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ABSTRACT

This guide provides states, local agencies, policy makers, and early childhood service providers with an understanding of the provisions of two laws, the reauthorization of Head Start and the reauthorization of the Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA). It presents background information and important issues on early childhood care and education from research and development. The guide is organized into five broad tenets that have emerged from public discourse on the topic of early childhood care and education and that formed the core of the federal laws. The five tenets are as follows: (1) young children and their families need services that are family-focused, comprehensive, and integrated; (2) families need to be involved in their children's early education; (3) early childhood programs and services need to be of high quality; (4) programs and services for young children and families need to reach more people; and (5) special attention needs to be paid to the transition periods in a young child's life. The program leader's checklist in each chapter suggests areas where local program leaders can take action. A list of 19 suggested resources is included. (AP)

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checking up

on early childhood care & education

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by Ellen Kotlus

edtalk

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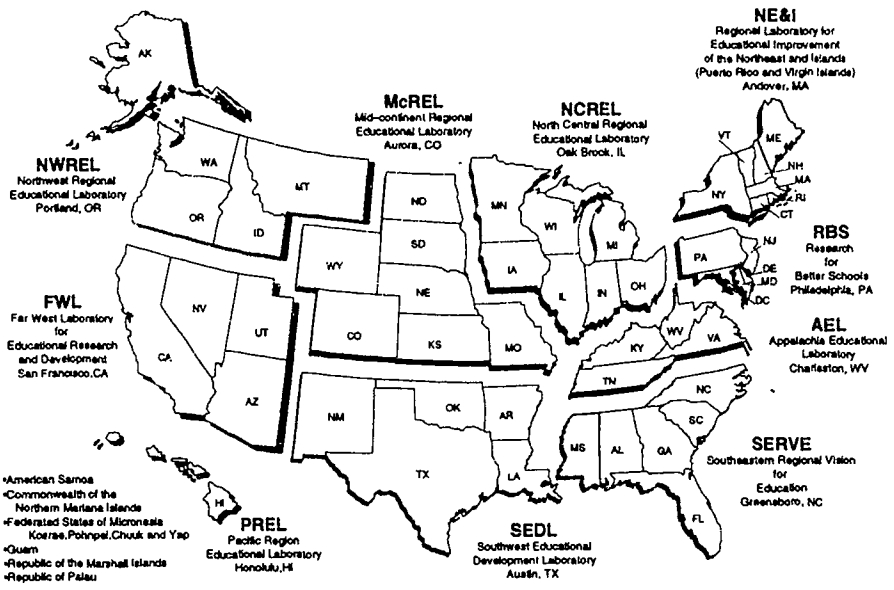

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Preface

The Council for Educational Development and Research (CEDaR) publishes *EdTalk* to inform a variety of audiences about nationally significant topics in education. In this *EdTalk*, our aim is to help policymakers and early childhood service providers in states and local communities develop and improve their early childhood care and education programs.

Checking Up on Early Childhood Care and Education synthesizes the best and most recent information from early childhood research and development into an easy-to-use checklist. Information from the checklist will help those concerned with early childhood care and education determine if they are doing everything possible to make their programs a success. *Checking Up on Early Childhood Care and Education* also provides highlights of key new federal laws in early childhood care and education and what it takes to successfully implement those laws.

More than half of all children under the age of six have either both parents or their only custodial parent working. The need for comprehensive, high-quality, and continuous care and education has never been more obvious. Recently enacted federal legislation reflects this need by giving states and local communities a unique opportunity to improve and extend their programs in early childhood care and education.

This document was funded by the regional educational laboratories, which are a congressionally-established set of regionally based educational R&D institutions that serve educators and educational policymakers. It could not have been prepared without the laboratories' early childhood education task force pulling together their knowledge and experience in providing information and assistance to educators and child care providers across the country. Task force members reviewed drafts of this publication and provided many helpful suggestions. In addition, Peter Mangione of Far West Laboratory gave freely of his time and expertise to advise the Council throughout the development of the publication.

The Council also wishes to acknowledge the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education, for encouraging the regional educational laboratories to extend their services to the important area of early childhood care and education.

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Introduction

Federal laws are challenging states to serve young children and their families in new ways. Two laws in particular, the reauthorization of Head Start and the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), have become the focus of a great deal of attention among policymakers and early childhood service providers in states and communities. These laws ask states and local agencies to expand their early childhood programs, remove barriers between early childhood programs and other social services, tighten quality control, address transition needs, and bring more parents into the educational process earlier.

...the early years are critical in laying the groundwork for children to develop to their full potential and to be successful in school and in later life.

The approach is consistent with findings from research and from practitioners' experience — specifically, that the early years are critical in laying the groundwork for children to develop to their full potential and to be successful in school and in later life.

This guide aids states and local agencies as they respond to the provisions of the laws. It highlights the laws for those who must implement them, including both state and local leaders of Chapter 1 programs, Even Start programs, state funded preschool programs, early intervention services, and others. It also provides background information on early childhood care and education from research and development. Checklists suggest areas where local program leaders can take action.

