



State Early Childhood Policy
Technical Assistance Network

Beyond the Usual Suspects: Developing New Allies to Invest in School Readiness

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Introduction

There is much concern and interest, among a broad range of constituencies, in early childhood. Yet in most states, early childhood remains “an agenda waiting to happen.”

Furthermore, while the general public has been polled extensively on its views of early childhood, and particularly child care and early education, other constituencies have not. Consequently, advocates have little information on which to base their efforts to enlist many constituencies in supporting an early childhood agenda.

This monograph provides information on how advocates might work to build a broader set of allies to promote an early childhood agenda to improve school readiness.

The first chapter describes the importance of moving beyond the usual suspects when enlisting both individual champions and groups of allies in investing in school readiness. It stresses the importance of recognizing the cultures, or cognitive frames, of groups of allies and crafting outreach messages accordingly.

Chapter two discusses some of the “unusual suspects” who are potential allies in investing in school readiness. This chapter describes each group in terms of its political culture, the messages most likely to appeal to it, and the assets it can contribute.

The third chapter describes several national organizations that are recruiting or have recruited champions for early childhood from among these groups of allies. In addition to having a national presence, these organizations are well suited to creating state investments in school readiness. Many have members who can serve as champions in their states or have the capacity to develop such champions.

The recommendations set forth in this monograph can be difficult for child advocates to begin implementing on their own. The State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network can help. SECPTAN routinely assists organizations and individuals in locating the data they require to craft effective advocacy messages that will reach corporate leaders, state policy makers, law enforcement officials, and other allies described in this monograph.

Chapter One: Why Move Beyond the Usual Suspects?

In early childhood, as in any field, public views and opinions play an important role in policy making. Policies seldom can endure when there is broad-based public opposition; therefore, developing messages that match the public's cognitive frames is necessary in promoting school readiness (see appendix and p. 23).

At the same time, the United States is a pluralistic society, where interest-group politics play a major role in policy making. Achieving public policies that promote school readiness requires more than good public messaging, particularly in light of competing demands for other program funding and tax relief. Creating such policies requires the organization and mobilization of active constituencies that can and do press for investment in school readiness. This organization and mobilization must be sufficiently powerful that school readiness allies do not accept symbolic responses, but instead demand substantive action. Policy makers (politicians) are very adroit at demonstrating their support for a popular message, even when their actions do little to address the issue. Ongoing work is required in order to hold policy makers accountable for addressing the substance of the message.

Traditional advocates for early childhood investments have been child advocacy organizations and the child care and early education community. But some of the greatest state-level successes in securing new investments have resulted from alliances that go beyond the "usual suspects." In some states, corporate leaders have championed new state investments in early learning; in others, law enforcement officials have pressed for prevention programs targeted at the early learning years. Faith leaders and seniors have

been effective advocates for young children. They have brought both new messages and new constituencies to the cause. In order to replicate these successes, child advocates need to understand the cognitive frames and cultures of their potential allies. Only such an understanding will enable them to reach potential champions and, perhaps more importantly, craft the materials and messages that make it possible for those champions to enlist their associates, organizations, and agencies.

Child advocates need to understand the cognitive frames and cultures of their potential allies.

A corporate leader, for instance, may become a champion of mental health services for young children because his daughter is raising an autistic child. He may be a forceful and tireless advocate in presenting the case to policy makers and the public, and his position may enable him to open doors that otherwise would be closed. However, if he wishes to convince his state's association of business and industry to support a new child mental health system, he must have support in developing advocacy messages that are consistent with that association's culture and cognitive frames.

Chapter two helps early childhood advocates understand the cultures or cognitive frames of potential allies, the messages that may be most effective in appealing to them, and the advantages of involving specific types of allies in investing in early childhood and school readiness.

Chapter Two: Understanding and Reaching Unusual Suspects

This chapter describes a number of groups of potential allies who might be enlisted to promote investment in school readiness. In each case, there is a brief description of the group's culture or cognitive frame, the messages that are most likely to appeal to the group, and the advantages of having members of the group as allies in school readiness investments. Identifying and activating champions in each of these groups can provide a school readiness initiative with exceptional new allies.

Individuals are likely to have different and unique reasons for becoming involved and may not fit into any stereotype. But these descriptions can help advocates understand the worlds in which potential allies operate, their spheres of influence, and the messages that they will need to employ with their colleagues.

