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# Developments

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***Learning From Birth Through 8 In Pennsylvania***

# While Benefits Of Early Learning Are Clear, Comprehensive Approach Remains Elusive

Pennsylvania lacks a comprehensive, fully effective approach to early learning despite some strong local programs and bipartisan political support for efforts to better prepare children to enter school and succeed when they get there, according to a report released by Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children.

Recent research on brain development identifies early childhood as a critical period for learning and reveals that development is deeply influenced by experience, environment, and relationships. Other studies offer convincing evidence that starting school ready to learn gives children tremendous advantages, while entering school behind places them at risk of staying behind, doing poorly, eventually dropping out, and experiencing other poor outcomes.

"A firm foundation of learning and literacy, from birth through third grade, sets the stage for all the learning that follows," said Joan Benso, President of Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children. "This state has invested a lot of money and effort in raising school achievement, but have we really looked at the whole picture? Have we examined what goes on outside the classroom, and before children enter kindergarten, and how it all intersects?"

Released in June, *From Building Blocks to Books: Learning for Children from Birth through 8 in Pennsylvania* adds to the growing public dialogue on issues of

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**IN THIS ISSUE**



# The Flip Side Of The IRS: Helping Families Claim $$

Lucas Pavlovich works for SPEC, a little-recognized abbreviation for a little-known section of the Internal Revenue Service whose job belies the tax agency's image as a soulless collector of other people's money. Pavlovich and colleagues help taxpayers keep more of their hard-earned dollars, particularly low-income families who need it the most.

Enough credits are sprinkled throughout the tax laws to save millions of qualified taxpayers thousands of dollars every April 15. But they must claim a credit to reap the benefits. And that's the rub – millions don't, many for the simple reason they have no idea money is owed them.

"When I do outreach and tell people they are entitled to this money, even when they don't have any tax liability, they say, 'Are you telling me the IRS is going to send me a check?' The answer is, yes. But I don't think a lot of people believe it," said Pavlovich, a Senior Tax Specialist with the IRS in Pittsburgh.

Within the IRS, Stakeholder Partnership, Education and Communication (SPEC) is responsible for getting the word out about the various credits and helping eligible taxpayers take advantage of them. About 350 sites staffed mostly with volunteers are scattered throughout western Pennsylvania to help low-income taxpayers and the elderly with tax issues.

This month, Pavlovich is scheduled to make a pitch to

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early development and learning. Advocates hope to give these issues a higher profile during this year's gubernatorial election and beyond. In April, Governor Mark Schweiker ordered a task force to review a range of early childhood issues and offer recommendations for early care and education policy. Their report will be offered to the next governor for his consideration.

*From Building Blocks to Books*, funded by the Howard Heinz Endowment, outlines the community-wide benefits of helping young children build a strong educational foundation and provides a status report on key programs and systems in Pennsylvania, including child care, Early Intervention, preschool, reading readiness, kindergarten, first through third grades, and after-school programs. Brief summaries of the issues covered in the report follow.

**Child Care**

In Pennsylvania, children are cared for in diverse settings – from grandmothers caring for a child one day a week to child care centers operating under state oversight. The availability of subsidized care in Pennsylvania compares favorably to other states. But quality is not assured.

About 859,000 Pennsylvania children ages birth to 8 years were in some form of child care in 2000. About 300,000 of them were in regulated child care every day as of January 2001.

The state Department of Public Welfare recognizes three types of child care facilities: child care centers, family day care homes, and group day care homes. Centers enroll about 266,000 children – significantly more than the other types of facilities – and undergo yearly inspections.

Low pay and high turnover are problems. Annual turnover rates range from 31% for teachers, who earned an average of $16,566 in 1999, to 51% for aides, whose wages averaged $11,427, according to a 1999 report by the state Legislative Budget and Finance Committee.

Several initiatives show promise. These include:

• Tiered reimbursement. In 26 states, child care subsidy levels are based on achieving quality benchmarks. A provider's subsidy can climb by achieving higher levels of NAEYC or other standards, providing incentives to improve and giving parents a way to judge the quality of a program. In New Jersey, such incentives led to a 33% increase in accredited facilities.

• Professional development. In Pennsylvania and 17 other states, TEACH offers scholarships for child care teachers to pursue higher education. WAGE$, not used in Pennsylvania, links stipends and health insurance to advance training and job longevity for child care teachers. In North Carolina, it improved wages by up to 30% and turnover rates fell from 42% to 31%.

• Policy considerations offered in the report focus reflect concern that the state is moving too slowly toward changes that ensure quality care. Recommendation include taking these steps:

• Fully implement Keystone Stars, a performance-based, tiered rating system that rewards providers for achieving quality standards. Only about 300-400 center providers out of almost 4,000 statewide are covered.

