



# ed

early developments

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Improving  
Early Child Care  
and Education

Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill



## From the Director



Don Bailey


Nearly four years ago, our initial issue of **Early Developments** dealt with quality care. Since then, communities and states have begun implementing higher standards and more families have become aware of and are looking for higher quality. Attempts to improve quality take many forms and equally diverse is the research into the nature of care and outcomes for children and families.

Our research at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center (FPG) keeps pace with the times, and in this issue, we offer an update on our first issue. In an article beginning on page 6, we focus on how our own state – North Carolina – is making major changes in rating child care centers. The impact of these changes is examined at several levels: centers, the training of assessors, and state policy.

In a study discussed on page 4, FPG researchers found that a comprehensive community initiative can improve child care quality if significant funds and activities are focused on the issue. Quality was significantly related to the number of local quality improvement activities in which the child care centers participated.

Researchers also looked at one nationally recognized program – North Carolina’s Smart Start – and found that assistance to child care centers helps young children come to school ready to succeed if the assistance is directly related to quality improvement. This story begins on page 2.

We have also analyzed the relationship between state regulations and child care in four states. In an article on page 10, research indicates that policies set higher standards for child protection than for enhancement of development and learning. Analysts said, “Such regulations support the image of child care programs being a safe haven rather than for development enhancement. The limited requirements for child care personnel and for community interaction also encourage that image. These minimum standards departed substantially from professional judgements about what is needed in child care settings.”

In a survey, described in an article beginning on page 14, teachers of preschoolers report that they are able, generally, to engage in the practices they endorse. Some barriers were found: the most common were “children with behavior problems interfere” and a “lack of planning time.” This article is in our special section devoted to the National Center for Early Development & Learning. 


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**Child outcomes IMPROVE if aid to child care centers is DIRECTLY RELATED to quality improvement**

# Targeting the right

 assistance to child care centers helps young children come to school ready to succeed if the assistance is directly related to quality improvement, according to a new study conducted by researchers at the Frank Porter Graham Center at UNC-Chapel Hill.

Specifically, children who attended child care centers that participated in Smart Start activities directly related to improving quality had better cognitive and language skills when they entered kindergarten than did children from other child care centers or family child care homes. Additionally, fewer children in the Smart Start-Direct group were rated as having behavior problems by their kindergarten teachers.

Smart Start is a partnership between North Carolina state government and local leaders, service providers, and families to better serve children under six and their families. The state distributes money to county partnerships, which are non-profit corporations established specifically for the purpose of administering Smart Start activities. The primary goal is to ensure that all children enter school healthy and prepared to succeed.

This new study, which included a total of 508 children, looked at a group of children attending Smart Start centers and children attending other child care centers or family child care homes. Within the Smart Start group, researchers identified 142 children who attended centers participating in activities directly related to improving child care quality. The others in the Smart Start group attended centers with activities described as supportive. (See sidebar.)

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# stuff

“Findings suggest that program change efforts need to be directly related to improving the quality of child care if they are to have an effect on children’s school entry skills. To affect school entry skills, the type—not just quantity—of support is important,” said **Kelly Maxwell**, lead researcher on the project.

“The findings and recommendations from this study should not be construed to mean that local partnerships should provide none of the activities listed under the indirect category,” said **Donna Bryant**, principal investigator of the FPG-UNC Smart Start evaluation team.

“Ensuring that all teachers are certified in CPR, for instance, is important for children’s health, but should not be expected to raise children’s kindergarten entry skills,” she said.

Bryant said she thinks the local Smart Start partnerships need to pay more attention to the linkages between the activities they fund and the outcomes they intend to achieve. 

## Activities DIRECTLY RELATED to improving quality

- Enhanced subsidies for higher child care quality
- Enhanced subsidies for higher teacher education
- License upgrades
- On-site technical assistance
- Quality improvement and facility grants
- TEACH (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) scholarships, which provide education scholarships and support for release time for child care teachers.
- Teacher education scholarships
- Teacher salary supplements

## Activities INDIRECTLY RELATED to improving quality

- CPR training
- Developmental screenings
- Director administrative training
- Enrichment activities
- Expansion and start up grants
- Health and safety assessments
- Playground safety
- Teacher substitutes
- Transportation
- Specialists
- Subsidies (not tied to quality)
- Workshops

the right stuff

# Focused use of money, activities can improve child care quality




**A comprehensive community initiative can improve child care quality if significant funds and activities are focused on the issue, according to a study by researchers at the Frank Porter Graham Center at UNC-Chapel Hill.**

The quality of child care, as measured by the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS), at 180 child care centers in North Carolina was significantly higher in 1996 than 1994. The quality was significantly related to the number of local quality improvement activities in which the child care centers participated.

Some of the centers in this study were part of the state's Smart Start initiative; others were randomly sampled. The state gives money to county partnerships, which are established specifically for administering Smart Start. These partnerships plan how to best meet their own community needs, improve existing programs and design new ones.