Corporate Leaders

CULTURE / COGNITIVE FRAME

Corporate leaders tend to be busy, no-nonsense, bottom-line types who expect their directions to be followed. Many have little use for group processes and would rather devise and implement solutions quickly.

Each state is likely to have a business roundtable or other group that is comprised of the heads of top corporations and sometimes educational institutions. Employers participate in these groups so that they can encourage the application of business thinking in government decision making. Many members have been active on education reform issues. They take the long view of economic development and see the need for a more highly educated workforce. Some have a strong desire to expand beyond personal corporate

success to positively impact society as a whole. These corporate leaders comprise a kind of club, in which some members take on leadership roles and head up action on issues while others provide support to them.

Enlisting corporate leaders as allies in school readiness does not require the commitment of all of these leaders. Usually, one or more members of the roundtable are known to be interested in early childhood or school readiness and will take up the banner if it is clear that the work will be tangible and they will share credit for it.

MESSAGE STRATEGY

Investing in school readiness makes good economic sense, with high rates of return to society in a skilled future workforce.

Corporate leaders respond to bottom-line arguments and are attracted to rate-of-return analyses and demonstration of return on investment. They think in terms of developing something that works and then scaling it up. They are not afraid of large numbers, provided there is the potential for large returns.

Economic analysis can be particularly influential. Business leaders develop business plans, not funding proposals, and it is helpful to be able to speak their language. The messenger, as well as the message, is important. For example, when making the case for investment in preschool, return-on-investment data published by the Federal Reserve Board chair is more effective than the same data reported by a child advocate. Verification of numbers by an accounting firm can provide an additional level of credibility with corporate audiences.

The messages that have most effectively influenced corporate leaders have stated—and demonstrated—that early childhood and school readiness programs increase the productivity of the future workforce and reduce social problems and their consequences for business and government.

ADVANTAGES

When corporate leaders speak, legislators and other business leaders listen. Powerful CEOs often have unique access to governors and legislators because of their influence on the state's economy. Corporate leaders can be forceful advocates in decision-making circles.

Occasionally, corporate leaders also can bring a more disciplined, focused, and bottom-line approach to agenda development and advocacy. On occasion, they also may lend staff (designers, editors, marketing experts, etc.) to communications efforts.

Early Elementary Educators

CULTURE / COGNITIVE FRAME

Early elementary educators view education as the key to children's future economic opportunity and lifelong enrichment. They see their role as primary to society's long-term well-being. Poverty, family stress, and lack of family support challenge and negatively impact their ability to do their job, and they would like to see other systems do a better job of addressing these issues.

Educators are professionals and believe that credentials are important to teaching young children. They feel they perform their work for the good of society rather than for monetary gain, but they often regard themselves as underpaid.

Early elementary educators, in particular, recognize that some children start school behind their peers and that this is due at least in part to their parents' educational background. They also recognize the importance of social and emotional development. Some educators have a background in early childhood development, although most of them—like practicing early childhood educators—are not professionally trained in this area.

MESSAGE STRATEGY

Ensuring children start school ready to learn makes teaching more effective, for each individual child and for the whole classroom.

Educators want students to start school eager to learn and ready to succeed. They buy into pre-kindergarten or other preschool programs as a means of better preparing children for school. They also support parenting education programs, provided they see how these programs improve children's success in the classroom. In most states, teachers have unions or bargaining units that have fought hard for improved compensation and for limitations on extra demands placed upon them. They are likely to oppose efforts that could substitute paraprofessionals for credentialed staff or expand work hours.

The school readiness messages that are most effective in reaching early elementary educators stress educational values. They clearly state that early childhood services will not compete with the education system for resources, nor are they intended to replace elementary educators' skills and talents.

ADVANTAGES

Polls and focus groups have shown that kindergarten and early elementary teachers are extremely credible spokespersons on early childhood issues. The public believes they are experts on child development and early education and supports what they have to say. Moreover, early elementary educators can be strong leaders in designing and implementing good transitions between preschool or other early childhood programs and the first years of school.

Health Care Professionals

CULTURE / COGNITIVE FRAME

Of all medical professionals, nurses, pediatricians, family practitioners, and doctors who see low-income patients in clinics receive the lowest pay and have the most contact with families. They work hard and are often on call, but many manage to be involved in civic activities. They are accustomed to treating the day-to-day health issues of children and are disturbed when circumstances such as poverty, a chaotic home environment, and substance abuse place children at risk. They know the value of the treatments they prescribe corresponds to the ability of parents to carry them out. Nurses, including nurse practitioners and public health nurses, often are aware of family needs and circumstances that can impact child health.