The guide is primarily concerned with the reauthorization of Head Start and the reauthorization of ESEA by the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994. While a third law, the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, established our nation's education goals, it was the reauthorization of Head Start and ESEA that put programs behind those goals.

The 1994 Head Start Reauthorization Act aims to improve the quality and effectiveness of Head Start programs for low income children and their families. To be eligible for Head Start, a child must be living in a family whose income is below the federal poverty line, currently $14,350 for a family of four. Policies allow 10 percent of Head Start children to come from families whose income is above the poverty line. The reauthorization expands program services to infants and toddlers. It also addresses the need to improve the quality of training for Head Start staff, increases accountability for financial management and administration of programs, funds expansion, and encourages partnerships between Head Start, the public schools, and other early childhood and family support programs.

...quality research — research that is objective and holds up over the test of time — does point the way for law.

ESEA funds most of the federal aid for elementary and secondary education, including programs for disadvantaged children, instructional improvement in subject areas of national concern, such as mathematics and science, and more effective use of technology in education. The reauthorization of ESEA mandates increased coordination and continuity between public schools and early childhood programs and services such as Head Start. It also mandates increased efforts to assist and involve families of young children when they make the transition from preschool to public school programs.

It should be pointed out that the fit between federal law and the research is not always exact. Law is not produced that way. Research cannot always be neatly shaped into law. However, quality research — research that is objective and holds up over the test of time — does point the way for law.

In addition to these federal laws, several reports and initiatives have helped create a national consensus around the need to improve and coordinate services for young children and families. One of these is the National Governors' Association's Governors' Campaign for Children, which presents a vision and basic principles for helping policymakers assess what works and to target funds to effective programs. The Carnegie Corporation's *Starting Points: Meeting the Needs of Our Youngest Children* documents the conditions of children and their families from the

prenatal period to age three, emphasizing the importance of those first three years for optimal development. The report, *Together We Can: A Guide for Crafting a Profamily System of Education and Human Services*, issued by the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services, provides a framework for an effective, collaborative process for improving services to children, youth, and families. In its report, *Creating a 21st Century Head Start*, the Advisory Committee on Head Start Quality and Expansion points to the need for Head Start to be a model of high-quality comprehensive services that respond to the changing needs of children and families. It also emphasizes the importance of collaboration among Head Start and key community and state institutions to maximize available resources. Finally, *Continuity in Early Childhood: Elements and Indicators of Home, School, and Community*, by the Regional Educational Laboratories' Early Childhood Collaboration Network, expands the concept of transition from children's movement from preschool to kindergarten to a focus on the continuity of services for children and families from pregnancy to age eight.

This guide is organized into five broad tenets that emerged from public discourse on the topic of early childhood care and education and that formed the core of the federal laws. We have made no attempt to review state laws. However, we believe that most states subscribe to these tenets as well. They are:

- Young children and their families need services that are family-focused, comprehensive, and integrated;
- Families need to be involved in their children's early education;
- Early childhood programs and services need to be of high quality;
- Programs and services for young children and families need to reach more people; and
- Special attention needs to be paid to the transition periods in a young child's life.

The information contained here is meant to be shared widely among the many policymakers and agencies that have a role in providing early

childhood care and education. Through such sharing, we can build programs that truly respond to the full range of needs that young children and their families have.

Young Children Need Family-Focused, Comprehensive, and Integrated Services

Overview of Federal Law

The first National Education Goal is the one that is usually associated with early childhood care and education. This goal says that all children shall enter school ready to learn. But other goals are equally important to the development and well-being of young children and families. One of these is that every adult American should be literate by the year 2000, possessing the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. In order for the nation to achieve this goal, schools must offer more adult literacy, parent training, and life-long learning opportunities, and improve the ties between home and school.

Head Start. The reauthorization of Head Start maintains it as a program that focuses on the well-being of a child's whole family. In order for a program to be considered comprehensive, it must meet performance standards in the areas of education, health, social services, and parent involvement. Services need to be coordinated with other state and community programs in health, welfare, education, family literacy, and child care. The reauthorization added a Head Start liaison position to facilitate such collaborations in each state.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The Even Start Family Literacy programs reauthorized in ESEA are designed to create a unified family literacy program by integrating early childhood education, adult literacy or adult basic education, and parenting education. The law says that the programs should provide adults with a variety of services designed to enable and encourage involvement in their own and their children's education. These include:

- Child care
- Full-year programs
- Special staff training in the skills of working with parents

Achieving the Objectives

Families must have access to services that are *family-focused, comprehensive, and integrated.* Such services need to concentrate on prevention, not crisis intervention.

Research and experience have shown that services provided to children alone may be insufficient if other family needs are not met. Services may need to extend to other family members as well. These services may include:

- Prenatal care and health care
- Job training
- Housing
- Literacy training
- Child care
- Transportation
- Nutrition support
- Substance abuse counseling

Also, children and families need a system of support that can meet changing needs at different times in their lives. As a family's circumstances change, the services that it needs are also likely to change. The objective, however, is always to help families become independent.