Changes in quality were related to Smart Start participation. Quality ratings were specifically tied to the number of Smart Start quality improvement activities in which a center participated, the percent of full-funding allocation received by the county, and the proportion of Smart Start funds designated for child care. Many centers took advantage of multiple Smart Start opportunities.

Further, the rate of increase in the proportion of centers licensed at the higher AA level was higher in Smart Start counties than in other N.C. counties. 

#### Other findings:

- Overall, only 14% of the preschool classes in 1994 were providing good quality care. In 1996, 25% of the preschool classes were providing good quality care.
- Money spent on child care quality improvement efforts was related to ECERS quality, particularly for counties that received more Smart Start funding.

Researchers cautioned that there was still much room for improvement, however, with 75% of the centers still below the quality threshold.

*NOTE: Since data were collected for this study, North Carolina has directed that at least 70% of the Smart Start partnerships' budgets be allocated to child care.*

**Editor's note:** The above excerpts are from Effects of a Community Initiative on the Quality of Child Care by FPG researchers Donna M. Bryant, Kelly L. Maxwell & Margaret Burchinal. The article appeared in *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 1999, Vol. 14, pages 449-464.

# Recent Publications

**Issues in Disability & Health.** Simeonsson, R.J., & McDevitt, L.N. (Eds.). (1999). Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center.

**The Transition to Kindergarten.** Pianta, R.C., & Cox, M.J. (Eds.). Bailey, D.B. (Series Ed.). (1999). Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing.

**Family systems.** Winton, P.J., & Winton, R.E. (2000). In J. Solomon (Ed.), *Pediatric skills for occupational therapy assistants* (pp. 11-22). St. Louis, MO: Mosby.

**Moving towards cross-cultural competence in lifelong personnel development: A review of the literature.** Hains, A., Lynch, E., & Winton, P.J. (1999). Champaign, IL: Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Service Institute.

**Lives in Progress: Case Stories in Early Intervention.** McWilliam, P.J. (2000). Baltimore: Brookes Publishing.

**Effects of a community initiative on the quality of child care.** Bryant, D., Maxwell, K., & Burchinal, M. (1999). *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 14, 449-464.

**Quality of early childhood programs in inclusive and noninclusive settings.** Buysse, V., Wesley, P. W., Bryant, D., & Gardner, D. (1999). *Exceptional Children*, 65, 301-314.

**The environment and mental retardation.** Bryant, D., & Maxwell, K. (1999). *International Review of Psychiatry*, 11, 56-67.

**A review of interventions for preschoolers with aggressive and disruptive behavior.** Bryant, D., Vizzard, L. H., Willoughby, M., & Kupersmidt, J. (1999). *Early Education and Development*, 10(1), 47-68.

**Qualitative analysis of Latino parents' religious interpretations of their child's disability.** Skinner, D., Rodriguez, P., & Bailey, D.B. (1999). *Journal of Early Intervention*, 22, 271-285.

**Educating exceptional children** (9th ed.). Kirk, S., Gallagher, J., & Anastasiow, N. (2000). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

**Policy and the transition process.** Gallagher, J. (1999). In R. Pianta and M. Cox (Eds.), *The transition to kindergarten* (pp. 351-362). Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing.

**Knowledge versus policy in special education.** Gallagher, J. (1999). In R. Gallimore, L. Bernheimer, D. MacMillan, D. Speece, & S. Vaughn (Eds.), *Developmental perspectives on children with high-incidence disabilities* (pp. 245-261). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

**Unthinkable thoughts.** Gallagher, J. (2000). *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 44(1), 5-12.

**Child care licensing regulations and child care quality in four states.** Gallagher, J., Rooney, R., & Campbell, S. (1999). *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 14(3), 313-333.

**Policy options for early childhood: A model for decision making.** Gallagher, J. & Rooney, R. (1999). *Early Education and Development*, 10(1), 69-83.

**Early development, temperament, and functional impairment in autism and fragile X syndrome.** Bailey, D.B., Hatton, D.D., Mesibov, G., & Ament, N. (2000). *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, (30), 557-567.

**Taking the Lead: 1999 Highlights from 10 local education agencies serving preschool children with disabilities.** Weston, M. (1999). Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, FPG Child Development Center.

**It's only natural...to have early intervention in the environments where it's needed.** McWilliam, R. A. (1999, September). *Top Notes* (Alabama Early Intervention Newsletter).


**Integrating therapies into the classroom.** Scott, S. M., McWilliam, R. A., & Mayhew, L. (1999). *Young Exceptional Children*, 2(3), 15-24.

**Interpreting infant conceptual categorization.** Reznick, J. S. (2000). *Journal of Cognition and Development*, 1, 63-66.

**Can prenatal caffeine exposure affect behavioral inhibition?** Reznick, J. S. (1999). *Review of General Psychology*, 3, 118-132.

