

FOUNDATION FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Mapping the P-3 Continuum (MAP):
P-3 as the Foundation of Education Reform

September 11-12, 2003
New York City

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Current education policy in the United States, which emphasizes high stakes testing of children, is unfair to many who do not experience an adequate education. Many children enter kindergarten on unequal footing due to variability in pre-kindergarten experiences, and, once children enter kindergarten, variations in education content and quality. This variability in pre-kindergarten experiences and subsequent schooling is a strong predictor of children's achievement outcomes. These effects are even stronger for low-income children. A P-3 approach aims to level the academic playing field for all children by supporting efforts to align pre-kindergarten through third grade by reforming teacher preparation and certification and developing sequential learning experiences for children as they move from pre-kindergarten through Grade 3.

The Foundation for Child Development convened stakeholders to discuss next steps for moving a P-3 agenda forward. A list of participants is appended to this summary. Directions for next steps included:

1. Crafting a working definition of P-3. The definition for P-3 must include voluntary universal pre-kindergarten for children, full-day kindergarten, and alignment of both through the third grade of elementary education. P-3 can be an alignment of grade levels based on developmental and learning characteristics of children as they proceed from pre-kindergarten through third grade and including their after-school experiences.
2. Identifying and documenting specific examples of P-3 and their effects on children's learning. Examples of P-3 exist, and can inform how to expand on current efforts or start up new ones.
3. Addressing financing and governance issues, which include targeting sources of funds, and developing plans for governance structures. One example of a well-performing governance structure is that of Chicago's Child-Parent Centers, where the program is implemented within one administrative system, the Chicago public school system. Financing ideas can come from places already implementing parts of a P-3 agenda, like California, Georgia, and New Mexico.
4. Addressing the recruitment, preparation, professional development, and retention of teachers. Participants agreed that current teacher education and credentialing are not adequately preparing teachers for the classroom.
5. Identifying key leverage points. Many stakeholders, who serve different and/or overlapping constituencies, were identified at the meeting. Engaging these stakeholders as well as colleague funders will be necessary to build consensus and move the P-3 agenda forward.
6. Marketing the P-3 message. Attention must be paid to the content of the message, as well as specific authoritative messengers. Issues raised by stakeholders who will oppose the initiative should be addressed. Careful attention to language and rhetoric when delivering messages will be crucial to the effectiveness of P-3.

INTRODUCTION

Educational expectations in the United States today, as reflected by high stakes testing, do not reflect the realities of children’s classroom and learning experiences. First, there is variability in outcomes between children who do or do not attend pre-kindergarten and/or kindergarten. Second, systematic classroom observations reveal marked variability in classroom quality and teaching, not only between schools, but also within schools from pre-k through third grade.¹ This variability has been shown to lead to different classroom experiences and outcomes for students from P-3.

By providing all children with access to a pre-kindergarten education, and requiring all children to attend kindergarten, the academic playing field for all children can be further leveled. Reducing variability in classroom learning environments by providing high-quality teacher preparation is expected to contribute to better outcomes for children. Providing opportunities for parent involvement and offering access to support services can also assist our many low-income children in the educational system.

CRAFT A WORKING DEFINITION OF P-3

What does P-3 mean?

Special attention should be paid to the language, rhetoric, and framing of the P-3 idea to clearly communicate the goals of a P-3 initiative.

P-3 represents the potential for a well-integrated education experience for children 3-8 years old. ‘P’ refers to full-day, full-year, voluntary learning experiences for all children 3-4 years old. Pre-kindergarten helps children develop the skills necessary to be successful when they enter kindergarten. ‘P’ is aligned with kindergarten and the early school years through third grade, providing a coherent, related set of experiences for children in the first several years of public schooling. This integrated experience would embody different developmentally appropriate practices, based on scientific research, for children at different ages and at different grade levels. Children’s experiences each year are based on the attainment of skills in the previous years.

It is necessary to be intentional in the curriculum with a common goal – to provide all children with an equal opportunity to succeed in school. This necessitates change in the infrastructure of our educational system, including preparation and relevant credentialing for all teachers and school leadership and climate for sustained professional development.