Comprehensive services focus simultaneously on the many critical influences on a child's development, such as adequate health care, safe environments, emotionally stable relationships with caring adults, and engagement in activities that foster learning. Comprehensive programs and services strive to strengthen the whole child within the context of the family.

Services must be integrated so that every service is readily available and easily accessible when a family needs it. Families should not suddenly lose support because of:

- Conflicting eligibility requirements;

- Categorical funding that dictates what services can be provided, to whom, to how many, and under what conditions; and

- Lack of accountability and coordination across services.

The 1994 National Governors' Association report, *Changing Systems for Children and Families*, notes that funding for child and family services exists at several levels of government. "Such a financing structure makes it extremely difficult to weave a comprehensive system out of disparate parts. It complicates efforts to reach consensus on goals, roles, and procedures in implementing programs and services," says the report.

The goal of family-focused, comprehensive, and integrated services is to meet the needs of families through collaboration among family support agencies, care and education services, health care providers, and the private sector. Each partner in the collaboration must work toward:

- Developing a common vision;
- Establishing goals and objectives;
- Sharing resources and implementing a plan for action;
- Being accountable for agreed-upon roles and tasks;
- Publicizing their effort in the larger community; and
- Evaluating successes and making adjustments where needed.

Program Leaders' Checklist

Many strategies are available for program leaders to use in creating family-focused, comprehensive, and integrated services. How many of them are you using in your state, agency, or early childhood site?

yes	no	
❑	❑	Families, schools, and public and private community agencies share leadership and decision making.
❑	❑	Program families are integral partners in planning and implementing services.

yes	no	
❑	❑	Providers use many methods to make families aware of programs and services available to them.
❑	❑	Programs and policies respect families' home cultures and enable children and their families to communicate in home languages.
❑	❑	Programs and policies meet specific needs of children with disabilities and their families.
❑	❑	Programs and policies eliminate unnecessary duplication of services and conflicting eligibility requirements.
❑	❑	Career employees have incentives to develop services that respond to diverse needs of families.
❑	❑	Programs are flexible in responding to the changing needs of individual families.
❑	❑	Training programs make professional staff aware of services that are available to families.
❑	❑	"One-stop" centers give families access to integrated and comprehensive services.
❑	❑	Services focus on cost-effective prevention rather than on more serious and costly interventions later on.
❑	❑	Community leaders work effectively as change agents.
❑	❑	An ongoing program assesses family needs and adjusts programs and services according to family information.
❑	❑	Policies and practices support integrated services.

Families Need to Be Involved in Their Children's Early Education

Overview of the Law

Consensus is wide that parental involvement is critical to children's success in school. The Goals 2000: Educate America Act and the acts that reauthorized Head Start and ESEA reflect this view by requiring both an increase in and improvement of parental involvement and support in early childhood care and education programs. New legislation also focuses on helping children and families make the transition from a wide range of preschool settings into public school systems.

One objective of the first national goal — that by the year 2000, all children in America will be ready to start school — is that every parent will be their children's first teacher and devote time each day to helping their preschool children learn. Embedded in this is the idea that parents will have access to the training and support they need.

The eighth National Education Goal addresses parent involvement directly. It says that by the year 2000, every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting children's social, emotional, and academic growth.

The objectives for this goal are that:

- States will develop policies to assist local schools and agencies in the establishment of programs that respond to the wide range of parental needs, including those of parents of children who are disadvantaged, speak no or limited English, or who have disabilities;
- Every school will build an active partnership in which it shares decision making with families and in which families support children's academic work; and

- Families will support schools and will have high standards of accountability for schools and teachers.

Head Start. The 1994 reauthorization of Head Start provides a renewed opportunity to forge partnerships with key groups, including parents. It calls for agencies applying for new Head Start designations to include a plan for a wide range of activities that will make parents full partners in their children's education. It requires programs to conduct a family needs assessment that includes information on:

- Family literacy services
- Parenting skills training
- Substance abuse counseling
- Self-sufficiency

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The 1994 reauthorization of ESEA requires local education agencies to increase and support family involvement in their children's education. The requirements include:

- A parent involvement policy developed with and distributed to parents of participating children. This policy must be integrated with parental involvement strategies in other programs such as Head Start, Even Start, Parents as Teacher, and Home Instruction Programs for Preschoolers.

- A review of policies for ways to increase the availability, affordability, and quality of child care services for all children and families that need them.

- Partnerships with public and private sectors to develop and expand community-based family support programs that provide parents with the knowledge and skills to become more involved in their children's experience.

Achieving the Objectives

Richard Riley, U.S. Secretary of Education, has called for a national effort to increase family involvement in children's education. The Department of Education's 1994 report, *Strong Families, Strong Schools: Building*

Community Partnerships for Learning, includes several recommendations. Among them are:

- Encouraging schools, businesses, and communities to establish a supportive environment for family involvement;
- Identifying and publicizing outstanding examples of family involvement programs around the nation;
- Conducting and sponsoring research to study the relationship between school practices and family involvement in learning; and
- Providing useful information to parents in their own language and without jargon.