**Influences on maternal attribution of infant intentionality.** Reznick, J. S. (1999). In P. D. Zelazo, J. W. Astington, & D.R. Olson (Eds.), *Developing theories of intention: Social understanding and self control* (pp. 243-267). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

**Measuring infant spatial working memory using a modified delayed-response procedure.** Schwartz, B. B., & Reznick, J. S. (1999). *Memory*, 7, 1-17.

**What twins can tell us about the development of intelligence — a case study.** Reznick, J. S., & Corley, R. (1999). In M. Anderson (Ed.), *The Development of intelligence* (pp. 105-136). East Sussex, UK: Psychology Press. 

# Reaching for the Stars



**The rated license or star system, as it's called, adds three voluntary levels of quality to the two basic levels previously available in North Carolina. Centers and family child care homes can earn licenses with up to five stars based on a point system composed of three components: staff and director education, compliance history, and program standards.**

**Although the rated license does not solve all problems associated with attaining quality in child care, it does help parents become informed consumers who can choose better care for their children.**



## The new star system affects nearly 9,000 centers in North Carolina that care for nearly a third of the state's children under five

*"Next on the video is an art activity. Ready? Roll the tape."*

*A group of children are playing with modeling dough at a picnic table in a yard. A teacher shows how to use a thick dowel to roll the dough flat. Some of the preschoolers pay attention while others smack their dough delightedly with their hands. Everyone seems to be having a fine time.*

*Those watching the tape include five women from various areas of North Carolina who are beginning training on using the Family Day Care Rating Scale (FDCRS) to judge the quality of a family child care home.*

*After a minute or two, the video stops. Cathy Riley, one of the trainers, says, "All right. Now rate the center on 'Art,' which is item 19 in your video training guide." The trainees silently grade the family child care home on art. Then they discuss their rankings. Most give it a four. They discuss whether they could say with certainty that the children were offered art at least three times a week and how creative the teacher was allowing the children to be.*

*At one point, Trainer Riley says, "You rate what you observe."*

*In fact, she adds, "When you first go into the family child care home in the morning, tell the owner/operator that you will want to observe everything. And that includes preparing the food, diapering, taking children to the bathroom, naps – everything."*

*The group then re-starts the video to find out how experts had rated this home's art. They had given it a four.*

Using videotape taken in a child care facility to learn how to judge the quality of care is the start of intensive training for these North Carolina Rated License Assessors. They are part of a cadre being trained to implement a new rated license adopted last year in North Carolina.

After video training, trainees complete a number of live observations under the direction of the trainers from FPG, **Lisa Waller, Cathy Riley and Kris Fulkerson**. The overall training is directed by **Thelma Harms and Debby Cryer**, co-authors of the environment rating scales, who also conduct the final practice observations before certifying that trainees are ready to be official assessors for the North Carolina rated license.

The assessors must reach a reliability of 85% (within one point) on each of the four environment rating scales before they can conduct assessments of child care programs for infants and toddlers, preschoolers, and school-age children in centers, schools and family child care homes. After each live practice observation, the trainer and trainees compare their scores and talk about discrepancies of more than one point.

The accuracy and objectivity of the assessors is key to the credibility of any certification system. As one trainee put it, "The child care providers really want to know who we are, what our training is, and what level of reliability we've been trained to. I tell them we've been trained to 85% accuracy by the authors of the scales. That seems to carry some weight."

In addition to providing the initial training, FPG trainers conduct a reliability check on each assessor at the sixth assessment completed with each scale. This check assures that assessors maintain their level of reliability. So far, 19 assessors have been hired across the state, some full time and some part time. The new system affects the nearly 9,000 centers in the state that care for nearly a third of the state's children under five. It does not change the minimum standards for child care, but it does add higher gradations in standards.

The rated license or star system, as it's called, adds three voluntary levels of quality to the two basic levels previously available in the state. Centers and family child care homes can earn licenses with up to five stars based on a point system composed of three components: staff and director education, compliance history, and program standards.

Today's training class will help these assessors determine the average score on the FDCRS rating scale used as part of the program standards component for family child care homes. The other scales are the **Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale**,

(continued on page 8)



Sample

State of North Carolina  
Department of Health and Human Services  
Division of Child Development

**Three Star Child Care License**

ABC CHILD CARE CENTER  
123 ANYWHERE ST  
RALEIGH, NC 27777

Sample

**In each area rated, this facility earned:**

Staff Education: 2 out of 5 points

Program Standards: 2 out of 5 points

Compliance History: 5 out of 5 points

**Total: 9 out of 15 points**

Issued to: CHILD CARE, SUZIE  
Age Range: 0 - 12 years  
Capacity: 58  
Effective Date: July 1, 1999  
Restrictions:  
Daytime care only  
Children in care on ground level only

ID Number: 92001033  
Type of Facility: Center

In accordance with Article 7, Chapter 110 of the North Carolina General Statutes, the above named child care facility is issued a rated license. Licenses vary from an overall rating of one through five stars, based upon their cumulative points in the three categories above.