MESSAGE STRATEGY

Good health requires more than medical care; a medical home plays a critical role in meeting young children’s health and developmental needs.

Brain and child development research, as well as medical journals, appeal to pediatricians and nurses. Many are fascinated by unusual cases. Their initial focus may be on medical problems, but they usually recognize the need to address the conditions that produce such problems. The demands on their time and the structure of their jobs may not enable them to do more to address children’s developmental health issues than they currently do. But they recognize the value of an ecological approach to health care, and most appreciate the opportunity to have a say in strategies that would expand health care professionals’ roles.

ADVANTAGES

Health care professionals are highly valued and respected in their communities for their service, knowledge, and expertise. Their opinions and approval are sought on issues beyond the medical realm. Nurses, in particular, have credibility with the public, which generally views them as being committed to helping people. They can be very effective spokespersons in addressing both policy makers and the public. Nurses, pediatricians, family practitioners, and doctors are not regarded as self-interested when advocating for public supports for children, because most people assume that they are not in need of public help themselves. They are also generally regarded as politically conservative, so their involvement can lessen the likelihood of right-wing opposition.

Law Enforcement Officials

CULTURE / COGNITIVE FRAME

Law enforcement officials—judges, prosecutors, and chiefs of police—deal with tough issues and tough people. Their approach to crime is to fight it, and many feel that non-punitive approaches amount to “coddling criminals.” They believe that sanctions are necessary and that they should be imposed earlier rather than later, in order to produce law-abiding behavior.

Law enforcement officials believe strongly in personal responsibility; they do not glorify personal freedom. They feel that their purpose is to protect society, and they do not gloss over or minimize social problems and concerns. Many believe the seeds of criminal behavior are sown early in life, when abuse, neglect, or delinquency takes place and is not addressed.

MESSAGE STRATEGY

Investing in prevention services at an early age is the best crime control strategy.

According to Fight Crime Invest in Kids (see p. 9 and appendix), when law enforcement officials are informed of the impact of early care and education programs on preventing crime and are asked to support these programs, they do so. Most law enforcement personnel who have worked in the field for a long time have seen vulnerable young children become adult criminals. They would like to see society act earlier, and they have a sense of what it takes to break the cycle of delinquency and crime. Many also wish to show the public that although they

represent law and order and must be tough on crime, they also are human and caring.

ADVANTAGES

Law enforcement personnel are a largely untapped resource in early childhood advocacy. But some, when they are involved, become such strong believers that they are willing to press the message to legislators and the public continually. Constituencies that perceive law enforcement officials as trustworthy, authoritative, and helpful—such as small business owners—may respond to appeals from these officials more so than from other advocates.

Mid-Level Staff of State Agencies

CULTURE / COGNITIVE FRAME

Mid-level staff working in state health, human service, and education agencies administer and oversee a variety of programs that serve young children. They believe in the importance of early childhood and the work they are doing to support it.

Mid-level staff of all state agencies generally believe in the value of their work and consider themselves real public servants, although they often are called bureaucrats. They manage a multitude of details and are charged with interpreting federal regulations and state laws and regulations. These staff generally cannot take risks, but pride themselves in their knowledge of the subject matter with which they work. They spend much of their time managing programs rather than planning for change, but they can be charged by their political appointees to draft options for changes in regulations or legislation or

even to create new programs. Some spend almost all of their time attending meetings in order to coordinate and collaborate across different systems.

They are often called upon to respond to a political appointee's or legislator's request immediately, dropping projects they are already working on. They take pride in the knowledge they possess, although some have limited understanding of the effects of their work in the political arena. They often feel that political appointees, and legislators in particular, are simplistic thinkers who create problematic policies that are not connected with the real world.

MESSAGE STRATEGY

Building a school readiness system means developing standards and fostering cross-agency collaboration.

In addition to making suggestions to government staff, it is important to recognize their expertise and seek their advice. It is also important to recognize that they are likely to balk at changes that place additional demands or work requirements on them, even if there is a benefit to others. Working with them to ensure that the tasks required to enact an early childhood investment are manageable, from their point of view, is essential to gaining their support.

ADVANTAGES

Mid-level state agency staff generally have substantial influence upon their superiors in their capacity as gate keepers. They can facilitate change or block or subvert it.