Assumptions underlying P-3

1) Focusing on each year (pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, grades 1-3) as an isolated experience is not sufficient to reduce the likelihood of academic underachievement. Typically, prevention and/or intervention services target child care settings, pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, or the early elementary grades. Research shows that there is no ‘magic bullet’, targeted at one stage of

¹ Pianta, R. (2003). Standardized classroom observations from pre-k to 3rd grade: A mechanism for improving access to consistently high quality classroom experiences and practices during the P-3 years. *A Foundation for Child Development working paper*.

development, which produces long-term outcomes for children². Other studies that have assessed long-term outcomes of multi-year, multi-level interventions have shown that positive effects for children can be sustained into adulthood with economic and social benefits.³ P-3 draws from this body of research, and offers a solution that integrates currently separate entities- pre-kindergarten programs and the K-12 public education system- serving children from ages three to eight years.

2) Under the existing K-12 educational system, achievement gaps are evident at kindergarten entry, and persist by race/ethnicity and socio-economic status through the third grade. Children differ in their readiness to begin kindergarten, due to different experiences prior to kindergarten entry. The majority of poor readers in first grade remain poor readers in fourth grade.⁴

3) Research points out that young children are ready to learn at birth and that children seek out stimulation to further their own development.⁵ If channeled in appropriate ways, and if institutional settings are better organized to build on existing concepts and skills, children are less likely to fall through the cracks than they are now. With developmentally appropriate scaffolding, children are more likely to flourish socially and academically.⁶

4) The majority of the public likely supports a P-3 initiative. Particular segments of the U.S. population are dissatisfied with the current educational system's inequities, which cause many children to fail academically. Evidence of this dissatisfaction can be found in state court decisions that have mandated education reform (NJ, NC, OH, AR). Other evidence can be found in states that are adopting similar reforms (GA, MD, MO, OR) through gubernatorial, legislative, or executive leadership. Additionally, polls in states (MA, FL) provide voter support of universal pre-kindergarten.

5) Research shows that variability in teaching proficiency leads to different outcomes for children. It is, therefore, important to assess teachers' instructional behavior in the classroom and how they support children's learning, in addition to evaluating children's acquisition of skills. Evaluations focusing on both the teacher and child will provide better information to inform interventions.

² Zigler, E., & Styfco, S. J. (1993). *Head Start and Beyond: A National Plan for Extended Early Intervention*. New Haven, CT, US: Yale University Press.

³ Reynolds, A., Temple, J. A., Robertson, D.L. (2001). Long-term effects of an early childhood intervention on educational achievement and juvenile arrest: A 15-year follow-up of low-income children in public schools. *JAMA: Journal of the American Medical Association*, 285(18), 2339-2346.; Campbell, F.A., & Ramey, C.T. (1995). Cognitive and school outcomes for high risk African-American students at middle adolescence: Positive effects of early intervention. *American Education Research Journal*, 20, 221-236.; Comments provided by Marty Zaslow during her presentation; Schweinehart, L.J. (1993). *Significant Benefits: The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 27*. Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press .

⁴ Comments provided by Kristie Kauerz at the meeting: Education Commission of the States

⁵ Piaget, J. (1948). *The birth of intelligence in the child*. Oxford, England: Delachaux & Niestle

⁶ Vygotsky, L.S., Rieber, R. W.; Hall, M. J. (1997). *The collected works of L. S. Vygotsky, Vol. 4: The history of the development of higher mental functions*.

IDENTIFY AND DOCUMENT CONCRETE EXAMPLES OF P-3 AND THEIR EFFECTS

Four early childhood programs

Important lessons gathered from evaluations of four extended early childhood programs for low-income families can inform a P-3 initiative – Head Start Follow Through (1968-1996); Chicago Child-Parent Center and Expansion Program (1967-present); Carolina Abecedarian Project (1972-1985); and Head Start/Public School Early Childhood Transition Demonstration Project (1991-1998).⁷ All of these programs included parent involvement and social and health service components. Although the classroom learning environments differed in their curricula, all included some form of ongoing staff training. Finally, all of the programs took place in an elementary school environment in kindergarten through third grade.