The Secretary's recommendations are based on years of research on early childhood care and education. Some of this research identifies key areas in which parental behaviors and attitudes strongly influence children's academic achievement. They are:

- A wide range of verbal interactions, including reading to children and encouraging conversations;
- High expectations for academic performance;
- Parental warmth and emotional responsiveness;
- An authoritative disciplinary style that is warm, reasonable, nonpunitive, and firm; and
- Parental knowledge about how children develop.

Studies also point to three types of influences on parenting. They are:

- Parents' sense of physiological well-being;
- Child characteristics such as temperament; and
- Environmental stress and support such as marital relationships, friendship networks, and work status.

According to *Strong Families, Strong Schools*, studies show that school practices that encourage parents to participate in their children's education are more important than family characteristics such as parental education, family size, marital status, and socioeconomic level. Studies indicate that programs designed to increase parents' involvement in their children's school experience can improve parental self-image, empower low-income parents to participate in their children's education, and sometimes help parents improve their own educational level and socio-economic status.

In order to ensure that all families are an integral part of their children's educational experiences, program environments must be culturally and linguistically sensitive to all children. Children need daily opportunities to explore materials and activities that are particularly relevant to them. Through ongoing contact with parents, staff members can learn about and respect each family's cultural values and practices. Incorporating input from parents strengthens parents' role in supporting their children's success.

Research shows that young language-minority children need strong support in developing verbal and literacy skills in their home language. While it is important for language minority children to learn English, studies show that when the acquisition of English is pushed too early, communication between children and their families can break down as children may lose their ability to speak and understand their home language. Research also suggests that when children develop strong skills in their native language, these skills will transfer successfully to a second language.

Program Leaders' Checklist

Research has demonstrated a number of strategies that program leaders can use to build partnerships with parents. How many are you using?

yes	no	
❑	❑	Parents are informed about how to identify high-quality early childhood programs in communities.

yes	no	
❑	❑	Businesses support policies such as flextime and leave time so families can participate in their children's care and education.
❑	❑	Parents have opportunities to share information about their children and to receive information about available programs and services.
❑	❑	Communities receive regular information about exemplary family-centered care and education programs.
❑	❑	Programs that serve children from language-minority families include staff members who are bilingual and who understand the processes of first and second language acquisition.
❑	❑	Collaborative efforts between the private and public sectors have created parent education and support programs.
❑	❑	Community assessment of the relationship between care and education practices and family involvement is ongoing.
❑	❑	Programs and policies are sensitive to the cultural diversity of families.
❑	❑	Communities provide useful information, without jargon, to parents in their home language.
❑	❑	Policies ensure that parents of young children with disabilities are informed about their eligibility for federally mandated programs.
❑	❑	Workplace programs encourage parent education and support.

yes	no	
❑	❑	Public schools and other early childhood programs offer on-site parent education and support programs.
❑	❑	Programs provide parents with strategies to build the native language skills of their children.
❑	❑	Communities encourage the establishment of family literacy programs.
❑	❑	Communities make special efforts to reach working parents, parents with special needs, and parents of children with disabilities.
❑	❑	Parents participate in the decision-making process within various agencies and across agencies.

Early Childhood Programs and Services Need to Be of High Quality

Overview of the Law

One objective of the first National Education Goal — that by the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn — is to give all children, including those children who are disadvantaged and disabled, access to high-quality and developmentally appropriate preschool programs. An additional objective is for children to receive the nutrition and health care they need to arrive at school with healthy minds and bodies.

Head Start. Training is essential to high program quality. The reauthorization of Head Start maintains the 25 percent set-aside for improving program quality established in 1990 and defines it as being a minimum level. Half of this set-aside remains targeted toward higher salaries. Priorities for the use of quality improvement funds include:

- Ensuring that Head Start programs meet or exceed performance standards;
- Improving child-staff ratios and providing adequate staff training;
- Ensuring adequate salary levels to attract and retain qualified staff;
- Using salary increases to help implement a career development program;
- Improving community-wide strategic planning and needs assessments; and
- Ensuring improvement of the physical environment in order to provide effective services to children and families.

The reauthorization contains an additional two percent set-aside for training and technical assistance to expand programs and improve their quality. This set-aside supports:

- Improving programs with identified deficiencies
- Community needs assessment
- Management activities
- Expansion activities
- Strategic planning
- Career development activities
- Facility maintenance

The law extends to 1996 the deadline requiring one staff per classroom to have a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, and calls for qualification standards to be developed for Head Start family service workers. Guidelines will be set for optimal staffing patterns (number, types, and responsibilities of staff) in Head Start programs. In addition, guidelines will be established for a mentor teacher program that will provide training and technical assistance to Head Start staff.

While current Head Start programs will continue to be subject to on-site monitoring every three years, newly designated Head Start agencies will be reviewed after their first year of operation. Other provisions call for revising current performance standards in health, education, parent involvement, and social services, and establishing additional standards for administrative and financial management practices and for facility locations and conditions.

The law maintains the appeals process for sites slated to lose their funding and establishes a procedure to terminate funding for programs that cannot meet minimum requirements. In order to maintain its Head Start designation, a program must make the correction of deficiencies part of a timely improvement plan. The law also addresses the development of a mediation process to resolve conflicts between the local Head Start Policy Councils and the executive director or board of Head Start grantees and their delegate agencies.