This license must be displayed in a prominent place so it may be available and shown to each child's parent or guardian when the child cannot be bought, sold or transferred. It is valid only for the location/address noted above. This license is the property of the State of North Carolina and will be returned to the Division of Child Development in the event of termination or revocation.

*Note: An actual license will include original signatures of the parties authorized to issue the license.*

John Doe, M.D., Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services
Jane Doe, Director, Division of Child Development

Graphic: TurnerMcCollum

**Centers and family child care homes can earn licenses with up to five stars based on a point system composed of three components:**

1. staff and director education,
2. compliance history, and
3. program standards.



(continued from page 7) **Infant-Toddler Environmental Rating Scale** and the **School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale**.

Whichever scale is being used, it is particularly important because it is based on observation in classrooms. Observation with a valid and reliable instrument is used to show the ongoing daily quality of care and education experienced by children.

The star system, which is administered by the N.C. Division of Child Development, was designed to give parents a better idea of how good their child care center is, as well as giving center operators clear indicators to guide program improvement.

“Research at FPG shows that many parents find it difficult to tell the difference between good programs and bad programs,” said Cryer. If parents can’t really tell what the quality is, there’s a problem with the consumer information that parents have.” She said that according to one study, parents on average spend less than one minute a day in their child’s program, making it difficult for them to know what happens to their child once they have left.

The format of the new license makes it easy to see at a glance how many of the five stars a facility has earned, because only the earned stars are filled in [See picture of sample license on this page]. State officials say they’re hoping that parents will ask what’s required to fill in the rest of the stars.

The new license has specific requirements for each component, designed to improve the quality of care for children. When centers and homes receive their star rating from the licensing consultant, they also receive a comprehensive report on every component. The report includes written detailed feedback from the assessor who observed in their facility about areas of strength and areas where improvement is needed. This detailed report gives the child care providers a blueprint for improvement.

Getting a five star license requires centers and family child care homes to provide high quality in many areas including: protection of children’s health and safety, organization of the caregiving space, provision of appropriate materials for play and learning, practice of positive and supportive interaction with children, and stimulation of language and thinking skills through engaging activities.

Each child care facility will have different areas of strengths and weaknesses. Some may need to make or purchase additional materials while others may need to seek training for their staff so that the materials they have will be put to better use.

Some may need to improve their classroom discipline techniques while others may need to establish better relationships with parents.

Although spending more is not the determining factor in getting a good rating, the director of the N.C. Division of Child Development, **Stephanie Fanjul**, said the state is sensitive to the fact that meeting higher standards may cost more.


That's one reason that multiple stars are voluntary. A center can operate with only one star, which means minimum requirements are met. Centers that had the old "A" rating automatically get one star. The state has allocated \$15 million a year so that centers can improve. This money goes to centers that already receive state subsidies. Operators can earn between \$14 and \$25 extra per subsidized child per month, depending on how many stars they have.

In addition, millions of dollars have been funneled into the state's Smart Start partnership system. [See related stories beginning on page 2 and page 4.] For example, in Wake County, centers that add more stars could receive between 5% and 40% more money per child through Smart Start.

Some critics have said that while the five-star system is a good start, it's still weak in some areas. "We're especially lax on ratios, group size, and especially teacher education," Cryer said. "I go to centers and I realize that many staff members lack training and some have been hired on the spot, with no reference checks."

Studies show that across the US, child care providers earn an average of only \$7.50 an hour or \$13,125 a year. This is considered a major reason for the problem in recruiting and retaining qualified staff. Turnover in child care staff ranges from 25-50% nationally.

Fanjul said she wishes the state could do more. "I wish we financed it. I wish we'd make it possible for every child to get high quality care and for every child care teacher to be paid appropriately. We're not there yet."

Although the rated license does not solve all problems associated with attaining quality in child care, it does help parents become informed consumers who can choose better care for their children. 

**If you want to know more**

NCEDL Spotlight #18:  
Teacher education, wages key to outcomes.  
< [www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl/PDFs/spot18.pdf](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl/PDFs/spot18.pdf) >

NCEDL Spotlight #2: Quality Child Care  
< [www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl/Pages/spot12.htm](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl/Pages/spot12.htm) >

NCEDL Policy Brief on Quality Care  
< [www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl/PDFs/brief1.pdf](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl/PDFs/brief1.pdf) >

*The children of the cost, quality, & outcomes study go to school: Executive summary.* Peisner-Feinberg, E. S., Clifford, R. M., Burchinal, M. R., Culkin, M., Howes, C., Kagan, S. L., Yazejian, N., Byler, P., & Rustici, J. (1999). Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, FPG.  
< [www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl/Pages/cq.htm](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl/Pages/cq.htm) >



'A safe haven' is just the beginning in child care and education

# SAFE HAVEN

"As we enter the 21st century it is clear that we are changing our view of early child care from one of a safe haven to one of developmental enhancement. We need to make sure that our regulations reflect that changed view."