• Expand TEACH, which offers child care scholarships, and include teacher retention in performance standards as ways to improve education and keep good teachers on the job.

**Early Intervention**

The report gives early intervention in Pennsylvania high marks. Most young children with marked developmental delays or disabilities can receive services that maximize their learning abilities.

Funding has increased since 1990, when an early intervention statute was enacted. Department of Public Welfare funding for early intervention rose from $18.8 million in 1989-90 to $54.5 million in 2000-2001. Department of Education funding increased from $14.8 million in 1989-90 to nearly $95 million in 2000-2001.

The report states that such investments help to ease the need for special education, residential schooling, and other services, and cites evidence that every dollar spent on early intervention saves from $4 to $7 in special education or institutionalization costs later.

Federal reviews of the state's efforts have mostly been favorable, including its efforts to provide early intervention services in natural environments, such as the home. However, the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) did find the state out of compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Act in some areas. For example, the agency reported the state could do more to identify and refer eligible children.

Policy recommendations offered in the report include the state continuing to fund services for all eligible children,

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*Dr. Robert B. Mincy*

# The New Frontier: Reuniting Fathers With Broken Families

He grew up in a South Bronx public housing project in New York City with a single mother and two brothers. Ever since, Robert B. Mincy, Ph.D., has been drawn to issues of fatherhood, particularly why so many fathers are absent from their families.

"I just couldn't get past that question. I saw how hard it was for my mom to raise three boys in a dangerous neighborhood," said Dr. Mincy, the Maurice V. Russell Professor of Social Policy and Social Work Practice at Columbia University.

No single, simple answer satisfies the question, he discovered. Many factors are involved – from a father's own behavior to policies, initiatives, and agencies that hardly acknowledge the role of the noncustodial father.

At the Family Support Conference in Pittsburgh four months ago, Dr. Mincy shared his insights into families and fathers in a keynote address that was at times provocative.

What is clear from several decades of research, he said, is that children benefit the most in homes where both parents reside. "It is important to our children's future that we figure out how to support families so that both of their parents can be involved."

**Changing Family Dynamics**

Recent changes in the American family have been dramatic. Dr. Mincy noted, in particular, that nearly one-third of the babies born in the U.S. during 1996 were born to unmarried women – nearly three times the rate seen only two decades earlier. "It is no longer just an African American problem or a Latino problem," he said. "We have single moms everywhere."

Unwed parents often have high hopes of marriage in the first days after birth of the child, Dr. Mincy said. His surveys of young couple found that about 54% of young mothers rated the chances of marrying the father as good-to-excellent. But one year later, few of these couples had actually married. "When you are serving a single new mom, my data is saying that most of them want the fathers of their children involved."

The relationships between unwed fathers and their children are also encouraging at first. Dr. Mincy said that from birth to age 1, most children see fathers at least once a week. But contact declines dramatically. "Father-child contact declines as children get older – at the very time families need both parents to raise the kids."

His research and that of others, Dr. Mincy said, suggests these children face grave risks: two-thirds of children who are poor are born to unwed parents; and children raised in mother-only families have three times the probability of being incarcerated as an adolescent than children who are raised by two parents.

Several factors tend to separate men from their families. In Dr. Mincy's neighborhood, one of the reasons is obvious. He lives in Harlem, where bus companies advertise discounted fares to the prison on Rikers Island. "For all age groups of young men in the 1990s, we saw incarceration rates rise," he said. "But they were rising fastest for all age groups of African Americans."

**Policies Showing Their Age**

Federal and state social policies, including welfare programs, do little to keep low-income families intact, Dr. Mincy said, largely because policy has long been based on an outdated perception of how families are formed.

"You date, marry, a child is born, then something happens – the death of parent, divorce, or separation. The traditional family model is based on this and it is the assumption on which income security policy is formed. One important aspect of that is that if the father left the family, it was because of divorce, and it is assumed he has income, that he took it with him, and that he can support the family. So, public policy is after him to return some of that money to the family.

"That is the framework out of which we've created most of our public policies around children and families," he said.

"We've assumed the father is an appendage to this whole process. AFDC, child care, food stamps, Medicaid – all of that goes to the mother and the child. This is our income security policy that we've had for the past 65 years."

Dr. Mincy suggested that even family support and other initiatives for children and families tend to focus on the needs of the child and the mother. "You see a single mom and child and say, let's help her regroup."

"We've created an income security system in the 1930s and revised it in the 1960s and we had these divorced, middle-income working parents in mind. The guy cut out and took his money with him. We said, we need to make sure that the mom could go to work and the dad will pay child support. That makes sense.

"But fast forward to the 1990s, when so many of these children are born to parents who are unwedded and both the mother and the father are poor. Putting the mom to work and expecting to get child support from the dad doesn't make sense."