The act further requires the development of a comprehensive plan to guide research projects. Topics to be studied include employment

benefits, services for Indian and migrant children, and full-day, full-year schedules.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The reauthorization of ESEA contains provisions to give grants to states that establish educational content and student performance standards. The standards must be part of a state educational plan developed in partnership with local communities and educational agencies. States may make sub-grants to local educational agencies that have state-approved plans for coordinating and integrating preschool and elementary school programs and services. Beginning in 1997, states that use Title I funds for preschool will have to comply with Head Start performance standards. States may use Title II school improvement funds to comply with the standards.

ESEA also creates a national teacher training project in which states may establish regional teacher training centers in early childhood development and nine more subject areas.

Achieving the Objectives

The National Association for the Education of Young Children defines "developmentally appropriate practice" as providing a safe and nurturing environment that promotes the physical, emotional, and cognitive development of young children from birth through the age of eight.

Research indicates that there are universal and predictable sequences of growth and development during the early years. These sequences occur in physical, emotional, social, and cognitive domains. Developmentally appropriate practices recognize the importance of:

- Providing a wide range of age-appropriate activities that allow children to actively play with and explore materials, solve problems, and interact with peers;
- Acknowledging and respecting individual differences in rates of development and learning styles;

- Setting up an environment in which the cultures and home languages of children and families are integral to the program;
- Setting up an environment that responds to the needs of children with disabilities;
- Providing frequent opportunities for children to make meaningful choices for themselves;
- Assessing children through methods such as ongoing observation, collecting work samples, and using checklists to keep track of children's activities and progress; and
- Planning an integrated curriculum in which activities build on themes that are interesting and relevant to young children.

Studies point to the critical influence of the early environment on changes in brain structure and function. Adult caregivers are a vital part of this environment, providing the foundation for the child's intellectual competence, language comprehension, and early socialization. The 1995 Inspector General's report of the U.S. Department of Education, entitled *Education Can Allocate Special Education Funds More Equitably*, states that while many factors are related to disabilities, there is a strong correlation between poverty and the level of disabilities within a community. Inadequate prenatal care, poor nutrition, and limited health care are all factors that can result from poverty.

According to the Carnegie Corporation's report, *Starting Points*, "The most important factor in quality care is the relationship between the child and the caregiver." When infants experience an environment that is sensitive and nurturing, they develop a basic trust that enables them to feel confident in exploring their world.

The report lists the following characteristics of quality child care for infants and toddlers:

- The environment is safe and comfortable;
- Children are cared for in small groups;
- The child-adult ratio is low;

- Personnel are dependable and adequately trained and compensated; and

- The program encourages parent involvement and is linked to comprehensive health and nutrition services.

Research has pointed to the need to improve the quality of preschool programs and child care. The Child Care Employee Project's 1988 *National Child Care Staffing Study* concludes that the quality of center-based care in the United States is barely adequate. The study cites:

- Low compensation for staff
- Difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff
- High turnover rate among staff
- Lack of a career development system
- Lack of available or affordable training

A 1992 update of the original study contains much the same conclusions. Staff wages continue to be very low, staff turnover continues to be high, and health insurance coverage continues to be rare.

According to the University of Colorado's 1995 report, *Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes in Child Care Centers*, many child care centers in the United States threaten children's emotional and cognitive development. The study concludes that in the average center, adults provide little warmth and support and the children are exposed to few learning experiences. Only one in seven centers received a rating of "Developmentally Appropriate." One in eight centers neglects the basic daily needs of children. The study finds that infants and toddlers receive the poorest care.

The researchers found that there are fewer poor-quality programs in states that have higher licensing standards. Factors such as staff-to-child ratios, teacher salaries, and administrators' prior experience are strong determinants of quality.

The most prevalent type of care for young children with working mothers is care in the home of the provider. According to the Families and Work Institute's 1994 report, *The Study of Children in Family Child Care and Relative Care*, only nine percent of the homes in the study are rated as good quality (growth-enhancing). The study finds that the quality of

child care is warmer and more attentive when providers are committed to children's care, seek out opportunities for child-related training, and are open to learning from other child care providers.

Group size (the total number of children within a group) as well as the child-staff ratio (the number of children per adult) are clearly linked to program quality. Research shows that:

- Children in smaller groups are more verbal, less aggressive, more involved with activities, and make greater gains in standardized tests of learning and vocabulary; and
- Children in settings with better staff ratios are more likely to experience positive interactions with adults and more developmentally appropriate activities.

In center-based care for infants and toddlers, the adult-child ratio has been shown to be the best predictor of quality.

Specialized child development training and the education level of staff are also strongly linked to program quality. Child development training is associated with more social interactions between adults and children, and more cooperation and persistence on tasks among children. The 1994 report, *Making a Career of It: The State of the States Report on Career Development in Early Care and Education*, recommends that states:

- Create a planning group to develop a comprehensive career development system;
- Establish standards and qualifications for all early childhood care and education workers;
- Improve access to training and ensure that training results in credit towards a career development goal; and
- Increase compensation for early childhood workers.