The goal of **Head Start Follow Through** was to provide Head Start-like services in public schools to ensure a smooth transition from preschool through the early grades. Due to difficulties in funding and the differences between the public schools and the service oriented program, Follow Through became an experiment on the effects of instructional methods on the educational development of children in kindergarten through third grade. The instructional methods employed in the study were 1) Direct Instruction, 2) Behavioral Analysis Models, 3) High/Scope Cognitively Oriented Curriculum Model, 4) Parent Education Model, and 5) Bank Street Model of Developmental-Interaction.

Two findings, in particular, are instructional for our purposes. First, the overall finding was that instructional method makes a difference in child outcomes, leading to enhanced educational success and social and emotional development. Both the Direct Instruction and Behavioral Analysis Models showed stronger effects than the High/Scope Cognitively Oriented Curriculum Model, Parent Education Model, and the Bank Street Model of Developmental-Interaction. Second, there was variation in program effectiveness across schools, which was larger than the variations among the different methods of instruction. This later finding illuminates the problem of standardized implementation across schools.

The **Chicago Child-Parent Center and Expansion Program (CPC)** is the oldest extended early childhood intervention, and the second oldest federally funded preschool program in the U.S. (Head Start is the oldest). The program seeks to promote urban low-income, African American and Hispanic children's academic success and to increase parent involvement. One important and unique component of the CPC program is its central governance through the Chicago Public School System, including oversight by the school principal. Other components include pre-school for all three-year-olds, parent resource rooms, and reduced class sizes (from 35+ to 25). The curriculum focuses on basic skill attainment. Strong parental involvement and the provision of follow-on services are equally integral components of the program.

Essential findings from CPC evaluations include: 1) Children who participated for four or more years had higher reading and math achievement in eighth grade, as well as higher rates of

⁷ Reynolds, A. (2003). *Key characteristics and implications of working models: Chicago Child-Parent Centers*. Presentation at Foundation for Child Development.

graduation, as compared to children with no participation; 2) participation beyond kindergarten showed more successful outcomes for children; 3) participants who were in the program through third grade versus those who stopped in second grade had more successful outcomes through 15 years old, particularly lower rates of grade retention and need for special education services; 4) delinquency at ages 13-15 years and school dropout rates were also found to be less for extended program participants than for shorter term participants.

The goal of the **Carolina Abecedarian Project (ABC)** was to reduce academic failure in low-income, rural children. Educational child care was provided to mainly African-American children beginning at 4 months old through 5 years old. This early intervention was followed by three years of continued intervention through second grade. Components of the early intervention included language and literacy skills, low child-to-teacher ratios, and family support. The school-age program also included a six-week summer transition prior to kindergarten entry.

Key findings are: 1) Extended participation past the pre-school component produced higher achievement; and 2) at the 15-year-follow-up, the extended participation group exceeded the non-extended group only in reading achievement, but not math achievement, IQ test scores, grade retention, or special education.

The **National Head Start/Public School Early Childhood Transition Demonstration Project (HST)** was implemented in school districts across the country beginning in 1991, with federal funding. This was an attempt to implement the original goals of Follow Through. Specifically, the goals were to coordinate Head Start and elementary school programs to provide comprehensive support services and encourage parent involvement. In contrast with FT, HST focused more on support services and less on instructional activities.

Research findings across sites were mixed, and inconsistent. Some sites found no effect, whereas others found a positive effect for parent involvement on achievement scores in the third grade. Another site noted positive effects on social skills in the first and second grades, as well as higher parent involvement.

