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FACTS in ACTION

Getting Children Ready For School

The term “school readiness” is heard more and more often in ECE - but what is it exactly? School readiness is the concept that all children should arrive at school ready for school from the first day. The term “ready” suggests a distinct constellation of skills that facilitate children’s ability to succeed in school, such as having motor control to hold a writing utensil, self-control to sit quietly during circle time, or language skills to be able to communicate their wants and needs. Yet it is not just children who need to arrive at school “ready”. Communities must be “ready” to support their young children; families must be “ready” to support their children’s growth and development, and schools need to be “ready” to foster each individual child’s learning.

As states have begun to focus attention on children’s experiences in the years preceding school entry, it has become apparent that there is a shortage of data on children about the years between birth and when they arrive at school. During these in-between years children are rapidly acquiring the skills necessary for success in school, yet data has not been routinely collected documenting children’s progressive development of these school

readiness skills. Similarly, minimal documentation exists assessing communities’, schools’, and families’ readiness.

In light of this, beginning in 2001, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT launched The School Readiness Indicators Project. The project is an initiative to assist each of the seventeen involved states to develop state-specific child and system level indicators of children’s, family’s, and community’s school readiness. Each state is being encouraged to develop indicators relevant to their state, specifically reflecting their state policy priorities and data sources. The school readiness indicators will illustrate the status of school readiness in each state, and also enable policymakers and community members to identify where investments in school readiness programs should be directed.

“An indicator is a measure that describes a condition. They are numbers, percents, fractions, or rates used to paint a picture of a specific outcome or situation.”

www.gettingready.org
**What We Do/ Indicators
 The Massachusetts School
 Readiness Indicators Project**

Massachusetts is participating in the School Readiness Indicators Project

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and has developed indicators that will soon be implemented. Massachusetts indicators were developed by soliciting and incorporating input from the Governor’s School Readiness

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Facts in Action's mission is to connect practice and advocacy with early childhood field and policy research — to turn facts into action — in order to promote higher quality programs and to bring new advocates to the field of early care and education.

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Caroline and Sigmund Schott Foundation
Quality Education and Child Care for All



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Ready for School,
Continued from page 1

Commission, representatives of the private sector, and members of the early care and education field. Through this process a definition of school readiness for *children* in Massachusetts was written. Children's school readiness in MA includes:

- The ability to communicate
- Physical health
- Emotional health
- Social knowledge and competence (getting along with other children and adults)
- Developmentally appropriate language, knowledge, and cognitive skills.

School readiness also appreciates the diverse background of each child and school readiness is the result of a collaborative effort between families, communities and schools.

The indicators selected to measure progress towards the goal that all children arrive at school ready in Massachusetts. The indicators are organized in two categories: "Children are Ready" and "Families, Schools, and Communities are Supportive, Safe & Healthy." Within these categories, there are sets of indicators:

- *Children are ready:*
 - Physical health,
 - Emotional health,
 - Language and cognitive skills,
 - Social competence.
- *Families, schools, and communities are supportive, safe and healthy:*
 - Early care and education and schools are ready for children,
 - Transitions,
 - Family Involvement,
 - Self-sufficient families,
 - Safe and healthy communities.

Overall, many of the indicators incorporate data currently collected by the Office of Child Care Services, Department of Education, and the Executive Office of Health and Human Services.

What do indicators mean to early care and education providers?

Early care and education providers are in the unique position that they have the most opportunity, next to parents, to directly facilitate children's attainment of the necessary school readiness skills. Thus more emphasis may be put on early care and education providers to be knowledgeable about what constitutes school readiness and employ this information in their daily activities. In addition, as new means for collecting school readiness data are selected, early care and education providers may become involved in implementing these assessments.

Ultimately, as a recent presentation from the School Readiness Indicators Project in Massachusetts suggested the indicators are just the beginning. These indicators further have the potential to:

- Provide a means for public and private agencies to focus on common outcomes for children,
- Establish a definition of "school readiness" which parents, providers, and communities can collectively understand,
- Can highlight gaps in children's readiness earlier in life and thus promote earlier interventions, and
- Make it realistic to track progress towards ensuring that all children enter school ready to learn.

For more information about:
School Readiness:

<http://readyweb.crc.uiuc.edu/>

The School Readiness Indicators Project:
www.gettingready.org

The MA School Readiness Indicators Project:
www.qualitychildcare.org



Advocacy & Lobbying: Do's & Don'ts

As a child care director, teacher, or family child care provider, you are aware of which types of programs work well for children and which don't. This knowledge should be shared with policymakers to help improve laws that affect you and the people you serve. As a nonprofit employee you are in a unique position to lobby about that which you are most familiar, but also you are subject to specific rules about lobbying. In this article you will find basic do's and don'ts for lobbying as a nonprofit employee.