The content of training systems must be specialized according to participants' job functions, physical settings, and child populations.

This involves creating a separate framework that incorporates a knowledge base and best practices for:

- Infants and toddlers
- Family child care
- Preschool programs
- School-age child care
- Children with special needs
- Administrative positions

Program Leaders' Checklist

In light of what research has identified as the critical elements of quality early childhood care and education programs, how many of the following strategies are being used in your state, agency, or site?

yes	no	
❑	❑	All young children have equal access to high-quality early childhood care and education.
❑	❑	Children's health and safety in the child care setting and in the community at large undergo regular review.
❑	❑	The assessment of young children is developmentally appropriate and includes systematic observation, portfolios of children's work, and reports from parents.
❑	❑	Exemplary practices in early childhood care and education get identified, disseminated, and supported when implemented.
❑	❑	Licensing regulations ensure high-quality standards for full and part-day center-based and home-based early care and education programs.
❑	❑	Training systems exist for those preparing to become early childhood providers and for those already in the field.

yes	no	
❑	❑	Standards for training follow principles of adult learning, encourage collaborative problem-solving and cooperative projects, and focus on research-based principles of child development.
❑	❑	Joint training opportunities are available for Head Start staff, family child care providers, and public and private preschool and early elementary teachers.
❑	❑	Training systems provide staff with strategies to ensure success for children who are not proficient in English.
❑	❑	Training systems enable early childhood staff to include children with disabilities in all aspects of their programs.
❑	❑	Educational, health, and social service agencies together develop training opportunities.
❑	❑	Staff training is linked to academic credit from accredited institutions and meets high-quality standards for licensing.
❑	❑	All exemptions from state child care licensing standards have been eliminated.
❑	❑	Funds from federal, state, and other sources are used to support a coordinated career development system for early childhood workers.
❑	❑	Partnerships with private sectors are formed to fund training that is not easily accessible in rural areas.
❑	❑	The use of technology increases access to quality training.
❑	❑	Maximum use is made of federally mandated set-aside funds in order to increase staff compensation.
❑	❑	A mentoring program is in place for all professional staff who work with children ages 0 through 8.

Programs and Services for Young Children and Families Need to Be Extended to More People

Overview of the Law

In reauthorizing the Head Start and the Elementary and Secondary Education Acts, Congress responded to documented needs for expanding services to young children and families. Expansion takes place in two ways: by extending the program to a greater number of children and parents, and by broadening the types of services that are made available.

Head Start. Traditionally, most Head Start funds have been directed toward four-year-olds. Two programs served children aged three and younger: Parent and Child Center (PCC) programs and the migrant program model. The 1994 reauthorization of Head Start creates new services for children aged three and younger and their families, as well as for pregnant women. These new programs must coordinate their services with other state and community programs. Funds are to be used for training and technical assistance to grantees when necessary.

The new program grants are available to existing Head Start grantees that serve preschool children, Parent and Child Centers, and other public and non-profit private agencies. The act terminates funding for Comprehensive Child Development Programs (CCDP) at the close of 1997, but allows these centers to adapt their services and apply for funds allocated for the new Head Start initiative for infants and toddlers. The act also authorizes funds for extending existing programs to more children.

The following factors will be considered when awarding expansion funds to local Head Start grantees:

- Program quality (including child care programs);
- Capacity to expand programs while maintaining high quality;

- Presentation of a community-wide strategic planning and needs assessment;
- Need for full-day and full-year services in the community;
- Number of unserved eligible children in the community; and
- Concentration of poverty in the community.

Priority must be given to Head Start programs for children of migrant families who relocate most frequently.

The Head Start Reauthorization Act allows grantees to use funds to build new facilities if suitable facilities are not available.

The reauthorization also expands Head Start programs operated by Indian tribes. These programs can now enroll children who live near the reservation. They can also enroll children who do not meet Head Start's low income criteria if they have the resources to do so. Representatives of an Indian tribe can apply to set up a Head Start program if a tribe is defunded for reasons of quality or fiscal management.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The reauthorization of ESEA expands early childhood care and education in a number of ways. It reauthorizes the Star Schools Program, a satellite and broadcast television service for small, rural, and isolated schools. Programming may include professional development activities for teachers in Head Start and other early childhood development programs. It also creates the Ready-to-Learn Television Project, which funds agencies to develop, produce, and distribute educational and instructional programming for preschool and elementary school children and their parents.

ESEA further provides grants to urban and rural schools for programs that may include:

- Full-day, full-year comprehensive early child development programs;
- Parenting classes and parent involvement activities;
- Coordination of pre-kindergarten and child care programs;

- Integration of developmentally appropriate pre-kindergarten services into the overall public school program;
- Upgrading the qualifications of early childhood education staff and program standards; and
- Augmenting early childhood development programs to meet the needs of preschool children who do not speak English proficiently.