While they, like all government workers, are subject to the Hatch Act and generally cannot act as direct advocates, they are asked to and can assess the feasibility of proposals, and their support in this area is important. They can be strong allies in the inside game of obtaining overall agency or departmental buy-in. With regard to any policy, much of the detailed work of drafting regulations and procedures will be delegated to them, once broad policies are established.

These staff have expertise on issues that few, if any, others are likely to possess. They sometimes are referred to as the "B-Team," because they will "be" there regardless of any change in political or agency leadership.

School Superintendents

CULTURE / COGNITIVE FRAME

School superintendents are selected by local school boards and ultimately must keep those boards satisfied while fiscally managing the school budget. While they may be able to exert leadership in setting educational directions, they often have limited capacity to direct individual schools and individual principals.

Superintendents are under increasing stress due to the new accountability provisions of the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Turnover among school superintendents in larger school districts is rapid, in part because moving to a larger and more complex school district connotes a promotion. Many superintendents seek to achieve professional recognition by leading the passage of school bond issues and building new facilities.

While superintendents are generally responsible for kindergarten through 12th grade, an increasing

number are addressing pre-kindergarten issues, many because they see that too many children are starting school at a substantial disadvantage due to the lack of preparation.

Most educators recognize that the new accountability standards hold them responsible for outcomes that can only be produced by altering socio-economic and community conditions, which are beyond their control. School superintendents would like to close the achievement gap. They would also like to have good community relationships and more community involvement in the schools, on their own terms. They may feel that engaging parents—in particular, parents of children who struggle academically—in their children’s education or in school improvements is difficult or problematic.

MESSAGE STRATEGY

The achievement gap exists before children come to school; closing it early is needed to meet the No Child Left Behind Act regulations.

Like most professionals, school superintendents listen to one another and are more likely to take on new challenges when they see other superintendents doing so successfully. School superintendents can view school-community partnerships positively, provided they are presented in ways that do not challenge the superintendent’s role or place more demands on already overburdened staff.

In order for a school readiness investment to garner superintendents’ support, the following must be made clear:

- The initiative will help to close the achievement gap, directly addressing the new accountability standards that schools face.
- It will assist the superintendent in achieving his or her goal of improved performance for all students.

ADVANTAGES

School superintendents have been known to advocate for expanding early childhood programs and services in the community, as opposed to simply adding funding to the school system. This group of allies acts from conviction rather than solely from self-interest. They are respected for their expertise on student achievement issues, one of the major concerns of state policy makers.

Semi-Retired and Newly Retired People

CULTURE / COGNITIVE FRAME

The number of semi-retired and newly retired Americans is increasing. Most of these people are over age 55, in good health, economically secure, through with child rearing, and ready to enjoy more free time. They may travel, particularly to visit grown children and grandchildren. Many have time to socialize and volunteer. They come from all political perspectives. Often, they tend to have a longer-term view of the world.

While retirees may be very concerned about social security and Medicare, they also are concerned about children. Many have grandchildren and want to make sure that there is a bright future for them. Many are concerned about the difficulties that their grown children face in finding child care and finding time to spend with their young ones. They may believe it is

tougher growing up today than when they were raising families. Some also take on the stress of modern parenting themselves; six percent of all children are being raised by grandparents.

MESSAGE STRATEGY

Our grandchildren deserve the best. Society, as well as parents, must respond, to ensure that all children have the care and support they need.

Messages that value and support parental responsibility while offering public and community support resonate with many newly or semi-retired individuals. Messages that do not blame, but provide a role for the public and the community in supporting young children, are effective with this group.

ADVANTAGES

Because they have time, resources, and connections, individuals in this group can be powerful advocates. As constituents, they can speak out of a broad concern for society, rather than self-interest, when communicating with legislators. Grandparents who speak out for expanded early care and education are recognized as acting from altruism, and this carries additional weight in bolstering public support.

To say that Americans are engaged in an intergenerational battle for resources is an oversimplification. The fact that many seniors—in particular, those who live on moderate fixed incomes—do not vote for initiatives that would raise their property taxes does not mean that they do not

support children. In fact, they place children's issues higher on the political agenda (and economic development issues lower) than those aged 35 to 55.

Small Business Owners

CULTURE / COGNITIVE FRAME

Small business owners and the chambers of commerce of which they are members believe in promoting business and think government should do the same. They often see government regulation as a burden and think of social welfare programs as supporting people who are not willing to work. They do not necessarily identify with corporate leaders, believing corporate leaders to have resources that local business owners do not.

Chambers of commerce provide certain benefits to their members, and membership is open to any business. Few child care centers and child-serving agencies are members, perhaps due to the fact that few are willing or able to pay the required dues.