First, there is a difference between advocacy and lobbying. All lobbying is advocacy, but not all advocacy is lobbying. Advocacy includes educating the public or those in a position of power about *an issue*. Lobbying is advocating for a specific *piece of legislation* or a particular *political candidate*. There are some restrictions on the types of lobbying activities you can participate in as a nonprofit, but *not* on the amount of general advocacy you can do.

As a nonprofit there are monetary limits on the amount of resources you can spend on lobbying. You can either: 1) spend less than a "substantial" amount of your resources on lobbying, or 2) opt for the H-election, which is very specific about the ratio of your annual expenditures that can be spent on lobbying. For questions about the "H-election", contact the Alliance for Justice at 1-866-NPLOBBY or www.allianceforjustice.org

So what can you do during election time?

You May:

- Provide information to staff and parents about the importance of voting and political participation.
- Organize a get-out-the-vote or voter registration drive at your center.
- Tell *all* of the candidates about the importance of early childhood education and child care (or any topic).
- Invite a candidate to your child care center for a site visit.

- During a debate, ask a candidate their views on a particular topic, such as child care subsidies.

You May Not:

- Provide information about *only* the candidates you support to staff and parents.
- Register voters at your center *only* for the party you support.
- Target *specific* candidates to tell about the importance of early childhood education and child care.
- Invite a candidate to your child care center to host a campaign event (i.e. no soliciting for campaign contributions, votes, or handing out campaign literature).
- During a debate, ask a candidate to pledge or sponsor any *specific* legislation.

Lastly, these rules apply only to your nonprofit or when speaking on behalf of your organization. When acting as an individual these restrictions do not apply. For further information: <http://www.nonprofits.org/npofaq>, <http://naeyc.org/affiliates/acb/guide.pdf>

Ready, Set ... Preschool!

If we talk about school readiness beginning at age 4, we are ignoring the tremendous growth children engage in from the moment they are born. Our conversations will soon not just be about school readiness, but preschool readiness forewarns a recent report from the Ounce of Prevention fund. Their recent report discusses the importance of early experience to later development, and model government programs linking services for children birth to school entry.

According to the report, more scientific evidence shows that:

- If a child is exposed to few sounds, sights, and colors, and less language, touch, and interaction with adults during infancy, then the child may attain a lower I.Q. than expected.

- If a child does not receive the proper care and attention during infancy, then he or she is more likely to lack confidence in the classroom, limiting their ability to succeed. For at-risk children, or babies born into families facing social, economic, or psychological risks, this applies even more as intervention at birth increases their social/ emotional stability and lessens the chances of them engaging in criminal behavior later in life.

Taking this into account, federal and state governments are starting to implement programs that target infants and toddlers and are continuous with programs for children age 4-5. In the report, Ounce of Prevention examines the federal program Early Head Start,

which was created from Head Start funds "set aside" to serve infants and toddlers. Now, the two programs together provide children ages birth-to-five with early education, health care, and nutrition services. In addition, Illinois and California are adopting programs and passing legislation that offer similar early education and health services for children ages birth-to-five and their parents. According to the report, these initiatives can serve as useful models for future federal, state, and local early childhood programs.

Source: Ounce of Prevention Fund (2004) *Ready for School: The Case for Including Babies and Toddlers as We Expand Preschool Opportunities* www.ounceofprevention.org/downloads/publications/ready_for_school.pdf

Where do the Presidential Candidates Stand on Issues of Early Care and Education?

John Kerry, Democrat, MA

In the Senate, he supported increases in funding for Head Start and other child care programs, including the bi-partisan legislation, Early Learning Opportunity Act (ELOA), passed in 2000. If elected, Kerry plans to increase the child care tax credit to cover \$5,000 in expenses for middle-income families and stay-at-home parents. He also proposes to expand health care coverage for families and provide full coverage for children enrolled in Medicaid.