— Jim Gallagher



*A study of child care regulations in four states – California, Colorado, Connecticut, and North Carolina – shows that state policies generally set higher standards for child protection than for enhancement of development, according to a new study by researchers at the Frank Porter Graham Center at UNC-Chapel Hill.*

"Such regulations support the image of child care programs as being a safe haven rather than for development enhancement. The limited requirements for child care personnel and for community interaction also encourage that image," said **Jim Gallagher**, one of the researchers on the study.

He said, "These minimum standards departed substantially from professional judgements about what is needed in child care settings."

The study analyzed the rules and regulations for center-based care from the four states that had previously been studied for the national Cost, Quality and Outcomes study.

Investigators developed and applied rubrics to compare policies with recommended practices in the areas of structure, operations, personnel and context.

Researchers did a separate analysis comparing regulations for protecting the child versus regulations for enhancing child development.

"While we recognize that state standards represent minimum requirements, it is still important to focus on what we consider as "minimum" for

child care and child development," said **Robin Rooney**, another researcher with the project.

It appears easier, from these findings, to establish standards for child protection than for enhancement of child development, she said.

"This may be because there is a strong consensus about just what is required for protection of safety and freedom from abuse than about what is needed to enhance development, or it can also mean that, as a society, we are not quite determined to use child care programs to enhance child development through regulations. We can easily agree on safety standards, but we may differ from one another on how to best help the child reach higher levels of cognitive, social, and motor development," said Rooney.

These findings indicate that the minimum standards for these four states do not include many standards for child development that would be considered important by professionals in the field, Gallagher said.

"While we should be cautious in assuming a causal relationship between minimal state standards and the number of inadequate or mediocre child care settings that we found in these four states (as well as some outstanding programs), it seems likely that hard pressed directors of child care centers will meet the minimum standards first and then consider what else they should be doing," he said.

"If we do wish for a strong role for child care centers to enhance development, then some higher and more specific development enhancement standards need to be written," said Gallagher.

## Researcher's recommendations

### Eliminate lowest standards

These analyses point out that “we still are a long way from matching child care regulations with what we know as quality. A strong step in the right direction could be made by eliminating some of the lowest standards that are now considered acceptable.”

The researchers said, “We should recognize that policymakers might dilute standards to avoid the political ramifications of shutting down non-responsive child care centers. However, state licensing agencies could offer incentives for meeting higher standards through increased public subsidies for personnel preparation and by delaying the time that child care providers have in meeting high standards so that they can be reasonably reached. For example: By the year 2004, we will expect directors to have advanced levels of preparation in child development administration.”

### More precise language

Regulators should describe the practices they intend to promote. Expectations for health and safety practices were more frequently described in detail, while other quality practices – particularly those related to child development – were referred to vaguely, or not at all.

To link policy with quality practices, such as specific levels of personnel training, access to stimulating materials, and positive relationships with families, descriptive language and examples of how that expectation might be implemented are needed. Without language to describe quality practices, such practices may be assumed to be optional.


Gallagher said, “A message needs to be sent through our regulations that we expect children to have positive experiences that enhance development in child care as well as keeping children healthy and safe.”

### Encourage developmental enhancement

One important role for professional groups and associations at the state and federal level would be to review periodically the rules and standards for child care to assure that they match current thinking in the field.

One of the eight National Goals in Education endorsed by the 50 governors and the president was that “all children should arrive at school ready to learn.” Gallagher said, “As we enter the 21st century it is clear that we are changing our view of early child care from one of a safe haven to one of developmental enhancement. We need to make sure that our regulations reflect that changed view.”

Personnel requirements (higher level of professional preparation) should be made explicit.

Gallagher and Rooney conducted the research for the National Center for Early Development & Learning based at UNC-Chapel Hill. 

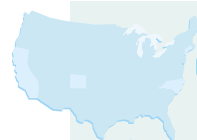
### If you want to know more:

Kagan, S.L., & Cohen, N.E. (1997). *Not by chance: Creating an early care and education system for America's children*. Executive summary. New Haven, CT: Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy at Yale.

Love, J., Schochet, P.Z., & Meckstrom, A.L. (1996). *Are they in any real danger? What research does – and doesn't – tell us about child care quality and children's well being*. Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research Inc.

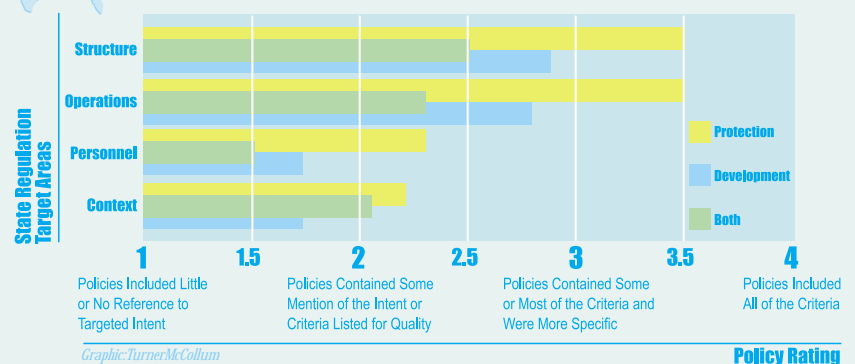
National Association for the Education of Young Children. (1998). NAEYC position statement on licensing and public regulation of early childhood programs. *Young Children*, 43-50.