MESSAGE STRATEGY

Quality, dependable child care reduces absenteeism, increases worker productivity, and contributes to the local economy.

On the whole, small businesses pay lower wages and provide fewer and more limited benefits—such as child care—than larger businesses. Many small business owners recognize that their workers struggle

to find affordable early childhood services. While they know that this affects their workers' performance, they do not feel they should be forced to subsidize these services. Many accommodate their employees on a personal, case-by-case basis but do not want such accommodations to be expected or required.

The most common way for small businesses to make early childhood investments is to fund early childhood services for their employees. A good first step in reaching them is for a local provider of early childhood services to join the chamber of commerce. Messages to chamber members should emphasize the increase in workers' dependability and quality of work that results when employees have quality services for their children and families. They may also see the value of providing such services as a way of attracting new business. According to economic impact studies, the contribution of the early care and education industry to their community may have some appeal to them. They are more likely to support one-time capital construction (such as building a center) than to provide ongoing funding.

As is the case with corporate leaders, one need not enlist all small business owners in order to have a successful early childhood policy initiative; one or two can be helpful in demonstrating that school readiness initiatives are not just social services or social welfare, but are part of the economic infrastructure that makes work possible.

ADVANTAGES

Because small business owners are often focused on minimizing their own financial obligations, a more effective strategy than trying to involve this group in school readiness investments is to build enough support among other allies to neutralize their likely opposition.

State Legislators

CULTURE / COGNITIVE FRAME

Although legislators are disproportionately white male attorneys, small business owners, and retirees, in most states, they hold diverse viewpoints and backgrounds. In fact, legislative chambers are much more diverse than most work settings, and legislators can work together on one issue after fighting vigorously over a previous one. Legislative leaders generally are selected by their peers because they can manage multiple agendas and help members achieve at least part of what they want, some of the time. In legislating, educational background and substantive expertise play moderate roles and are given less weight than in most professions.

Legislators quickly learn to become guarded about making concrete promises or accepting claims made by advocates at face value. They must respond to requests for help or support on hundreds of pieces of legislation, many with which they are only vaguely familiar. They appreciate it when lobbyists recognize the demands placed on them and understand that sometimes they must cast votes with which the lobbyists disagree. They want to make a good impression on their constituents, and many are wary of being put on the spot, although they are willing to go to places in which they are welcomed.

Twenty percent of legislators are likely to do 80 percent of the work. Some prioritize and excel at negotiating compromises, while others are inventors and champions of new ideas. Depending on the issue, both types may be needed to produce policy. Many legislators rarely get legislation passed. Some are well-meaning but lack influence. Others draw as much criticism as support when they take on issues. Advocates working on almost

any issue can find legislators who support their viewpoint. Legislators map their own areas of influence, in part by joining legislative committees.

MESSAGE STRATEGY

Early learning programs are effective and efficient investments; they are sound uses of tax dollars.

Legislators, of course, want to satisfy constituents. By passing or voting for legislation and enacting a budget, they seek either to solve problems and do good or to give the appearance that they have done so—as evidenced by the often-misleading titles of bills.

The more knowledgeable and persistent constituents are in making their wishes known, the greater the degree to which legislators will be accountable to them. In most states, even a handful of persistent and knowledgeable constituents who regularly contact a legislator about an issue can wield substantial influence. This works best when the relationship is established on positive terms and legislators are recognized for their positive actions.

Legislators can do a great deal within the chambers to promote legislation but welcome outside help in refining arguments and messages and in reaching undecided or wavering colleagues. This requires teamwork that is respectful of the important role of the legislative champion. Selecting the right legislative champion can be as important as selecting a marketable issue on which to advocate.

ADVANTAGES

The main advantage of having legislators as champions for school readiness is clear: Legislation cannot be passed unless a legislator is willing to introduce it and others are willing to vote for it. But legislators can and do play roles that advocates often are not aware of: They perform sensitive negotiations, engage in shrewd advocacy, and pay attention to the details of the legislation to ensure that the policy is not subverted or rendered trivial in the policy-making process.

TANF Participants and the Working Poor

CULTURE / COGNITIVE FRAME

While the number of families receiving welfare benefits (now called Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, or TANF) has declined substantially, TANF still is an essential way for many poor, primarily single-parent, households to receive some financial assistance as they find work. A large proportion of TANF recipients have very young children and need child care in order to be at work. In fact, states now spend a large portion of the funds previously set aside for cash assistance to poor families on child care subsidies for TANF recipients.