On ECE, Kerry says:

“Our education plan for a stronger America sets high standards and demands accountability from parents, teachers, and schools ... And as President, I am determined that we stop being a nation content to spend \$50,000 a year to keep a young person in prison for the rest of their life – when we could invest \$10,000 to give them Head Start, Early Start, Smart Start, the best possible start in life.” (Boston, MA, 07/29/04)

For more information on Kerry visit www.johnkerry.com

George W. Bush, Republican, TX

In 2001, he proposed and signed into law the Reading First and Early Reading First Initiatives which seeks to help every child become literate by the time they enter third grade. A year later, he issued his Welfare Reform Agenda, which proposed to maintain level funding for childcare (\$4.8 billion per year) through the Child Care and Development Block Grant, and he proposed the Healthy Community Innovation Fund Initiative that would promote comprehensive health care for women and children.

On ECE, the First Lady has stated (At time of print, the President has not yet issued a statement on the issue):

“President Bush and I want all children in early childhood programs, including Head Start, to benefit from groundbreaking research on early learning. By putting this research into practice in pre-school programs, we can help assure that children develop strong skills in early language, literacy, and math. (Colorado, 05/01/03)

For more information on Bush visit www.georgewbush.com

In the Classroom: Lessons on Voting

While U.S. citizens must be 18 years old to vote, it is never too early to learn about voting, elections, and democracy in America. Teaching children about voting will show them how important each person is in a democracy and how citizens choose their leaders. Thus, this “In the Classroom” provides ways for you to effectively plan and teach your kids about voting as well as encourage and remind their parents about Election Day.

Vote on Classroom Activities

- Explain that voting is a fair way for groups of people to decide on important issues, and then allow them to vote throughout the day for the activities they would like to do. For example, allow them to vote on which book they would like to read.

Throw an Election Day Party

- Plan an Election Day party for



children and parents and make it a celebration for the right to vote. Talk with the children about the upcoming

election for President. Encourage them to ask their parents if they are going to vote, who they will vote for, and why.

- Give each child a self-stick name badge with the words “**Your Vote Counts!**” printed on them. Have them color it and take it home to their parents and relatives.

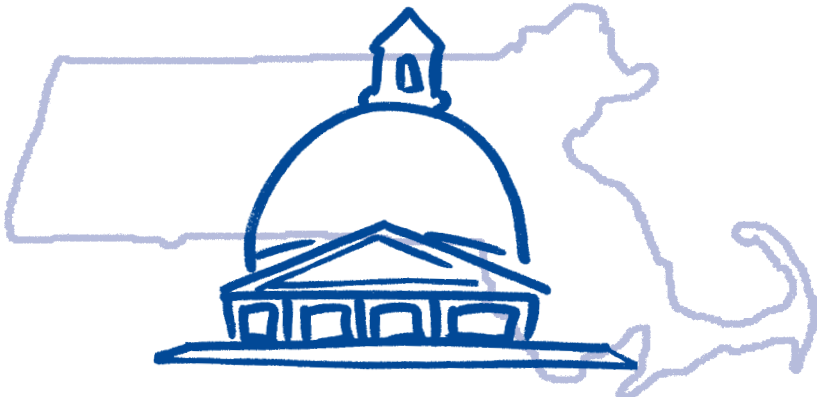
Reach Out to Parents

- Inform them of the positions and agendas of candidates, but remember that you cannot tell parents which candidate to

support. (See *above* for information on the presidential candidates’ positions on early care and education.)

- Send letters/ e-mails to parents informing them that their children are participating in activities related to voting and elections.
- Assist parents in locating their local voting booths.
- Advise parents to talk to their children about voting and encourage them to bring their children with them when they vote on **November 2, 2004!**

Source: Bennett, Kathleen and Watson, Diana. (2004) *Voting Curriculum for Preschool Classrooms and Family Child Care Homes*, Associated Early Care and Education, Inc. For more information on the curriculum contact Diana Watson at (617) 427-4300.



Inside the Statehouse: Early Care and Education Programs Finish Well in Final FY 2005 Budget

The FY05 budget has been finalized and the children and families of the Commonwealth have fared well. Overall, early care and education programs have been funded at \$475.55 million, a 1.96% increase from FY04. Most notably, a historic commitment has been made to the young children of this state with the official authorization of an independent department for early education and care. The Council on Early Education and Care will begin shortly working on transitioning services to this new department. In addition, the newly established Board of Early Education and Care will soon be appointed, and start developing the components for a universal high-quality preschool system, including kindergarten readiness assessment and workforce development. Between the conference committee budget and the final budget, the Governor vetoed the language on planning grants for this new department. However the Board of Early Education and Care has still been funded at an initial \$600,000, and the Advisory Board on Early Education and Care has received \$40,000.