Summary

In summary, both the CPC and ABC programs provide evidence that extended early childhood programs can promote future school success in disadvantaged populations. The differences in the long-term effects between the two programs may reflect the differences in the programs themselves. In particular, the ages of the participating children differed. ABC children began the program at 4 months and continued through second grade, and the CPC children began at 3-years of age and continued through third grade. It has been noted elsewhere that the third grade is an important transition grade for children⁸, and should perhaps be included in a program that wants to impact educational outcomes. Additionally, the educational contexts were different for these two groups of kids. CPC children were living in economically disadvantaged, mostly minority neighborhoods, whereas the ABC children attended school in a rural area of North Carolina with mostly white middle-class children. Another difference between the two programs

⁸ Stipek, D. (2002). At what age should children enter kindergarten? A question policymakers and parents. Social Policy Report, 16 @), 3-16.

is that CPC classes had a higher teacher-to-child ratio, as well as teacher aides, whereas ABC children were in the traditional classroom setting.

The lessons learned from these evaluation studies include:

- The importance of a single delivery system for both the early and extended interventions
- Reduced class sizes
- Coordinated instructional delivery
- A focus on school readiness in the early years
- Building on that readiness in the subsequent years leads to smoother transitions and higher rates of success in school for children
- The duration of program participation is essential to long-term outcomes including reduced dropout rates, grade retention, delinquency, and higher academic success

In short, a well-coordinated system with the goals of improving school outcomes and increasing parent involvement, as well as providing necessary support services over a number of years, constitute key lessons learned from these evaluation studies.

The French system of education

The French-American Foundation⁹ reports that in France, pre-kindergarten for all three-, four-, and five-year old children is a way to welcome children into French society. Beginning at three years of age, the French consider it normative for all children to enter the *ecole maternelle*. Its purpose is not considered an intervention only for low-income and immigrant children, but an opportunity for all children.

The French education system is an example of an integrated and intentional public education system for all French children ages 3-18 years old. The curriculum was established by the French Ministry of Education, and is followed by every public school teacher. The goals and outcomes of the curriculum are explicit, and teachers as well as children are expected to follow the established curriculum. The curriculum drives every activity that children are involved with in the classroom. Highly trained teachers manage to implement the curriculum in creative ways to engage every child. The classroom environment is structured in a way that enables children to practice the skills that are expected of them from year to year.

In another report by the French-American Foundation,¹⁰ researchers devised a list of elements that make the education system in France one approach to P-3 from which the U.S. can learn. First, voluntary, free pre-kindergarten is available to all children beginning at two years of age. Although only 35% of two year olds attend preschool, almost all three-, four-, and five-year-olds attend. Second, the quality standards for teachers and classroom curricula are high in France. Third, 10 percent more money is spent on children located in disadvantaged areas. These resources are used to reduce class size, reward teachers with bonuses, hire specialists, and develop community partnerships. Fourth, the French believe that early entry to the education system helps children in the long run by increasing their linguistic, cognitive, social, and physical skills. Fifth, the school system integrates children from immigrant backgrounds into the

⁹ Cooper, C.J. (2002). Ready to learn: The French system of early education and care offers lessons for the United States. A report of the French-American Foundation.

¹⁰ Neuman, M. J., & Peer, S. (2002). Equal from the start: Promoting educational opportunity for all preschool children-Learning from the French experience. A report of the French-American Foundation.

French school system through immersion in French language and culture, while valuing and encouraging the retention of the child's native language and culture in the home. It is important to note that the French education system is embedded in social policies that support all children and families, including essential health and social services.

ADDRESS FINANCING AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES IN P-3

Sources for funding P-3 are related to the geographic location of implementation (e.g., local school district, citywide, or statewide). One suggestion is to start small and develop incrementally. Another idea is to identify places where there is an openness to try new things. Whereas cost is currently a barrier to pre-kindergarten in many states, there are some states using creative ways to go forward with a universal pre-k agenda. Georgia has enacted universal pre-kindergarten for all four-year-olds through state lottery. New Mexico has recently implemented full-day kindergarten through state financing. Now that these states have some elements of P-3, they may consider alignment.

ADDRESS THE RECRUITMENT, PREPARATION, DEVELOPMENT, AND RETENTION OF TEACHERS AND LEADERS FOR P-3

What do P-3 classrooms look like in the U.S.?