Under the Bureau of Indian Affairs Programs, ESEA funds the early childhood development program, which provides grants to tribes and tribal organizations. The grants may be used to provide services currently not available, including:

- Prenatal care
- Nutrition education
- Health education and screening
- Educational testing
- Instruction in the language, art, and culture of the tribe
- Other educational services

Achieving the Objectives

According to the final report of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Advisory Committee on Head Start Quality and Expansion, Head Start served approximately 721,000 children and their families in 1993. Despite expansion in recent years:

- Head Start still serves only abut 40 percent of the 1.8 million eligible three and four-year-old children;
- Only three percent of children served by Head Start are three years old or younger; and
- According to a 1990 survey conducted by the National Head Start Association, parents most often listed the need for preschool programs to extend hours and days of operation. Only 6.5 percent of Head Start children were served for eight hours a day in 1992.

Although other early childhood programs such as state preschool programs and Title I also serve many preschool children, the National Education Goals Panel reported in 1993 that less than half of the three through five-year-olds from families with incomes below $10,000 attend any preschool program. Meanwhile, 81 percent of children in this age group whose parents earn more than $75,000 attend these programs.

Other research states that many infants and toddlers are exposed to significant risks to their cognitive, emotional, physical, and social development during the first three years of life. These risks include poverty, low immunization rates, and lack of prenatal care. Early intervention and family support programs, however, help to counterbalance these risks.

The Head Start Reauthorization Act of 1994 incorporates many of the recommendations made by the Advisory Committee on Head Start Quality and Expansion. These recommendations point to issues that must be addressed in order to improve quality while expanding early childhood programs and services. They include:

- Reaching out to children and families currently unserved;
- Promoting full-year, full-day programs where needed;
- Improving services to families with younger children;
- Increasing parent involvement; and
- Assessing community needs and planning strategically.

Particular attention must be paid to areas in the U.S. that have very limited access to basic services and early childhood programs and that have very high concentrations of poverty. Increased funding allocations for transportation and collaboration among states and communities are important considerations in meeting the unique needs of rural, Indian, and migrant populations through federal legislation.

Program Leaders' Checklist

Many strategies are available for program leaders to use in broadening and extending services to more children and parents. Which ones are you using in your state, agency, or early childhood site?

yes	no	
❑	❑	Communities are surveyed to see where expanded services should take place.
❑	❑	Policies encourage inclusion of children with disabilities in all early childhood care and education programs.
❑	❑	Funds are allocated to expand child care resource and referral services and to ensure the availability of consumer information and technical assistance in all geographical areas.
❑	❑	Federal grants and other funds are used to establish interagency councils that develop and implement coordinated plans for early childhood and family support services.
❑	❑	Representatives from all segments of the early childhood and family support fields (including education, social services, mental health, and health) are sharing information and best practices to link their services.
❑	❑	Policies encourage programs to recruit bilingual staff from communities to communicate with children in their home languages.
❑	❑	Corporations and foundations are making informed decisions about helping to finance expansion and quality improvement of community early childhood programs.
❑	❑	Communities use widely acknowledged effective practices when designing programs for low-income children and families with infants and toddlers.

yes	no	
❑	❑	Mechanisms exist for implementing comprehensive programs (including coordinated financing, staff training, and data collection) that focus on the perinatal and prenatal periods, and the first three years of life.
❑	❑	Data collections help monitor the number of children and families that are being served, with the goal of 100 percent participation.

Special Attention Needs to Be Paid To the Transition Periods in a Young Child's Life

Overview of the Law

Recent federal legislation increases the focus on helping children and families make the transition from a wide range of preschool settings into public school systems.

Head Start. Head Start awards Transition Project grants to community-based organizations so that they can demonstrate effective strategies for supporting children and families as they make the transition from Head Start programs to kindergarten and the first three grades of public school. The 1994 reauthorization increases Transition Project funding to $35 million for each year of FY 1995 through FY 1998. Head Start must coordinate with local educational agencies to:

- Establish channels of communication with schools where Head Start children will be enrolled to facilitate the coordination of programs;
- Transfer necessary records;
- Facilitate meetings between Head Start parents and elementary school teachers and officials to help explain registration and administrative procedures and to discuss developmental and other needs of individual children;
- Organize and participate in joint transition-related training that emphasizes the importance of the school-parent partnership;
- Provide parent training about their rights and responsibilities within the public school system; and

- Educate parents to take the necessary steps to communicate with school personnel and to help their children succeed in school.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Title I of the ESEA reauthorization requires local educational agencies to put in place transition programs that increase coordination between elementary schools and Head Start and, if feasible, other preschool programs. These programs include:

- Developing and implementing a systematic procedure for transferring records from preschools to elementary schools;
- Establishing communication between school staff and their counterparts in Head Start and other early childhood development programs;
- Conducting meetings involving parents and preschool and elementary school teachers to discuss the developmental and other needs of individual children; and
- Organizing joint transition training activities for preschool and elementary staffs.

ESEA also creates a special fund to support Innovative Elementary School Transition Projects. The projects are to assist eligible children and their families in making a successful transition from preschool to elementary school; enable eligible children to achieve challenging academic standards through a model, developmentally appropriate instructional program; and support the active involvement of parents in their children's education.