Child care licensing regulations and childcare quality in four states. Gallagher, J., Rooney, R., & Campbell, S. (1999). *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 14(3), 313-333.



## Content Analysis Summary of State Regulations

(Composite Rating of four states: California, Colorado, Connecticut, North Carolina)



Graphic: TurnerMcCollum

The above content analysis summary of state regulations is a composite rating of four states – California, Colorado, Connecticut, and North Carolina. For each target area, researchers developed separate rubrics for differential analysis of *child protection* (health and safety) and the enhancement of *child development* aspects of the policies.

**Making Transition  
Connections:  
A collaboration of  
families and schools**



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with your email address.

or

email Loyd Little at  
<[loyd\\_little@unc.edu](mailto:loyd_little@unc.edu)> and  
ask to receive the ENewsletter.

**T**he Kindergarten Transition Project at the National Center for Early Development & Learning has developed a school-based approach designed to enhance connections among children, families, teachers and peers during the transition to kindergarten.

University of Virginia Researchers **Marcia Kraft-Sayre** and **Robert Pianta** say these connections can be important supports to children and families during this period of change and reflect recent attempts to describe what "ready schools" can do to ease transitions (National Education Goals Panel, 1997).

Activities are intended to increase familiarity with school, provide for consistent expectations between home and school, and make children and families more comfortable interacting with school.

"In addition, these relationships enable kindergarten teachers to more easily, and earlier, use the resources of families to support children's competence in school," Kraft-Sayre said.

**How the program was developed**

Researchers collaborated with preschools, elementary schools, a summer pre-kindergarten program, and parents to learn about current transition practices, and then cooperatively designed a set of activities to foster positive transition experiences.

Regular meetings were held with teachers, family support workers, and principals to discuss factors that enhanced or hindered these kindergarten transition activities. In addition, families were asked about their experiences with their children's transition to kindergarten.

**Recommended activities**

"A package of activities affecting many connections – child-teacher, family-teacher, child-peer, and others – is more likely to support a successful transition, than any one activity alone. For example, children in one school system

are enrolled in preschool with peers with whom they will go to elementary school," Pianta said.

By arranging with elementary school principals and teachers for these children to be in the same kindergarten classroom together, peer relationships developed in preschool can be carried over into kindergarten.

Several preschools promote family-school connections by providing family support services. A family support worker, who is assigned to the preschool and elementary school, meets regularly with families in their homes, connects them to community resources when needed, provides opportunities for involvement in groups to discuss shared interests and address transition issues, and works to engage families in positive relationships with school.

Meetings between parents and kindergarten teachers before the onset of kindergarten, are arranged by the teacher and family support worker to help establish parent-teacher communication. The family support worker can be a bridge of continuity for families as their children transition to kindergarten and by accompanying them during visits to the elementary school when needed.

An additional connection involves linking pre-kindergarten children with their anticipated elementary school through opportunities for rising kindergarten children to visit their classroom in the spring before their kindergarten year.

Children from four-year-old classes and from special education classrooms are included, and can visit the kindergarten classroom, tour the school, participate in recess and eat lunch in the cafeteria.

Familiarizing children with their kindergarten teacher and specific classroom activities prior to school entry, in conjunction with a number of other transition activities reduces uncertainty for the child.

Finally, said Pianta, perhaps the most important activity to enhance kindergarten transitions has been collaborative group meetings where key players in the transition process – the

teachers, principals, and family workers – all work together.

These meetings allow discussion of problems and solutions and build connections among program staff. For example, preschool and kindergarten staff, with the mutually shared goal of having preschool peers together in kindergarten, are working together to achieve this goal when kindergarten placement decisions are made.

### Collaboration is fundamental

The researchers said collaboration among everyone involved is fundamental to both the development and implementation of a kindergarten transition program.

### Suggested family/school connections

- Arrange a time for parents to meet with the preschool and kindergarten teachers to discuss the expectations of kindergarten and their children's specific needs.
- Organize an informal dinner with parents and kindergarten teachers in conjunction with school open houses or back to school nights.
- Place children with kindergarten teachers who taught their older siblings to build upon pre-existing family-teacher bonds.
- Encourage families to engage their children in literacy activities at home, such as reading together.