While TANF participants have entered the labor force, the improvement to their economic situation is negligible, if existent. Their jobs pay low wages, they no longer get benefits, and they have expenses associated with working. Contrary to stereotypes about them, most TANF recipients take their roles as primary caregivers and bread-winners very seriously.

TANF recipients and the working poor work hard. They want their children to succeed educationally and make considerable sacrifices on their children's behalf.

MESSAGE STRATEGY

As parents and bread-winners, we need our children to have quality care and education while we must be at work.

TANF recipients and working parents face many demands upon their time; they work hard and are paid little. The early care and education system, or lack of a system, deeply impacts them. More so than receiving messages about those systems, they respond positively to the opportunity to create such messages—by speaking out and sharing their stories in ways that have impact. Focus groups or other ways of gathering TANF recipients together can be a vehicle for both identifying those who would like to be leaders on these issues and for sharing experiences.

ADVANTAGES

Former and current TANF recipients make up a significant share of this country's working poor population and can become very effective leaders and spokespersons for reform. They have practical experience that shows how policies actually impact people. They provide a reality check that policy makers need. The voices and presence of current and former TANF recipients also helps break down the stereotypes that many policy makers hold.

Many current and former TANF recipients are willing to share their stories and experiences if they know that doing so will help improve the system. Many have become experts about both the welfare system and the early care and education system. Because of their passion about issues that affect their lives, some can become strong advocates for change.

All parents of young children, as consumers of early childhood services, should be at the forefront of policy development and articulation. TANF recipients and others with the most stake in system change deserve special attention, and recruiting them as partners and allies should be a priority.

Chapter Three: Organizations that Can Help Recruit Champions

National organizations that are building support for early childhood agendas are sources of potential allies in securing school readiness investments. Those described below focus on developing both national and state policy. Many have their own networks of potential champions in a variety of states. With regard to any of the fields described below, peer recruitment efforts can build support for school readiness investments where such support does not exist.

Corporate Leaders

Corporate Voices for Working Families is a nonpartisan, nonprofit membership organization of some of the most prominent corporate leaders in the country. Thirty-six partner companies employing more than 3 million workers belong to Corporate Voices for Working Families, which works to develop family-supportive policies in those companies' workforces.

The organization has an advisory committee of leading experts in the field of early learning that has helped develop its policy framework.

Recently, Corporate Voices for Working Families partnered with the Committee for Economic Development to issue a policy statement regarding early childhood education. The organization has identified a set of corporate leaders who are willing to meet with business leaders on a statewide basis to present the case for investing in early childhood.

CONTACT:

Corporate Voices for Working Families
1899 L Street NW
Suite 250
Washington, DC 20036
202-429-0217
www.cvworkingfamilies.org

The **Committee for Economic Development** is an independent, nonpartisan organization of business and education leaders dedicated to researching policy and to the implementation of its recommendations in the public and the private sector. It is a trustee-directed organization, and its trustees establish the organization's research and policy agenda. Trustees include chairs, presidents, and senior executives of major American corporations and university presidents.

The Committee for Economic Development has been a leader in promoting early childhood education programs and services, particularly for disadvantaged children. Its 1987 book *Children in Need: Investment Strategies for the Educationally Disadvantaged*, which made the case for expanding early childhood programming, influenced many states in their development of preschool agendas. Trustees have served as national spokespersons on behalf of early childhood education, and some have traveled extensively to meet with peers in other states on early childhood issues.

CONTACT:

Charles E. M. Kolb, President
Committee for Economic Development
2000 L Street NW
Suite 700
Washington, DC 20036
202-296-5860
www.ced.org

Health Care Professionals

Docs for Tots was founded in 2003 by George Askew, MD. It facilitates a nationwide network of doctors who can help organizations in child advocacy and other fields support policies and practices that improve the well-being of infants and toddlers. Docs for Tots is developing policy-making tools for early childhood advocates to use with pediatricians and other health practitioners.

In addition, Docs for Tots:

- Provides doctors with the information they need to comfortably and confidently engage in advocacy
- Offers easy access to quality support and guidance in advocacy
- Connects child advocates and doctors with each other
- Recognizes and highlights the work of doctors who are advocates
- Makes the work of becoming an advocate as simple as possible for doctors

In each state, Docs for Tots is developing a network of doctors who are interested in becoming advocates and seek to work with other advocacy organizations.