In analyzing systematic observations of over 240 pre-kindergarten classrooms in six states, 223 kindergarten classrooms in three states, over 900 first-grade classrooms, and over 800 third-grade classrooms in more than 35 states, Pianta and colleagues found great variability in classroom quality across schools, across grades, and within schools.¹¹ The CLASS was the assessment instrument that measured social-emotional climate (e.g., teacher sensitivity, behavior management), instructional climate (e.g., productivity, concept development, learning formats, basic skill activities, scaffolding, constructive feedback), and quality of interactions between teachers and students (e.g., whole group versus small group work, individual interactions between child and teacher). Variability in classroom quality was not related to teacher education or class size. This finding suggests that teacher preparation and their behavior in the classroom are not well-aligned at this time.

Whereas Pianta and colleagues are beginning to assess the relationships between classroom quality and child outcomes, some preliminary analyses show that variability is associated with achievement, emotional, and behavioral outcomes for children. Three constructs that assessed the social-emotional climate and quality of teacher-child interactions predicted: 1) children's performance on standardized tests of literacy skill in pre-kindergarten and first grade; 2) lower levels of mother reports of internalizing behaviors in kindergarten and first grade; and 3) children's engagement in the classroom across all grade levels. The richness of the instructional environment from pre-kindergarten to third grade, characterized by teachers promoting higher order thinking and problem solving, facilitation of activities, and quality of feedback (e.g., scaffolding) predicted the academic functioning of the child. Results of quality classroom environments were stronger for children from a low socioeconomic background than children

¹¹ Pianta, R. (2003). Standardized classroom observations from pre-k to 3rd grade: A mechanism for improving access to consistently high quality classroom experiences and practices during the P-3 years. *A Foundation for Child Development working paper*.

from a high socioeconomic background. These initial findings suggest the potential positive effects of classroom quality on child outcomes, especially for economically disadvantaged children.

Teacher preparation

Evidence that teacher education was unrelated to classroom quality signals a need to examine teacher education. The National Research Council report *Eager to Learn* emphasized the “unexpected competencies” of young children and questioned current beliefs about ways to educate young children. Teachers interviewed by Pianta reported that they did not feel their preparation adequately prepared them for the classroom. Struggling to do a good job, lack of support, and wanting to improve their performance were also expressed by teachers in interviews. These views reflect the inadequacy of teacher preparation and the lack of support for professional development once they are in the classrooms.

Requirements for teacher credentialing vary by state, with even more variability for early childhood educators. With the advent of high stakes testing in the U.S., how teachers are prepared to impart knowledge to children is an important area worth investigating. Whereas the current focus is on assessing children’s attainment of specific types of knowledge, the solution might include assessing the capacity of teachers to impart this knowledge to children.

Teacher education should be intentional, with specific guidelines and goals, which are aligned with expectations for learning by children as well as their developmental capabilities. High standards should be maintained for all levels of teachers, from pre-kindergarten to third grade. An important focus must be placed on preparing teachers to work with children and families from different cultures. Teachers should be trained to be culturally competent in the classroom and to work with families of culturally diverse children.

A newly developed teacher preparation system, based on developmental and educational research, could be implemented and evaluated. In turn, this could become a model for teacher preparation on a larger scale.

SUPPORT RELEVANT RESEARCH ON THE EFFECTS OF P-3 ON CHILD OUTCOMES

What we know

Program evaluation studies provide evidence that systematic changes in early and elementary education can lead to positive child achievement outcomes if implemented over several years. Other program evaluations show that one-year interventions do not result in long-term outcomes for children. Timing is another important element in program implementation that has been shown to affect child outcomes. Early and middle childhood periods are important for positive status during early adulthood, and interventions targeting multiple years in both of these periods will have a stronger impact than either one alone.¹²

¹² Zaslow, M. (2003). *What can we learn from developmental research about how to support children’s learning from age three to age eight?* Presentation to a Foundation for Child Development Meeting on P-3.