*(**Mincy** continued on Page 12)*

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the directors of more than 30 family support centers in Allegheny County for a partnership to reach more low-income families with tax help and advice.

Welfare-to-work policies place a premium on making sure qualified low-income families receive the tax credits they are entitled to. Studies suggest welfare reforms, while significantly increasing employment among the poor, have done little so far to improve overall family income.

**Several Credits Available**

The **Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)** offers benefits to the greatest number of low-income families. Depending on the number of children, a family can earn as much as $34,201 and still quality for the credit.

And the benefits can be significant. For example, a family with two children and an annual income of $12,000 could receive more than $4,000 in earned income credit, even if they didn't owe the IRS a dime. If taxes aren't owed, families receive their earned income credit in the form of a check or, if they prefer, the amount can be deposited directly into their bank account.

For those who qualify, an **Advance Earned Income Tax Credit** can be applied throughout the year and fewer dollars would be withheld from their paychecks. Again, the taxpayer must claim the credit in order to receive the benefits.

Other tax credits that benefit low-income taxpayers include:

- **Child and Dependent Care Expenses**: a taxpayer may be able to claim a credit for expenses paid for care of a child under the age of 13 years or for dependent care expenses. The credit can be up to 30% of the actual expenses.
- **Child Tax Credit**: Perhaps the most widely used family-related credit provides fixed deductions for each child. The maximum tax credit per child increased to $600 in 2001. Amounts depend on income. For example, a couple filing jointly is able to deduct up the maximum credit per child as long as their adjusted gross income is under $110,000.
- **Saver's Tax Credit**: This new credit for 2002 was enacted to encourage workers to contribute to a retirement plan or an Individual Retirement Account (IRA). Workers can receive a tax credit worth up to 50% of a maximum $2,000 contribution – in addition to be able to defer the taxes on the contribution itself.

**Use It Or Lose It**

The majority of low-income taxpayers eligible for credits receive them. As many as 19 million people receive an EITC, reaping a total $31 billion in benefits. But at the same time, millions of others are losing out. The IRS estimates 14%-25% of the nearly 27 million EITC-eligible taxpayers fail to claim the credit. In other words, as many as 6.75 million Americans most in need of extra income are passing up hundreds if not thousands of dollars owed them.

They fail to collect this money for several reasons. Some aren't aware of the various credits or that they qualify. Some may rely on people to prepare their returns who may not realize the full credits due them. And some simply don't know how to file for the credit.

"It can be a complicated situation, especially for an ordinary person who does not do a lot of tax work," Pavlovich said.

For example, many elderly Americans may not be aware they may be entitled to an Earned Income Tax Credit if a grandchild is living with them, no matter how small their earned income is. Under such circumstances, $3,000 in earned income may yield a $1,000 credit – if a return is filed and the credit claimed.

**Volunteer-Driven Tax Help**

It is SPEC's job to figure out ways to spread the word about the various tax credits, educate taxpayers, and even help them prepare their returns. Special attention is paid toward helping low income taxpayers and the elderly. But even when narrowed to those groups, the target population tops 150,000, far too onerous a workload for the handful of IRS specialists assigned to do the job in western Pennsylvania. Not surprisingly, SPEC relies heavily on volunteers.

In western Pennsylvania, 1,500 volunteers are the core of the two primary IRS community service programs, Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) and Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA), which shoulders most of the responsibility for helping low-income taxpayers. These volunteers work out of 350 VITA and TCE sites in western Pennsylvania, 100 of which are located in Allegheny County.

Recent welfare-to-work rules has contributed to an increase in demand for tax services. The IRS, in fact, is working with several agencies that address the needs of families leaving welfare. But the heightened demand for their services is straining resources. "We find that we just don't have enough volunteers," Pavlovich said.

The IRS, he said, is looking to establish additional VITA and TCE sites with the help of community organizations. "We know there are people out there who need this service. What we are saying is that if you help us get the

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# WHERE CHILDREN GROW UP: UNDERSTANDING HOW NEIGHBORHOODS EFFECT CHILD OUTCOMES

Special Report

**University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development**
**Serving Children and Families By Promoting**
**Interdisciplinary Education and Research • University-Community Programs • Dissemination**

In the pursuit of a fuller understanding of what influences children's development and outcomes that shape their futures, the characteristics of the neighborhoods in which they live are receiving more attention than ever before.

The study of neighborhoods and their effects on children has reached new heights for several reasons: acceptance of a more contextual framework in developmental psychology; recent brain research that suggests that children's development is strongly influenced by experience and environment; a rising interest in risk factors experienced by children, such a poverty, and protective factors, such as affluence; and growing evidence that the accumulation of such factors affects the outcomes of children.