CONTACT:

George L. Askew, MD, FAAP
Docs for Tots
1522 K Street NW
Suite 600
Washington, DC 20005-1202
202-898-9043
www.docsfortots.org

Law Enforcement Officials

Fight Crime Invest in Kids, established in 1996, is a bipartisan, nonprofit organization led by national and state advisory committees that include more than 1,000 police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors, and victims of violence.

Fight Crime Invest in Kids investigates the research on what works to keep kids from becoming criminals and puts that information in the hands of policy makers and the public. It puts a major emphasis on early care and education programs, promoting preschool, parenting education, and after-school and other education programs. It has conducted national and statewide surveys of law enforcement officials on topics of prevention and early intervention.

The Fight Crime Invest in Kids Web site describes many of the organization's publications and includes a list of participating law enforcement officials in each state. Many have been spokespeople for preventive approaches to addressing crime and can be enlisted as advocates in early childhood work.

Individuals can join the organization's listserv by visiting: www.fightcrime.org/email.html

CONTACT:

Sanford A. Newman, President
Fight Crime Invest in Kids
2000 P Street NW
Suite 240
Washington, DC 20036
202-776-0027
www.fightcrime.org

School Superintendents

The Council of Chief State School Officers is a nationwide nonprofit organization comprised of heads of state departments of education and public instruction. The council's mission is to achieve the vision of an American education system that enables all families to succeed in school, work, and life. It has taken a lead role in developing model standards and assessment practices for schools and has expanded this work to apply it to the preschool years.

The organization's early childhood task force, begun with support from the Pew Charitable Trusts, has identified a group of chief state school officers who can speak out on behalf of universal preschool. On a peer-to-peer basis, these officers can be enlisted in states other than their own to help draw attention to the importance of early childhood education.

CONTACT:

Jana Martella
Council of Chief State School Officers
One Massachusetts Avenue NW
Suite 700
Washington, DC 20001-1431
202-336-7000
www.ccsso.org

Appendix: Crafting School Readiness Messages for the Public

Over the last decade, significant research has been conducted to gauge public opinion regarding early care and education. Extensive polling has helped identify the frames through which the public views early childhood issues and policies. It is important to recognize and understand these frames when fashioning public messages to support investments in early childhood.

Frame 1: The earliest years do matter.

- **Description:** The public is aware that the brain develops rapidly in the earliest years and that it is important to stimulate growth and development by reading, singing, and talking to infants. The public generally views this development as intellectual, as opposed to social or emotional.
- **Implications for message strategy:** The public does not have a corresponding frame for government's role in this area. Messages can use this frame, but need to link it to specific programs, policies, or strategies.

Frame 2: It is best if parents (mom) can stay home with infants and toddlers, but the reality is that many cannot afford to do so.

- **Description:** The public is very ambivalent about leaving infants and toddlers in child care, and believes too many parents put their careers ahead of caring for their children. At the same time, the public recognizes that many families have to work in order to economically support their children, and that there is a need for safe and supportive care.

- **Implications for message strategy:** Advocates should avoid appearing to want to push more infants and toddlers into care. Messages advocating expanded care options should include family leave and recognize the value of staying at home.

Frame 3: Babies need nurturing, but they do not need educational settings for care.

- **Description:** The public generally believes that babies need to be loved, nurtured, and kept safe, but that other considerations with respect to the type of care they receive are not important. The public does not see the need for specialized training of care providers. Grandmothers, not child care centers, are viewed as the best providers of care other than parents.
- **Implications for message strategy:** Advocates should stress the ways in which a child needs to be nurtured and supported in exploring the world—being read to, held, sung to, watched, and played with—in order to make the case for using care providers who are trained in these skills.

Frame 4: Child care is baby-sitting and needs to be safe, but does not require special skills.

- **Description:** The public sees “child care” as a way for parents to have their children cared for while they are working or away, not as an opportunity for development and education. The public expresses modest support for subsidizing child care to enable people to be off welfare but is ambivalent about “Cadillac” subsidized programs because many working families could not afford such care.

- **Implications for message strategy:** When advocating enhancements to the child care system that would improve quality, use the term “early care and education” rather than “child care.”

Frame 5: Preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds leads to school readiness; Head Start works.

- **Description:** The public believes that preschool helps children acquire the pre-literacy and mathematical skills associated with school readiness. The public values socialization, but does not connect it with educational success or the role of government. The public believes that Head Start works.
- **Implications for message strategy:** Many advocates, including foundations, are building on this public support by advocating expansion of preschool to serve all children. To many, universal preschool seems the most likely strategy for overall increases in quality in the early care and education system.

