to expand early childhood programs. The Woodland Hills School District, for example, considered converting a vacant school into a regional early childhood center several years ago, but the cost of renovating the building was considered too high.

"It all sounded great," said Superintendent Stanley Herman. "But we would have had to invest district dollars for capital improvements to the building. That was when we discovered the special zoning and the modifications needed to house children of that age. When I took the costs to the board, I was not encouraged to proceed."

An estimated $900,000 will be spent on converting a building into an early care and education facility in Braddock, one of five Woodland Hills communities included in a United Way-funded early childhood initiative.

Regulatory Concerns

Early childhood services can invite a new layer of regulations spun from various funding sources and regulatory agencies.

Different early childhood services often fall under the jurisdiction of different government departments. In Pennsylvania, the Department of Education regulates preschool, but child care is regulated by the Department of Welfare.

Early childhood programs impose requirements that are different in many ways from those that apply to educating older children. For example, child care centers are required to have one staff person for every four infants, and one staff person for every five toddlers under age two years – ratios considerably higher than those of even elementary schools.

Funding/Support

Funding for early childhood programs is one of the most difficult hurdles for school districts to clear. Early childhood initiatives can resemble a patchwork of funds from a variety of public and private sources. Districts often share the costs with outside agencies, who may provide staff, services, sites, and other resources instead of direct cash.

Public funds available include:

- **The Federal Child Care and Development Block Grant**. About $20 billion in federal funds are available to states for child care programs through fiscal 2002. Questions about how the money is allocated to needy families and methods of increasing the supply of quality care remain for individual states to answer.

- **Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)**. Welfare reform legislation gives states the flexibility to transfer up to 30% of their TANF allocations to the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) or use TANF funds directly for child care.

- **Title I**. School districts, poor ones in particular, are increasingly turning to these funds to support early education. But "front-loading" Title I funding shifts money from older children in need, presenting school officials with difficult decisions.

Despite these and other sources, public funding for early care and education falls short of meeting the demand. A recent Urban Institute study estimates that only about 48% of the potential child care

needs of low-income families would be met if states maximized the federal dollars available under welfare reform.[8]

However, the private sector increasingly is emerging as a critical source of support, particularly in launching major early childhood initiatives. Private sources range from hospitals and businesses to foundations and charitable organizations.

Early Childhood Initiative

In Allegheny County, the United Way is raising $59.4 million for its Early Childhood Initiative, which recently began supporting efforts to establish or expand high-quality early care and education programs in needy communities.

The Initiative was framed by a coalition representing government, foundations, corporations, health and human services, and education. The Initiative is a public/private partnership, however, most of the five-year budget is being raised from the private sector.

By targeting 7,600 unserved children in 80 communities for early care and education services, the Initiative seeks to double the number of low-income children in the county who are receiving early childhood education.

Support is provided to local initiatives, which are community-based and involve a network of providers and agencies. School district participation is emphasized.

Woodland Hills

Five communities were recently approved for Early Childhood Initiative funding in the Woodland Hills School District.

Previously, the district's involvement in early childhood education included providing Title I dollars and building space for one Head Start classroom housed in a district school; operating a Kindergarten Identification Developmental Screening program that identifies children with special educational needs prior to entering kindergarten; and contributing space in a district building for a YWCA after-school program and day care.

The district's large population of low-income children created a demand for greater access to quality early care and education. In the district's three primary schools, which house grades K-3, about 60% of the 1,823 students are eligible for the free or reduced lunch program.

Under the local Early Childhood Initiative, two early care and education sites will be opened within the district. The county Housing Authority is also providing space for early childhood services in two public housing projects.

Other aspects of the program include an effort to coordinate early care and education services with Head Start to smooth the transition into kindergarten. The initiative also includes training and certification programs for private caregivers in the community.

The school district does not assume fiduciary responsibilities in the initiative. Instead, a local nonprofit, Heritage Health Foundation, is the lead agency. The district is involved in planning and coordination through the superintendent's participation on the Initiative board. Costs to the district are limited mostly to the use of administrative staff.

Sto-Rox

The Sto-Rox School District uses a share of its Title I funding to provide full-day kindergarten to 24 of its most at-risk children. The demand for quality early care and education is much greater.

Nearly 65% of the children in the district are from low-income families. Sto-Rox has four public housing projects. About half of the district's 600 children aged birth-5 do not receive any kind of early childhood education, which has created a wide readiness gap in kindergarten classrooms and in grade school.

"We have a lot of children who have significant educational needs. And the way schools are funded, we are the least able to provide the resources those kids need to be successful," said Anthony T. Skender, Jr., Assistant Superintendent.

The district collaborated with Head Start and a network of about 20 community-based service providers to draft an proposal for a district-wide early care and education initiative, which is seeking United Way Early Childhood Initiative funds.

Included in the plan is building an early childhood facility on district property near the kindergarten. As envisioned, the center will include 16 classrooms, child care rooms, and health care facilities and will offer programs for infants and children through age 4 years. Other aspects include expanding Head Start to a full-day, full-year program.

As in Woodland Hills, the Sto-Rox School District would not be the fiduciary agent. A community nonprofit, Focus on Renewal, is designated as the lead agency.

Farrell Area

In 1983, the Farrell Area School District stitched together 64 funding sources to create a district-wide "cradle to grave" education program, which includes extensive early care and education and family support. Unlike most districts, Farrell Area chose to coordinate the initiative itself.

"The school was the facilitator," said former superintendent Sava. "We hooked up families with agencies, or we set up our own centers. The school district itself is an academic institution first. But it can act as a facilitator."

The initiative included a network of early care and education programs and called for the $200,000 renovation of a district building for use as an early childhood center.

Public sources of support included the state Departments of Welfare, Education, and Health, the Commission on Crime, and county and municipal agencies. Federal support included funds from the departments of Health and Human Services, Education and Agriculture. Private sources included

hospitals, foundations, civic organizations, local businesses and industries, and contributions from private citizens.

Some provided direct cash. Others, such as the county agencies for Mental Health/Mental Retardation, Drug and Alcohol, as well as Children and Youth Services provided on-site staff. The school district contributed staff and funds and arranged capital improvement loans to cover the maintenance of facilities.

A 150-member community steering committee guided the initiative, identified early childhood needs, and sought funding and support.

The committee, Sava said, represented the will of the community to see the program through, despite the lack of a significant single funding source, such as the United Way initiative. "First, you have to develop the philosophy that, yes, early childhood education is important to the district. Then, you have to determine that costs and regulations are not going to intimidate you. Those are adult-centered concerns that you have to work through if you are committed to doing what is best for children."

References

This report was written by Jeffery Fraser based on the footnoted references and the additional sources listed below.

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