Transitions can be considered periods of risk in development. Children who do not make successful transitions may be at increased risk for poor outcomes. For example, research shows that many school environments are not conducive to adaptive outcomes for adolescents. The transition from elementary school to junior high or middle school can be a risk period for academic decline for many youth.¹³ The transition from the summer to the academic year is another risk period, especially for economically disadvantaged children.¹⁴ Whereas there were little differences between children in ten low-SES schools as compared to kids in 10 high-SES schools during the first grade transition from kindergarten, gaps grew as children got older. The authors concluded that this finding was due to “summer loss.” Summer loss is the process by which children lose skills and information learned the school year before, because of the lack of exposure to educationally stimulating activities during the summer vacation.

In sum, what happens in the classroom matters for children, and current credentialing requirements for teachers are not necessarily a good indicator of the effectiveness of their teaching. Research shows that what happens in the classroom does influence cognitive, behavioral, and emotional outcomes.¹⁵ Teacher credentials, on the other hand, were not predictive of child outcomes. In addition, research shows the potential risk that transition periods can have for children, especially those who are economically disadvantaged.

What do we need to know?

We still need to know to what extent, and how different classroom contexts influence child outcomes across ages/grades, and for diverse groups of children. We also need to know what sound teacher preparation looks like and how it is linked with desired child outcomes.

IDENTIFY KEY LEVERAGE POINTS AT THE NATIONAL, STATE, AND LOCAL LEVELS TO MOVE A P-3 AGENDA

Participants generated a list of key stakeholders for P-3:

- Higher education institutions who train teachers and administrators
 - AACTE – American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
- National Board for Professional Teaching Standards
- American Federation of Teachers and National Education Association
- NAEYC - National Association for the Education of Young Children
- CDA – Child Development Associate
- ACCES – Alliance of Community Colleges for Electronic Sharing
- NASBE – National Association of State Boards of Education
- NABE – National Association for Bilingual Education
- NGA – National Governors Association

¹³ Zaslow, M. (2003). *What can we learn from developmental research about how to support children’s learning from age three to age eight?* Presentation Foundation for Child Development

¹⁴ Zaslow, M. (2003). *What can we learn from developmental research about how to support children’s learning from age three to age eight?* Presentation Foundation for Child Development

¹⁵ Pianta, R. (2003). Standardized classroom observations from pre-k to 3rd grade: A mechanism for improving access to consistently high quality classroom experiences and practices during the P-3 years. *A Foundation for Child Development working paper*

- National Conference of Mayors
- CED – Committee on Economic Development
- NBCDI - National Black Child Development Institute
- National Chamber of Commerce
- CCSSO – Council of Chief State School Officers
- Think tanks to re-develop credentialing standards
- National Head Start Association
- National Association of Elementary School Principals
- Consensus organizations to build on, and influence public will to improve the educational system
- Parents
- School reformers
- Community-based organizations and representatives from communities

An analysis of these stakeholders' needs and constituencies including their competing agendas will be necessary to forge consensus among these groups.

MARKET THE IDEA OF P-3 THROUGH STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

1) Message development – What is the message? Attention should be directed toward language and rhetoric in the formulation of messages. They should be integrated into education reform, linked to community organizations, and tied into public health issues. P-3 is part of universal pre-k, but also inclusive of, and related to, after-school activities for children. P-3 as systems restructuring and not add-on services or intervention services, should be articulated.

2) How to market the message? Increasing public understanding of P-3 and combating resistance to change are integral to message effectiveness. One suggestion of how to market the message of P-3 is through social integration, similar to the French. The French Ministry of Education believes that pre-kindergarten is a critical element toward citizenship in France.

3) Who delivers the message? Selection of messengers should take into account credentials and credibility in relation to key audiences and stakeholders.

WORK WITH COLLEAGUE FUNDERS AND POTENTIAL PARTNERS

Working with colleague funders and potential partners will be important to move the P-3 agenda forward. Since P-3 is a large, systematic, structural initiative, the Foundation for Child Development requires partners. It will be necessary to work with colleague funders to assemble the resources necessary to fund the initiative. Forming partnerships with key stakeholders is important to build the consensus necessary to make P-3 a reality. Both colleague funders and potential partners will help shape P-3 through their insight and involvement.

First Things First: P-3 as the Foundation of Education Reform

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September 11 — 12, 2003

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