Frame 6: Government has a responsibility to ensure children are safe and have health care. However, except in extreme cases, government should not intrude on parents’ raising of their children.

- **Description:** The public strongly supports health insurance coverage for poor children and believes state systems should protect children from harm (but does not have a uniform definition of child abuse). The public also believes that parents have a right to raise their children as they see fit and is leery of government intruding on family life.

- **Implications for message strategy:** Parenting education and family-strengthening programs generally must be framed as voluntary rather than mandatory.

Frame 7: Many current social problems started with insufficient nurturing and support during the earliest years.

- **Description:** The public believes in parents’ right to raise their children, but also believes that many parents are overindulgent, are inattentive, or put selfish interests ahead of family obligations. The public believes this results in problems such as juvenile delinquency, risky youth behaviors, and adult crime.
- **Implications for message strategy:** It is important to show that change is possible, particularly by promoting prevention programs that enhance families’ capacity to nurture their children.

Frame 8: There are programs that work, and these can prevent future social problems and costs. In general, however, government systems do not work very well.

- **Description:** The public supports replicating cost-effective programs that are perceived as having impact. However, in general, the public does not believe that government is efficient or can manage large systems well.
- **Implications for message strategy:** Emphasize the results that will be achieved, rather than the systems that will be developed to achieve them.

Early Childhood Frameworks and Messages: Key Resources

THE FRAMEWORKS INSTITUTE

There has been a great deal of recent work to examine public opinion on early childhood issues and to fashion appropriate messages to support investments in early childhood and school readiness. The FrameWorks Institute has been a leader in defining the public's cognitive frames on a variety of social issues and then suggesting messages that correspond to those frames. Cognitive frames are the ways in which people examine and filter information, and while they can be changed, such change typically requires an epiphany. In general, people digest information according to their cognitive frames and reject messages that conflict with those frames. Therefore, it is essential to understand the cognitive frames of the audiences one is seeking to influence—and to fashion messages consistent with those frames.

For more information on the FrameWorks Institute, cognitive frames, and early childhood frames in particular, visit www.frameworksinstitute.org or contact:

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THE COMMUNICATIONS CONSORTIUM

Through the Communications Consortium, eight state-based child advocacy organizations are working as an Early Care and Education Collaborative. The Collaborative designs and implements strategic public education strategies to create the public will to increase and improve early care and education resources. This collaborative is developing a variety of tools, as well as lessons learned through such advocacy efforts. For more information on the Early Care and Education Collaborative, visit www.earlycare.org or contact:

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About SECPTAN

The State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network (SECPTAN) provides current information about early childhood policy initiatives to state policy makers. It assists them in assessing the best available evidence and information about effective policies and practices in early childhood. The network is managed by the Child and Family Policy Center with funding from The Ford Foundation, the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. For more information about SECPTAN, visit www.finebynine.org or contact Charles Bruner, Network Director, or Sheri Floyd, Network Manager, at 515-280-9027.

About this Series

This monograph is part of SECPTAN's series on early childhood issues, which also includes:

- **A Compendium of Multi-State Early Childhood Initiatives**
- **Measuring Children's School Readiness: Options for Developing State Baselines and Benchmarks**
- **School Readiness Policy and Budgeting: Template for Collecting State Baseline Information**
- **Child Welfare and School Readiness—Making the Link for Vulnerable Children**
- **Financing School Readiness Strategies: An Annotated Bibliography**
- **Seven Things Legislators (and Other Policy Makers) Need to Know about School Readiness**

- **Health Care and School Readiness: The Health Community's Role in Supporting Child Development—New Approaches and Model Legislation**
- **On the Path to School Readiness: Key Questions to Consider Before Establishing Universal Pre-Kindergarten**

These publications are available online at www.finebynine.org or by contacting the Child and Family Policy Center.

About the Child and Family Policy Center

The Child and Family Policy Center (CFPC) was established in 1989 by former Iowa legislator Charles Bruner, PhD, to better link research and policy on issues vital to children and families, and to advocate for outcome-based policies to improve child well-being. CFPC is active both statewide and nationally. In Iowa, the Child and Family Policy Center assists the state and communities in developing integrated, community-based, family-focused, and results-accountable services, particularly for vulnerable children. CFPC also produces a variety of reports, case studies, concept papers, and technical assistance tools on systems reform and community building that are widely used across the United States.



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