Research offers an intriguing glimpse into the role neighborhoods play in the lives of children, but it is far from complete. In some cases, findings are more the result of theoretical work than empirical evidence, and the pathways by which neighborhoods influence children and adolescents remain ripe for closer study.

**Do Neighborhoods Matter?**

When neighborhoods are studied to determine their effects on child and adolescent outcomes, the outcome yardsticks used most often are school readiness and achievement, behavioral and emotional problems, and sexuality and childbearing.

In general, the effects of a neighborhood are most often associated with the socioeconomic status (SES) of its residents. But the quality of a neighborhood has an effect over and above the SES of individual families, although neighborhood effects tend to be small, often accounting for no more than 5-10% of the variance in child and adolescent outcomes.

**School Readiness**

Living among high-SES neighbors is consistently found to be associated with children being better prepared to enter school and with positive school achievement.

High SES is a factor that considers such neighborhood characteristics as percentage of professional workers and managers, percentage of residents earning more than $30,000 a year, and the percentage of college-educated residents.

When the SES of neighbors is high, young and early school-age children tend to have higher IQs, verbal ability, and reading recognition scores. In the Infant Health and Development Program (IHDP), no neighborhood effects were seen until children in the multi-site program for low-birth weight, premature infants turned three years old. Then, researchers noted, living in a high-SES neighborhood tended to have a positive effect on children's IQ scores.[1]

Among adolescents, those living in high-SES neighborhoods are more likely to complete high school, attend college, and finish more years of schooling than those living in middle-income neighborhoods.[2] In Chicago's Gautreaux Project, children of the low-income families who were moved from public housing to the more affluent suburbs were more likely to stay in school, enroll in college preparatory classes, and to go on to college than their peers who remained in the city.[3]

Studies also suggest that an exodus of neighbors employed in professional fields can spell trouble for neighborhood children. One study reported that higher school drop-out rates were seen when the number of professional or managerial workers fell below 5% of a neighborhood's population.[4]

**Behavioral and Emotional Problems**

Behavior problems among children have been associated with several neighborhood characteristics, such as the SES of neighbors and the stability of the neighborhood. However, the findings are less consistent than those reported for cognitive and school outcomes.

Evidence suggests that living among neighbors of low SES is associated with poorer mental health of children and adolescents, more so for externalizing behaviors, such as acting out and aggression, than for than internalizing behaviors, such as depression and withdrawal. Among three-year-olds, living in neighborhoods with few professionals and managers is associated with more internalizing and externalizing behavior problems.[5]

Among adolescents, regional studies, such as the Pittsburgh Youth Study, suggest that higher levels of criminal and

delinquent behavior are associated with growing up in neighborhoods where SES is low and welfare and unemployment rates are high. In Baltimore, African American teenagers who moved out of high-poverty districts were found less likely to be arrested for violent crimes, such as assault and rape, than peers who continued to live in poor neighborhoods.[6]

**Sexuality and Childbearing**

Research suggests that various indicators of neighborhood SES may be associated with sexual activity among adolescents. For example, the likelihood of babies born to adolescents and unmarried women is higher in neighborhoods where few professional and managerial workers live.[7]

On the other hand, ample neighborhood resources is associated with lower risk of childbearing among unmarried women. Job opportunities, a neighborhood resource, has been linked to several sexuality outcomes among adolescent females. The timing of first intercourse and the risk of premarital sexual activity are associated with whether adolescent females are employed,[8] a finding researchers believe is largely due to the fact that those who work receive more adult monitoring and supervision .

**How Neighborhoods Influence Development**

Theoretical work more than empirical research shapes much of what social scientists know about how neighborhoods influence the development and outcomes of children and adolescents.

The prevailing belief is that neighborhood influences are often indirect. Resources such as income, for example, may indirectly affect young children by influencing the behavior of parents.

Research suggests that the potential mechanisms through which neighborhoods influence children and youth include:

- Institutional resources, such as schools, child care, medical facilities, and job opportunities.
- Relationships, particularly those between parents and children.
- Norms/collective efficacy, including the extent of social connections that exist in a neighborhood and whether those who live in the neighborhood effectively monitor behavior according to shared values.

**Institutional Resources**

An important neighborhood characteristic is the availability of child care, health care, and learning and recreation opportunities; the quality of those resources; and whether residents can afford to take advantage of them.

Generally, community learning activities, such as libraries, family resource centers, and literacy programs, are seen influencing children's development, especially school readiness and achievement. But among three year olds, one study found that learning experiences at home influenced school readiness more than learning experiences children received outside the home.[9]

Parents seem to perceive these resources as important. When they cannot find them in their communities, many seek them elsewhere. In one study, such resource-seeking was found to be more common among disadvantaged African-American families than the practice of restricting children to the lean resources available in their neighborhoods.[10]

**Child Care**

Child care is a neighborhood resource of growing importance given recent trends that include more demanding work schedules, greater numbers of mothers in the workplace, and the employment demands of welfare-to-work reform.