Another success for early care and education providers in this year's budget is the \$5 million increase in the Rate Reserve. This allotment will mean higher reimbursement rates for programs that contract with the Office of Child Care Services. Child Care Resource and Referral agencies were funded at the same level as FY04, reversing a trend from FY03 - FY04 of cutting funding for this program. Both Head Start and Community Partnerships for Children were level funded at \$6.15 million and \$68.6 million, respectively.

The only tracked line item to receive a cut was a set of services for *Low-Income Families*, which was reduced from FY 04 by 1.06% to \$278.94 million. However, the Supportive/Protective line item, subsidized care for those children in protective custody or at-risk of becoming so, was level-funded at \$48.34 million.

Amidst another rough budget year, early care and education programs have done relatively well.

Majority of Newly Poor Americans are Children

For the second year in a row the majority of newly poor Americans are children finds the Children's Defense Fund's analysis of recently released U.S. Census Bureau data. In 2003, earnings less than \$14,824 for a family of three were considered living in poverty. The number of people living in poverty rose to a total of 35.9 million, with 12.9 million of these being children. The racial group that experienced the largest increase was Latino; 30% of all Latino children currently live in poverty. Increasing by 232,000 children, one in three black children are poor. The Children's Defense Fund analysis also found that the majority of the newly poor children, half a million, live in a household with a single mother. The Children's Defense Fund ultimately advocates that the United States must commit itself to ending child poverty.

For additional information www.childrensdefense.org/familyincome/childpoverty/definingpoverty.pdf



Ideas for Action: Get Out the Vote

In addition to the voting classroom activities suggested in this issue's *In the Classroom*, there are many things you can do with parents and staff to promote the importance of voting. Running your own voter registration drive or extending your operating hours so that parents can get to the polls are two examples of the multitude of activities early care and education providers can do to get out the vote on Election Day 2004.

Run a voter registration drive.

Obtain voter registration forms and make them available to staff and parents. Registration forms can be obtained from the local election office or Boston VOTE and are available in multiple languages. Filled-in forms should then be sent to the city or town election office to complete

the registration process. Partner with the local Association for Education of Young Children (AEYC) or the League of Women Voters to conduct a voter registration drive at your center. Alternatively, work with these partners to host a voters registration booth at a regional conference.

Promote Election Day.

Hang flyers around your facility reminding parents and staff that November 2nd is Election Day and about the polls' voting hours. Extend your hours on Election Day to help parents



get to the polls before or after work. In Massachusetts the polls open no later than 7 am and close at 8 pm.

Help parents and staff identify their Representatives and where to vote at www.wheredoivotema.com. Direct new voters to www.bostonvote.org/info/newvoterinfo for answers to frequently asked questions. Obtain voter registration forms from:

Boston Elections Dept. (617) 635-4635 <http://www.cityofboston.gov/elections/>

Massachusetts Election Division 1-800-462-VOTE www.sec.state.ma.us/ele/

Boston VOTE (617) 542-VOTE www.bostonvote.org

Mental Health and ECE

While many studies have focused on the relationships between mothers and children, some have started to examine the relationships between all caregivers and children. Now, new research is looking at the role of the caregivers' mental health on the children in their care.

In the case of depression, several studies are showing that non-familial caregivers (those unrelated to the child they care for) who describe themselves as depressed or having symptoms of depression can be less attentive to a child's needs. As a result, these children become less likely to develop their full intellectual, social, and emotional capacities. As well, their language abilities do not develop as much as their peers.

A recent study by Drs. Bridget Hamre and Robert Pianta finds that certain

factors lessen the impact of depressed caregivers' compromised care and attention to children. These include the education level of the caregiver, the type of care setting (i.e. family child care, center-based care, etc.), and the time spent without another adult present.

According to the report:

- Depressed yet more educated caregivers are usually more responsive and sensitive to children than less educated and depressed caregivers.
- The less structured environment of family child care (FCC) settings allows the depressive symptoms of FCC providers to affect their quality of care more than it does in centers.
- The presence of another adult helps relieve the stress of a depressed caregiver and enables them to provide better care and attention to children.

Overall, these findings provide the groundwork for an important aspect of early childhood research that should examine further how prevalent depression is among caregivers, what is causing these depressive symptoms, and more importantly how those working in child care can work together to address the problem and foster nurturing relationships. In the short term, the study recommends providing stress-management classes and more specific guidelines on how to relate to children.

Source: Hamre, Bridget and Pianta, Robert (2004) *Self-reported depression in non-familial caregivers: relevance and associations with caregiver behavior in child-care settings* Early Childhood Research Quarterly 19:2, 297-318.