### Suggested child/school connections

- Provide opportunities for children to interact directly with their anticipated kindergarten teachers by arranging visits to kindergarten classrooms during story time, center time, recess, or a special school function.
- Familiarize children with their kindergarten teachers by reviewing their names, showing their pictures, and discussing what the kindergarten classroom will be like.
- Orient preschool children to the expectations of kindergarten, discuss the rules for learning and behaving, such as walking in a "kindergarten line."



### Suggested peer connections

- Arrange for children to interact with future kindergarten classmates at preschool or outside the classroom setting.
- Identify a current kindergartner to serve as "buddy" to a preschooler. Plan visits to the kindergarten classroom when the kindergartner "buddy" reads a story, demonstrates how to play a game, or shows the younger child how to use the classroom computer.

### Suggested program connections

- Arrange discussions between preschool and kindergarten personnel about classroom practices and specific needs of individual children. 🌀

#### If you want to know more

Pianta, R. C., & Walsh, D. J. (1996). *High-risk children in schools: Creating sustaining relationships*. New York: Routledge, Kegan-Paul.

*The transition to kindergarten*. Pianta, R.C., & Cox, M.J. (Eds). Bailey, D.B. (Series Ed.). (1999). Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children, Youth and Families, Head Start Bureau. (1996). *Effective transition practices: Facilitating continuity: Training guide for the Head Start learning community*. Aspen, CO: Systems Corporation.

## "Popsicle night"

### promotes transition in a fun way

The following vignette exemplifies the transition activities used by NCEDL researchers in the kindergarten transition project:

During the summer prior to the start of kindergarten, a playground "popsicle night" was offered for the rising kindergartners, parents, siblings and other family members. This informal, low-key activity enabled the children and their families to experience the school in a fun and non-demanding manner.

It was held from 6:30-7:30 PM, so that parents who worked during the day could attend. Unlike a kindergarten orientation, there was no formal agenda. Elementary school personnel and the family worker joined families on the playground and answered questions.

For example, one parent asked about immunizations for school entry. The principal explained the process and offered to follow up with the family.

The turnout for this was actually better than for the more formal kindergarten orientation at one of the schools. Several of the children were initially hesitant to play and stayed close by their families, but quickly warmed up as their preschool friends arrived. Children were able to reconnect with preschool peers, and become familiar with the school playground.

Families met other families of classmates of the children, and were able to interact informally with school staff. All and all, this activity helped ease the transition to school in a relaxed and fun way.

**Preschool teachers report engaging in practices they endorse**



**A** national survey of 1,902 preschool teachers reveals that they are able, generally, to engage in the practices they endorse.

Teachers were given a list of twenty-one practices and asked to rate to what extent a practice happened in their classroom and to what extent they would want the practice to occur “in a perfect world.” Few discrepancies were found between reported and ideal practices.

Although teachers endorsed a variety of practices, on most items teachers said that they are able to use the practices they endorse, according to **Diane Early** and **Richard Clifford** at UNC-Chapel Hill and **Carollee Howes** at UCLA who conducted the study for NCEDL.

**Smallest discrepancies**

On many items teachers reported almost no difference between their practices and their ideals. The four items with the smallest discrepancies between beliefs and practices were:

- All children in the group have to take part in all activities.
- Children practice skills on worksheets.
- Children are involved in group lessons.
- Children spend time playing.

**Largest discrepancies**

Teachers reported that in a perfect world, they would engage in some practices slightly more. The four items with the largest discrepancies between beliefs and practices were:

- We have a daily science experience.
- Children have time to be alone when they want it.
- We have a daily math experience.
- We have a daily music activity.



**Demographic variables**

There were significant differences found in examining which teachers endorsed group-centered beliefs based on the sponsorship of their center, said Early. Group-centered beliefs are those that encourage all children to engage in the same activities at the same time and at the same pace. It is the opposite of child-centered beliefs that encourage individualized activities and pacing.

Teachers in public schools, Head Starts, and other non-profit centers endorse group-centered beliefs significantly less than do teachers in religiously affiliated or for-profit settings, the data indicated. Additionally, teachers with more education endorse group-centered beliefs less.

To measure group-centered beliefs, teachers were asked a series of questions about how often they believe certain practices would take place in a perfect world. Teachers with more education had lower scores on the measure of group-centered beliefs.

Interestingly, teachers with larger groups endorse fewer group-centered practices, said Clifford. There was no relation between the amount of time a teacher has worked at the center and her group-centered beliefs.



## Conclusions and implications

Early childhood teachers largely see themselves as engaging in the practices that they endorse, said Early. On average, they do not report many barriers to conducting their classes in the ways they think are best (as evidenced both by the small discrepancies between their reported practices and beliefs and by the low ratings they give to the barriers listed in the survey).

Different teachers do endorse different practices, especially with regard to group-centered versus child-centered practices. Although teachers uniformly agree that reading, math, science and music activities should take place daily, there is not uniform agreement with respect to beliefs about practices like involving children in group instruction and insisting that children complete all activities.