Whether child care is affordable and accessible and whether it is of high quality are factors that have been shown to influence children's learning experiences, behavioral functioning, and physical health. For example:

- Young children whose caregivers provide ample verbal and cognitive stimulation, who are sensitive and responsive, and who give them generous amounts of attention and support are more advanced in all realms of development compared with children who fail to receive these inputs.[11]
- Children in high-quality child care classrooms have better receptive language skills and better math skills. They also have better math skills when they enter kindergarten, although the effects tend to be less significant by second grade.[12]

**Schools**

Schools are potential mechanisms of neighborhood influences that affect children and adolescents. Quality of education, climate, and other characteristics of schools that contribute to the developmental outcomes of children are shaped by neighborhood resources.

Just how strong an influence schools are remains unclear. Most available studies do not examine school and neighborhood characteristics in ways that reveal how school characteristics interact with neighborhood factors.

Research does suggest, however, that neighborhood characteristics have implications for schools and students. Among fifth and sixth grade students, for example, school factors, such as the availability and acceptance of alcohol and cigarettes, school safety, and attachment to school, were found to be associated with neighborhood characteristics, including median income, safety, and lifetime use of alcohol and cigarettes.[13]

**Medical Services**

Although access to medical services is clearly a community resource important to the health of children, the extent of its role in the development of children is unclear. Most studies that examine the link between health outcomes, such as low birth weight, and neighborhood characteristics fail to measure the extent of the medical services available to residents. Nevertheless, one study found that children living in poor neighborhoods are likely to have more emergency room visits and fewer doctor visits than children in affluent neighborhoods.[14]

**Employment**

Employment is an important neighborhood resource, although its impact, as reported in studies, is mixed.

Large survey samples tend to emphasize the negative consequences of adolescent employment, such as increases in problem behavior and drug and alcohol use. However, among low-income youth, several benefits are seen, including economic gains and greater adult monitoring. Such gains are associated with increased school engagement and lower levels of criminal and delinquent behavior.

Job opportunities in neighborhoods may also shape children's aspirations and perceptions of employment. Life in poor neighborhoods may not reflect the traditional view of the American work ethic and how children reconcile such contradictions might influence outcomes, such as schooling, teenage sexuality, and juvenile crime.[15, 16]

**Parent-Child Relationships**

Children's relationships with their parents are important to their development, and certain characteristics of parents can influence how neighborhood factors affect their children.

A parent's mental health, level of irritability, physical health, and coping skills may play a role in determining the impact of neighborhood characteristics on children when those factors influence the way the parent behaves. For example, a study among African American families living in poor neighborhoods found that levels of parental efficacy mediated the use of family management strategies, such as monitoring and supervision, within the home and community. Such findings suggest that neighborhood disadvantage could influence mental and physical health of parents, which could affect parenting and, in some respect, the outcomes of their children.[17]

Also, the amount of social support available to parents may influence the degree of stress parents who live in dangerous and impoverished neighborhoods experience. The level of stress among parents can influence the way they parent.

Several empirical studies have linked neighborhood characteristics to harsh and controlling parenting behaviors. For example:

- Parents who report living in more dangerous neighborhoods also report using more harsh control and verbal aggression with their children than parents who live in less dangerous neighborhoods.[18]
- Parents who moved to middle income neighborhoods reported using less harsh disciplinary practices than parents who stayed in poor neighborhoods.[19] Those who stayed in poor neighborhoods often set more restrictive neighborhood boundaries for their children, including restrictions on the peers with whom they are allowed to associate.

**In the Home**

Living in a poor neighborhood is associated with lower-quality home environments as determined by cleanliness, safety, available space, and other factors. Such households are likely to have their largest influence on children's physical health. For example, higher rates of child injury, likely due to unsafe play areas within the home, is associated with living in poor neighborhoods.[20]

Exposure to violence in the home and in the neighborhood is another concern. In disadvantaged neighborhoods, children are at greater risk of being exposed to high levels of violence, which can affect their physical and mental health.[21]

**Norms/Collective Efficacy**

Social connections arising from trust and shared values are vital to neighborhoods. Collective efficacy describes the breadth of a neighborhood's social connections and the extent to which residents are willing and able to monitor the behavior of others, particularly children and adolescents.

Studies that examine collective efficacy measure it in a number of ways. Some of the more telling factors include how likely neighbors are to intervene in situations such as children skipping school, a fight in front of their house, and a threat to close the local fire station because of budget cuts. Social cohesion is evaluated by how strongly residents feel neighbors are willing to help neighbors, whether they believe residents share similar values, and other factors.