Components of the program must include:

- Activities to facilitate transition to elementary school, such as kindergarten visits and other orientation activities;
- Transfer of preschool records;
- A formal meeting among parents, preschool teachers, and elementary teachers;

- An instructional approach that provides effective transition services;
- Direct parental participation in the development, operation, and evaluation of a program;
- Comprehensive educational, health, nutrition, social, and other services;
- A family services coordinator who can assist families in attaining support services; and
- An evaluation plan.

Achieving the Objectives

Increasing numbers of young children attend early childhood programs before entering kindergarten. These programs build on the growth and development that takes place during the first years of each child's life. To facilitate the transition from preschool to kindergarten or first grade, the school must make a concerted effort to provide continuity for children and families as they change educational settings.

The role of parents as partners is critical. Family members can provide key information about a child's abilities, strengths, needs, and interests. Opportunities for an exchange of information among the family, school, and preschool provide a broader picture of how to ensure a more successful transition for each child.

There has been growing concern about the need to sustain gains made by low-income children in their preschool years. Schools must facilitate the transition from preschool to kindergarten by being responsive to the wide range of home cultures, languages, experiences, and needs of children entering school.

The Head Start Bureau defines four critical elements of a successful transition from preschool to kindergarten:

- Providing program continuity through a developmentally appropriate curriculum. Both the preschool and the early

elementary grade programs must provide opportunities for children to explore materials, solve problems, experiment, and develop social skills at their own levels.

- Maintaining ongoing communication and cooperation between preschool and kindergarten staff. Opportunities for sharing information and transferring records, visiting each other's settings, and planning together helps ensure a successful transition.

- Preparing children for the transition. Children need to know what to expect in the new setting. They should have the opportunity to become familiar with the new programs through visits, discussions, books, and dramatic play activities.

- Involving parents in the transition. Continuity is important for the whole family. Parents who have been actively involved in their child's preschool program may feel quite intimidated by the more formal and distant public school setting. Preschool staff can help families by describing ways of working with the new school system. Kindergarten staff should plan a thorough orientation for parents that includes information about the program, transportation, food services, and opportunities for parent participation.

The Regional Educational Laboratories' Early Childhood Collaboration Network expands the concept of transition. It views the issue of transition as really being an issue of continuity of early childhood services from pregnancy and birth to eight years of age. In its publication, *Continuity in Early Childhood: A Framework for Home, School, and Community Linkages*, it states, "Ongoing services throughout early childhood mean that no one period of development receives attention to the exclusion of others."

The Early Childhood Collaboration Network has developed an eight-part framework that focuses on elements and indicators of home, school, and community linkages. According to this framework, elements that facilitate continuity are:

- Home, school, and community partners sharing leadership and responsibility for decision making;

- A continuum of family-focused, comprehensive, and integrated services;
- Policies, practices, and programs that demonstrate the education, involvement, and empowerment of families;
- Policies, programs, and practices that demonstrate sensitivity to the home culture and home language of children and their families;
- Ongoing communication among all adults who are responsible for children's care and education;
- A coordinated approach to staff development across agencies to enhance implementation of home, school, and community linkages;
- Developmentally appropriate and culturally sensitive curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and
- Documentation and reporting of processes, operations, and outcomes that are used to refine and expand home, school, and community linkages.

Program Leaders' Checklist

There exist a number of strategies that state leaders can use to ease transition periods for children and families. How many are you using?

yes	no	
❑	❑	Schools use information from parents to help shape educational programs.
❑	❑	A system exists where early childhood service providers and teachers share best practices, develop a greater awareness of services available to low-income families, and facilitate linkages.

yes	no	
❑	❑	Parents share information about their children during the transition from preschool to elementary school and regularly receive information about available programs and services.
❑	❑	Preschool-to-school transition policies and programs involve the child, family, school, and community.
❑	❑	Community programs educate parents of preschool children in how to work effectively with public schools.
❑	❑	Public schools provide staff development in implementing developmentally appropriate practices for children through the primary grades.
❑	❑	Policies ensure comprehensive services are provided to children and families from infancy through the primary grades.
❑	❑	Staff of educational programs and human service agencies receive training and technical assistance in defining meaningful outcomes and methods of assessment.
❑	❑	Collaboration is used to overcome barriers between preschool and primary level programs.
❑	❑	Partnerships are formed among Head Start and federal, state, and local programs that serve children with disabilities.
❑	❑	Programs honor the culture of children and families.
❑	❑	Ongoing evaluations continuously feed into program improvements.
❑	❑	Programs have bilingual staff so that families can communicate in their home language and encourage parents to speak to their children in their home language.

Endnote

Early childhood care and education is a critical national issue. This *EdTalk* was designed to help educators and child care providers who are grappling with it every day. Their efforts lay the groundwork for children to develop their full potential, to be healthy and successful in school, and to be fully contributing members of society later in life. Readers are welcome to reproduce the checklists in this document for use in developing and improving early childhood care and education programs. No permission from the Council for Educational Development and Research is required.

For information on other R&D programs and services in the area of early childhood care and education, please contact your regional educational laboratory.

Suggested Resources

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