

Annual Forum October 7, 2004

PK - 3: A Strategy to End the Need for Social Promotion and Improve Academic Achievement

2004 Annual Forum Transcript

Scandinavia House, New York City

October 7, 2004

Welcome: What is PK - 3?

Ruby Takanishi, President Foundation for Child Development

RUBY TAKANISHI: Welcome to the Foundation for Child Development. I'd like to welcome you to our first FCD Annual Forum which continues the tradition of our FCD Council Symposia. Many of you think that you are attending the FCD Annual Council Symposium, so I'm going to give a brief explanation.

Within the last year FCD made some bylaw changes that resulted in the FCD council becoming an advisory body. We took that opportunity to rename the symposium, and in renaming it we hope to signal a move from talking heads to exchange and open discussion.

I'd like to thank the staff and board members who organized this event. Arthur Greenberg of the FCD board served as an advisor in developing the program. Harold Leibovitz, who is FCD's founding Director of Strategic Communications, took major responsibility for staffing this forum. And the support of Fasaha Traylor, Mark Bogosian and Roz Rosenberg brought it all together. So I'd like to thank the entire FCD staff for excellent work.

[APPLAUSE]

I would also like to recognize Eleanor T. Elliot who chaired all of the FCD symposia over seven years. This year Ellie's here, and all she needs to do is relax and enjoy herself.

Thank you very much for coming today. Harold has organized a great group of people with direct experience in improving the first years of education for children. Their conversation will focus on how individual schools, school districts and states are now reshaping the first level of public education for all children beginning by age three or four with universal pre-K, followed by full school day Kindergarten and connecting both pre-K and full day Kindergarten with the standards, curriculum, instruction and assessment in grades one to three.

All of these levels should be integrated with well prepared teachers who are deeply knowledgeable and respectful of the characteristics and developmental pathways of children from birth to eight.

The Foundation for Child Development calls this our "MAP initiative." It's an acronym meaning "mapping the PK-3 continuum." We believe that there is reason to hope that a well aligned PK-3 first school can provide all children with the platform for learning that they require to succeed academically and socially and to become productive citizens.

At this time, and over many decades, the National Assessment of Education Progress continues to document unacceptably low levels of literacy among low income children including African-American and Latino children at the fourth grade. The significance of these unacceptable performance levels is that many children are denied opportunities to be productive adults in a global, competitive and information-rich workplace.

Research also demonstrates that children who do not attain good reading and math skills by the third grade will experience great difficulties catching up in middle and high schools.

PK-3 is one of their best chances for a good life.

The FCD board believes that the American education system is way behind the times, certainly based on what we know about how children learn and based on social changes in society. We are way behind the times because we do not support universal access to publicly supported education until the age of six - the first grade - for most children in the United States.

And, at that point, too many children are left behind. We at FCD see PK-3 as a solution that can end the need for social promotion in grade three and make a significant contribution in narrowing the unacceptable and persistent achievement gaps. Apparently our mayor, Mayor Bloomberg, also has a similar plan.

We also believe that PK-3 serves as an important social strategy to increase opportunities for young children growing up in immigrant families. These children, 93 percent of whom are below the age of six, are citizens of the United States and constitute one out of five children nationwide. They are the majority of children in New York City and in other major areas of the country as well as in some states.

A major effort supported by foundations is the *Para Nuestro Ninos* initiative. This is a new national task force on the early education of Hispanics led by Dean Eugene Garcia at Arizona State University, which will be taking a birth to eight approach.

Although the task force is focused on Latino children, FCD sees it as informing the education of all newcomer children whose families come to America seeking education and economic opportunity from over 100 countries in the world.

I'm very pleased that Rachel Jones, a senior journalist and national desk reporter for National Public Radio, will be moderating today's discussion. Her very impressive bio is in your packet of materials. But I think that the most important part of Rachel's history is that she was in the first Head Start cohort in Cairo, Illinois and has a distinguished record of achievement. I'm very pleased to turn this forum over to Rachel Jones.

[APPLAUSE]