Collective efficacy has been associated with lower rates of community violence and lower delinquency rates among adolescents.[22] And experts believe collective efficacy is critical for supervising and controlling adolescent peer groups, including youth gangs.

The influence of peers is believed to become stronger when a community lacks the will or ability to regulate the behavior of peer groups. Exposure to troublesome peers begins early. Studies suggest preschool children get more exposure to aggressive peers in their neighborhoods than in

child-care and family events. Children in low SES families and in single-parents families are more likely to be exposed to aggressive peers.[23]

Finally, serious risks found in certain neighborhoods – violence, crime, and easy access to drugs and alcohol, in particular – may also influence the development of children and adolescents. These risks are more likely to be widespread in neighborhoods where collective efficacy is weak and norms are lacking. Perhaps it is not surprising that the chief reason parents want to leave public housing neighborhoods is concern for the safety of their children.[24]

Available research, despite some shortcomings, strongly suggests that neighborhood characteristics play a key role in the development of children, particularly neighborhood SES, the availability of learning and other resources, and the collective efficacy of residents. More research is needed to better understand how various characteristics exert their influence. It is clear, however, that when working to improve children's chances for a bright future, the neighborhoods they grow up in must be considered

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**University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development, a program of the University Center for Social and Urban Research, 121 University Place, Second Floor, Pittsburgh, PA 15260 (412)624-7426. Internet: www.pitt.edu/~ocdweb/.**

(*Learning* continued from Page 2)

applying best practices to identify and serve children and their families, and assuring a smooth transition to school with services and supports appropriate to children's needs.

**Preschool**

Pennsylvania is one of only nine states that fails to invest in preschool.

Studies suggest attending quality preschool programs offers children significant advantages. They tend to enter kindergarten with better reading, language, and social skills; they are more likely to graduate from high school; and they are less likely to become delinquents as teenagers.

In Pennsylvania, their options are limited to Head Start, private preschools, and kindergarten for four-year-olds offered by some school districts. Child care often is not an adequate substitute. Child care regulations address only health and safety needs. And the quality of unregulated and unlicensed care is questionable.

In 2002, more than $189 million in federal Head Start funds were allocated to Pennsylvania. The state does not supplement those funds or devote funds to other preschool options for low-income children as other states do. In New Jersey, the state court ordered that preschool services be provided in the 28 school districts with the highest poverty rates.

The report concludes that Pennsylvania needs a richer array of preschool options, particularly for low-income children who are at risk of educational failure.

One encouraging development is a recent study that reported positive outcomes among children in the Early Childhood Initiative-Demonstration Project (ECI-DP) in Allegheny County. For example, 14% of the children studied had delays serious enough to qualify them for early intervention special education in Pennsylvania. Rather than receiving those services, they were enrolled in ECI-DP, where most thrived. ECI-DP, under the management of the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development, provides quality early education services to some 300 children in five communities.

*From Building Blocks to Books* offers several policy recommendations for improving preschool throughout the state. These include:

- Provide access to quality preschool education for children, involving parents in helping their children learn and connecting families with health care and other services.
- Recognize the critical role of parents in the lives of young children – as their first teachers as well as job holders whose work schedules often require full-day services.
- Staff preschools with qualified, well-trained, appropriately-compensated professionals.

**Reading Readiness and Success**

The importance of literacy is becoming increasingly clear to policymakers, and state and federal investments in reading readiness and reading success have recently increased.

While this is good news, *From Building Blocks to Books* reports that investments in Pennsylvania are scattered among state agencies and the state lacks an effective coordinating mechanism to reduce overlap and address gaps in services.

State and federal funds support four early literacy programs in Pennsylvania: Family Literacy, Parent Child Home Program, Read to Succeed, and the Reading Excellence Program. Early literacy is also found in family support centers, Early Head Start, and other programs.

The Pennsylvania Family Literacy Consortium develops quality indicators and performance standards to support the Family Literacy work of local agencies. The Consortium includes the Departments of Education and Public Welfare, University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania State University, Temple University, Pennsylvania Head Start Association, and the state library system.

The report gives funding a mixed review. Literacy funds are not accumulating by the year. As new programs emerge, some old ones disappear. For example, in 2002-03, school districts will see the last of their Read to Succeed funds, unless the state renews funding. Federal Even Start dollars may be cut by 20% in 2003. Meanwhile, other funding streams are appearing. Reading First rose from the eliminated Reading Excellence Act with more money to allocate to states. Pennsylvania's share could be $28 million in 2002-03 and $31.2 million in 2003-04, compared to the $10 million the state received annually through Reading Excellence.