Attention should be paid to helping teachers adopt knowledge and values related to child-centered practices, Early and Clifford said. Other research has indicated that child-centered practices predict the best outcomes for children. These data indicate that teachers who endorse such practices report being able to engage in them. However, teachers do not uniformly endorse child-centered practices. Changing teachers' knowledge and values may be a key to improving practice. 🌀

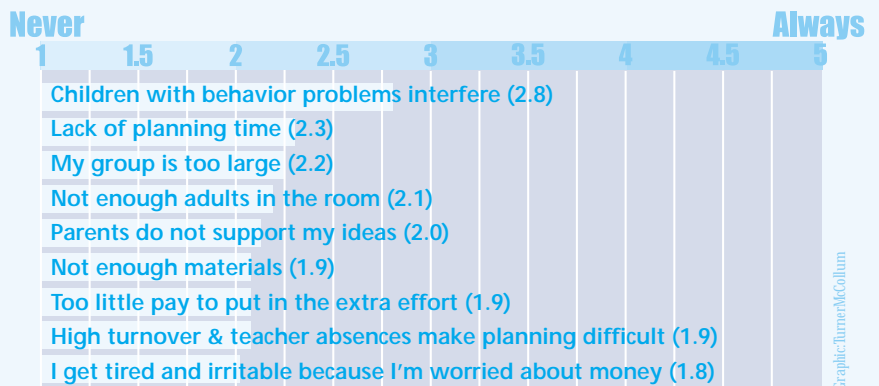


## Barriers to endorsed practices

The listing below indicates the top-rated barriers to engaging in endorsed practice. Not surprisingly, all the barriers were given relatively low ratings. Earlier, the answers to questions about practices and beliefs indicated that teachers see themselves as employing the practices they endorse.

### Most commonly cited barriers

The survey asked teachers, "How often do the following prevent you from teaching/caring for your group in the way you would in a perfect world?"



Graphic: TurnerMcCollum

**New book examines critical issues in transitions**



**This book contains ten chapters presented at a national transitions synthesis conference sponsored by NCEDE. An additional five chapters were written after the conference, and reflect the discussions and deliberations of the synthesis groups.**


416 pages  
Brookes Publishing Co., Baltimore, MD

“**O**ur aim in this book is to provide a comprehensive treatment of an area of knowledge that has been neglected for too long and is need of systematic attention.... We want to help organize and frame the debate on critical issues regarding the early primary education of an increasingly diverse group of young children.”

The above quote is from the preface of **The Transition to Kindergarten**, which has been published as the first in a series by the National Center for Early Development & Learning at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Editors **Robert Pianta** of the University of Virginia and **Martha Cox** of UNC-Chapel Hill said, “The education of young children is receiving an unprecedented level of attention in the United States and, for good or bad, will be a focus of educational reform as the twenty-first century begins. Understanding and influencing the transition from home to school, from child care to school, and from early childhood to elementary programs will likely be a focus of a great deal of attention in the policy, research, and practice communities.”

**Chapter subjects**

1. “An Ecological Approach to Kindergarten Transition” provides a conceptual model for looking at transitions.
2. “Early Schooling and Social Stratification” looks at how early school experiences provide advantages for some children and disadvantages for others that then reinforce the sorting of individuals into the hierarchical layers characteristic of societies.
3. “Assessing Readiness” examines the national “ready for school” goal and other key issues regarding readiness.
4. “Promoting Education Equity and Excellence in Kindergarten” looks at demographic trends and educational experiences by groups of children from different backgrounds and different kindergarten programs they attend.
5. “Diverse Perspectives on Kindergarten Contexts and Practices” focuses on research related to teachers’ practices in kindergarten classrooms.
6. “Families and Schools: Rights, Responsibilities, Resources, and Relationships” reviews and identifies critical issues for families and schools in the context of children’s transition to school.
7. “Changing Schools for Changing Families” examines the nature of, and barriers to, parent involvement and innovations in school-based support for families.
8. “Beginning School for Children at Risk” reviews why the transition to school for children in poverty is considered important for scientific inquiry, education improvement and societal concern.
9. “Children with Disabilities in Early Elementary School” looks at research and practices related to the transition to school-age services for young children with disabilities and their families.
10. “Kindergarten Practices with Children from Low-Income Families” discusses research on low-income children and families and implications for schools and classrooms.
11. “Research on the Transition to Kindergarten” examines how research design and methodology constrain the current knowledge base on transitions.
12. “Personnel Preparation and the Transition to Kindergarten” suggests a rethinking of the preparation of teachers and other staff serving children and their families.
13. “The Practice of Effective Transition” offers recommendations and rationales for practices for those involved in children’s transition into kindergarten.
14. “Policy and the Transition Process” discusses specific issues with policy implications and advances a set of principles for analyzing policy related to transitions.
15. “The Changing Nature of the Transition to School” suggests significant trends for the next decade in relation to shifting demography, education of young children in public schools, and the changing nature of families and schools. 



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