

Annual Forum October 20, 2005
Making the Most of our Early Education Investments

Welcome: Ruby Takanishi, President and CEO, Foundation for Child Development

Hi everyone and welcome. I am Ruby Takanishi of the Foundation for Child Development. I want to welcome you all to our ninth FCD Annual Forum. Last year's forum focused on the idea of PK-3. This year, the forum will focus on the actual implementation of PK-3. On behalf of FCD and staff, I would like to thank Harold Leibovitz and Mark Bogosian for organizing this event, Roz Rosenberg for staff support, and Avni Bhatia for designing the graphics.

Today Last year's forum focused on the idea of PK-3. This year, the forum will focus on the actual implementation of PK-3.

What you will hear today is that PK-3, that is Prekindergarten to third grade, is not a theory and it's not a fantasy. PK-3 is already being implemented by schools throughout the country because of their interests in developing children's learning skills early.

Along with the three approaches you will be hearing from the panel today, are additional efforts described in the FCD annual report that is included in your packet.

We, as a foundation, have a tradition of commissioning independent journalists to write essays regarding key topics of concern. Bill Graves, a distinguished journalist from Portland, Oregon wrote this year's essay and presents a very intriguing frame for looking at PK-3 as the base camp for public education.

It's a very interesting way of looking at the initiative. Not only is PK-3 being implemented but also the knowledge base or the empirical support for PK-3 is growing.

In a new FCD working paper, authors Arthur Reynolds, Kathryn Magnuson and Suh-Ruu Ou conclude that children that participate in PK-3 programs obtain higher achievement levels and have lower rates of remedial education. This new analysis, which is based on the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Kindergarten (ECLS-K), supports conclusions from the existing but familiar longitudinal studies from Abecedarian and the Chicago Child Parent Centers.

The authors conclude that children who participate in PK-3 programs have higher school achievement and adjustment by the time they reach third grade than those who do not. They also conclude that the benefits obtained from low-income children are especially high. They caution that their report is a descriptive analysis and not causal and offer four recommendations on how to follow up on their analysis. I will now talk briefly about their recommendations and what we at the Foundation for Child Development are doing to implement their recommendations.

Their first recommendation is to disseminate programs based on principles of effectiveness. FCD and the National Association of Elementary School Principals have identified such programs throughout the country. These programs, which are living examples of PK-3, will be featured on our website in the upcoming months.

The second recommendation is to use the proven cost-effective benefits of PK-3 to prioritize resources. One of the things we are doing is providing funding to Robert Lynch, an economist at the Economic Policy Institute to do cost-benefit analyses for Chicago Parent Child Center programs. You will be hearing more about this from one of the long-time leaders of this program for each state.

The third recommendation is to communicate PK-3 to education policy makers and administrators. We are doing this through our grants, including grants to the New America Foundation, and other communication grants. We are also speaking and meeting with key constituencies to share our ideas about PK-3.

The messages are (1) PK-3 makes efficient use of limited public dollars for early and elementary education and (2) PK-3 not only protects early learning investments but also adds value to such investments when PK is extended into Kindergarten and the elementary grades.

The authors' fourth recommendation is to develop new funding mechanisms. This, which is the thorniest and the most controversial recommendation because it involves re-allocating current resources.

We must recognize that the competition for limited and increasingly scarce resources is the future. Reynolds, Magnuson, and Ou note that only 5% of Title I funds are now being used for PK programs with the rest being used for remediation. So, even a small shift to support more early learning programs that have proven to be effective could be an important step.

I am pleased to introduce Gene Maeroff as the moderator of our forum today. Gene is completing a book funded by FCD, which is scheduled for publication next September on PK-3 programs throughout the country. Gene is a distinguished national education writer and the author of many books and articles. He was also the author of FCD's 2003 annual report, "First Things First: PK as the starting point for Education Reform."