Among the policy recommendations offered in *From Building Blocks to Books* are these:

- The state should create a collaborative process that directs agencies toward the goal of improving children's' reading before they leave third grade.
- The state needs to evaluate its literacy programs and increase funding to those that are successful.
- Review and renew Read to Succeed.

**Kindergarten**

Kindergarten offers important benefits to children, particularly at-risk children. And studies suggest the advantages are greater when children attend full-day kindergarten. In Pennsylvania, however, kindergarten is not compulsory, school districts do not receive additional funding to pay for kindergarten, and full-day kindergarten is still the exception

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(**Learning** continued from Page 9)

rather than the rule.

Studies cited in *From Building Blocks to Books* illustrate the benefits that children tend to gain when they attend full-day kindergarten. For example, in Ohio, full-day kindergarten students scored higher on first-grade reading readiness tests and on achievement tests in third, fifth, and seventh grades. Full-day kindergarten is also associated with improved chances of children being successful later in school, better behavior, and other encouraging outcomes.

All 500 Pennsylvania school districts offer kindergarten. While the number that offer full-day kindergarten is growing, it is still not an option in most districts: 187 districts offer a full-day program, and only 29% of the state's 121,000 public school kindergarten students attend a full-day program.

*From Building Blocks to Books* offers several policy recommendations to improve kindergarten throughout the state. The recommendations include:

- The state should create an incentive subsidy to help pay for full-day kindergarten in school districts and charter schools that have high numbers of low-income students.
- Include kindergarten in any initiative that seeks to reduce class sizes in schools.
- Encourage kindergarten programs to hire teachers with early childhood certification or with training and experience in teaching young children.
- Lawmakers should reform the public education funding system, shifting school financing away from property taxes and reducing the gap between high and low-spending districts.

**First through Third Grades**

Children who are doing well in school by the third grade – particularly if they are good readers – are more likely to enjoy success in school and graduate from high school. Those who are behind are more likely to do poorly and require costly and often ineffective efforts to help them catch up.

Education spending matters. In Pennsylvania, education spending during 1999-2000 ranged from a high of $13,096 per student to a low of $3,932 per student. *Education Week* gives the state a D-minus grade for education equity in a 2002 report. Only three states scored worse.

As with its kindergarten recommendations, *From Building Blocks to Books* urges lawmakers to reform education spending to narrow the gap between rich and poor districts. Other policy recommendations include:

- Reduce class sizes, particularly in districts with high rates of low-income students and student who performed poorly on fifth grade state tests.
- The state should enforce its teacher quality policies with a stronger focus on literacy in the primary grades.

**Educational Enrichment**

More and more parents are working hours that keep them away from home after school is out. For some children, particularly those at risk of failing, how they spend after-school hours can influence not only their education but their prospects for the future.

The report notes that Pennsylvania's approach to after-school issues has been fragmented. But recent developments provide opportunities to improve educational enrichment during non-school hours.

In 2001-2002, for example, the state Department of Education issued 1,500 Classroom Plus grants, providing federal dollars to families to help pay for tutoring and other services for children who are struggling academically. Also, the recent No Child Left Behind Act gives Pennsylvania and other states more control over how to spend funding for 21st Century Community Learning Centers – after-school and summer programs that offer educational enrichment in schools where students face several risk factors, including poverty.

*From Building Blocks to Books* offers several policy recommendations to improve non-school hour enrichment opportunities in the state, including the following:

(**Learning** continued on page 11)

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To submit material, write the Office of Child Development. Notices of programs or services will be published at the editor's discretion. All programs must be educational and nonprofit, and any fees charged must be noted. Publication of services does not imply an endorsement of any kind by OCD, its funding agencies, or the University.

(**Learning** continued from Page 10)

• Coordinate existing after-school and youth development programs to take advantage of the state's expanded control of 21st Century Community Learning Centers. The effectiveness of after-school programs meeting the needs of elementary school students should be evaluated.

• The state should consider building the capacity of non-school hour initiatives with some of the anticipated increase in federal funds.

• The state should continue to enhance the educational content of child care.

The likelihood of sweeping improvements among programs critical to early learning Pennsylvania is unclear. Gov. Schweiker's recent task force on early education and care, and the fact that both gubernatorial candidates have acknowledged the importance of early education "are very good signs," said Diane McCormick, spokesperson for Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children. "When it comes to preschool, I think its time has come. But the point of *From Building Blocks to Books* is that along with preschool, we need to tie together literacy, early intervention, kindergarten – all of the other programs out there – so no child falls through the cracks."