Good-bye from *Facts in Action*

Dear Facts in Action Readers:

Over four years ago, Associated Early Care and Education introduced its newsletter, *Facts in Action*, bringing a new tool to the early education and care field. The purpose has been to connect current research and policy developments to practice and advocacy in the field to promote higher quality programs and bring new advocates into the early care and education community.

In those four years, we have produced 24 newsletters, created a website resource that houses a wealth of research summaries and past articles, and grown to reach an audience of more than 4,500 early care and education practitioners in Massachusetts and across the country. We have reported on a wide range of issues – from the latest research on using computers in the classroom to studies on the impacts of Head Start, from quality improvement initiatives around the country to changes in investments in child care at the national and state level. We have brought you information on what you could do to become more effective for the children in your program, and more active advocates both in and out of the classroom. Along the way, we have appreciated rich feedback from you, our readers, including suggestions on improving the newsletter to make it more practical and useful for all practitioners. We've also enjoyed your encouragement, positive feedback, and the stories you've shared on the creative ways you put the newsletter to use – whether by sharing it with other staff, copying it for parents, or distributing it to friends and family. We are certainly glad that this newsletter has been such a positive resource for so many of you.

Sadly, this will be the last issue of *Facts in Action*. In these times of budget cuts and increasing demand on foundation dollars, it has become impossible to find the resources to continue producing the newsletter.

This is a crucial time for advocacy in the early care and education field. At the national level, the presidential election coming in November promises to have great impact on the services we provide. In addition, in Massachusetts the legislature has taken the historic step of creating a new and independent Board and Department of Early Education and Care. This next year of transition will hold many opportunities for advocates to get involved and weigh in on important issues as the new department takes shape. So we urge all of you to remain engaged. Continue to share information with your staff, your parents, friends and family. Visit the *Facts in Action* website, which will remain at www.factsinaction.org, to find information on research and other past articles. Stay informed about the latest research on children and what's happening at the local, state and national level – and continue to turn those facts into action to benefit children.

Thank you,

The Facts in Action Advisory
Committee



Websites to help you stay informed

National Child Care
Information Center
<http://nccic.org>

Child Care & Early
Education Research
Connections
[http://childcareresearch.org/
discover/indez.jsp](http://childcareresearch.org/discover/indez.jsp)

National Association for
the Education of Young
Children
<http://www.naeyc.org>

Zero to Three
<http://zerotothree.org>

Better Baby Care
<http://betterbabycare.org>

National Head Start
Association
<http://www.nhsa.org>

Massachusetts School-Age
Coalition
<http://www.mass-sac.org>

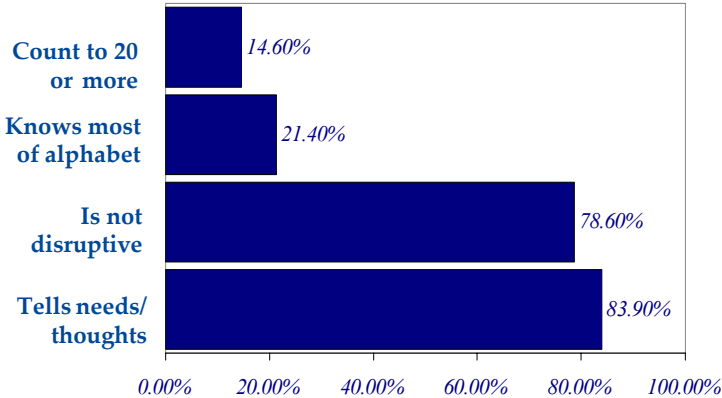
Achieve Boston
[http://
www.achieveboston.org](http://www.achieveboston.org)

NACCRA
<http://www.naccra.org>

Quick Facts to Clip and Quote

What do Kindergarten teachers perceive as most important for children's school readiness? In a recent study Kindergarten teachers ranked social/emotional skills as "essential" or "very important" more often than other academic skills. These findings draw attention to the importance of social/emotional development for school readiness.

Percentages of teachers indicating skills are "Very important" or "Essential" for children's school readiness



Source: Lin, H-L, F. Lawrence, & J. Gorrell. (2003) Kindergarten teachers' views of children's readiness for school. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 18, 225-237

Announcements

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Annual Conference and Expo 2004

Meet fellow pre-K - 3rd grade educators at the NAEYC annual conference and expo November 10-13, 2004 in Anaheim, CA. Spend the weekend engaging in discussions about new teaching strategies and current research while participating in sessions facilitated by renowned experts. Register soon to get the early bird registration price. For more information visit www.annualconference.naeyc.org

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