*From Building Blocks to Books: Learning for Children from Birth through 8 in Pennsylvania* is available on the Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children web site: www.papartnerships.org. ■

(**IRS** continued from Page 4)

volunteers and give us a room, we will give you the instruction, support, schedule class, and provide all of the necessary materials – at no cost. We want to go farther than just giving out information."

Volunteers are encouraged to file returns electronically. The IRS typically does not supply the computers. Instead, it provides e-file training to volunteers who use their work computers at new VITA sites to complete returns, and provides the IRS software.

Family support centers in Allegheny County are considered as potential VITA sites and Pavlovich is scheduled to meet to discuss prospects with center directors in September. "This is a concentrated area for people who are eligible for Earned Income Credit," he said. "Not only do we want to get the message out about the credits, but maybe we can get some volunteers and set up some sites."

*FOR MORE INFORMATION, contact the Internal Review Service in Pittsburgh at (412) 395-6604.*

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# *Announcements . . .*

## Free OCD Parenting Columns Well Suited For Newsletters

Dispensing parenting advice, long the domain of grandmothers and other family relations, is drawing more attention from policymakers and others looking for ways to strengthen families and communities – and for good reason. Studies show effective parenting improves a child's chances of healthy development.

Sound parenting advice on more than 50 topics is now available free of charge in a series columns written by Robert B. McCall, Ph.D., Co-Director of the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development and former columnist for *Parents* magazine.

The columns, well-suited for newsletters and community newspapers, provide clear, concise and accurate information on topics such as dealing with a child's lying, how to toilet train, what to do about nightmares, discipline and finicky eaters, and how to recognize and address grief in children.

OCD offers the columns free of charge as Microsoft Word documents, which can be viewed and downloaded from the Internet at: www.pitt.edu/~ocdweb/columns.htm

The public service initiative is made possible by the Frank and Theresa Caplan Fund for Early Childhood Development and Parenting Education, whose contributions support production of the columns and other Office of Child Development projects.

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## MIS Training Introduces Use Of Microsoft Access

MIS training for family support staff continues in October with an introduction to Microsoft Access. The program is targeted to data entry staff, site directors, or designated staff from Family Support Centers.

The training is scheduled for Oct. 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 from 9:30 AM to 12:30 PM each day. It is held at the University of Pittsburgh, Cathedral of Learning, Room G27. Space is limited.

*FOR MORE INFORMATION,* contact Nancy Kuritzky, (412) 661-9280 ext. 17.

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(*Mincy continued from page 3)*

**Rethinking Families**

Dr. Mincy suggested social welfare policies and programs are in need of reevaluation when it comes to how families are formed today and the role of the father. "There is a complicated system of family formation going on and we don't have to wait until young parents separate to intervene."

"The parents have high aspirations for family formation at the birth of the child," he said. "But one year later, the father is more likely to be gone. So when you have a newborn and a new mom before you, you have to understand that there is a dad and he is probably involved. And the question is what can we do to ensure that he stays involved.

"To me, this work about fatherhood is nothing other than the work of redemption – to welcome back into the family men who, for a whole variety of reasons including their own foolishness, we have treated as outcasts in our society," Dr. Mincy said. "My plea is to use that [family support] infrastructure to redeem these men and redeem their families.

"Those of us who work with children and families are in the most innovative, important field that there is in this country. Families are changing and they are changing in all sort of ways that we don't understand and that we haven't incorporated in our public policy and our family support system. The frontier today is how can we avail to children the benefit of both of their parents." ■

# *Announcements . . .*

**2003 Summer Institute**
**Family Research Consortium III**

**"Intervention as Science"**

The Family Research Consortium III, supported by the National Institute of Mental Health, will sponsor a 2003 Summer Institute for family researchers. The Institute will provide a forum for dissemination, evaluation and discussion of important new developments in theory and research design, methods and analysis in the field of family research. The Institute accepts a limited number of both junior and senior researchers as participants and allows for intellectual exchange among participants and presenters in addition to the more structured program of high quality presentations. Minority family researchers are particularly encouraged to participate. The theme of the 2003 Summer Institute is "Intervention as Science." The Institute will be held at the Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort and Spa in Santa Ana Pueblo, New Mexico, from June 26 - 29, 2003. Registration fees and hotel costs have not yet been determined. The Co-Chairs of the 2003 Institute are Marion Forgatch, Oregon Social Learning Center; Andrew Fuligni, University of California, Los Angeles; and Spero Manson, University of Colorado. Deadline for applying is Friday, March 28, 2003. For applications and/or more information contact:

Dee Frisque, Center for Human Development and Family Research in Diverse Contexts, The Pennsylvania State University, 106 Henderson Building, University Park, PA 16802-6504, Ph: (814) 863-7108, Fax: (814) 863-7109, Email: dmr10@psu.edu,
Web: www.hhdev.psu.edu/chdfrdc ■

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