

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 424 936

PS 027 050

TITLE Early Childhood in the Carolinas: Research to Policy Practice. 1997 Proceedings (Fort Mill, South Carolina, September, 1997).

INSTITUTION Southeastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE), Tallahassee, FL.

SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.

PUB DATE 1998-00-00

NOTE 20p.

CONTRACT RJ96006701

PUB TYPE Collected Works - Proceedings (021)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS Early Childhood Education; *Educational Improvement; *Educational Policy; Educational Quality; *Educational Research; *Theory Practice Relationship

IDENTIFIERS *National Center for Early Development and Learning; *SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education

ABSTRACT

SERVE, the Southeastern Regional Vision for Education, is a consortium of educational organizations whose mission is to promote and support the continual improvement of educational opportunities for all learners in the Southeast United States; SERVE is one of the ten Regional Education Laboratories funded by the U.S. Department of Education. In the fall of 1997, SERVE and the National Center for Early Development & Learning (NCEDL) held a conference in Fort Mill, South Carolina, the goal of which was to develop a model conference to help state policymakers turn research into policy and policy into practice. This booklet summarizes the proceedings of this conference. The booklet's contents are: (1) "Conference Summary"; (2) "Conference Background"; (3) "The Conference: Day 1," which covered research on quality early childhood programs, defining quality, and policy barriers to quality; (4) "The Conference: Day 2," which covered policy options for addressing barriers to quality; (5) "Conference Evaluation"; and (6) "Follow-Up Efforts." The booklet also contains the conference agenda, a list of participants, and information about SERVE and ordering SERVE publications. (EV)

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1997 Proceedings

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Early Childhood in the Carolinas

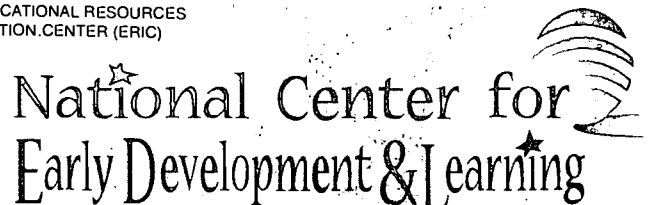
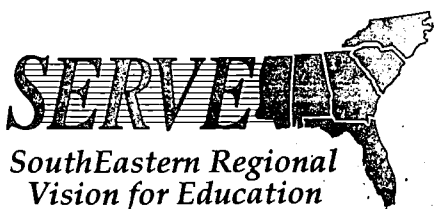
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Research to Policy to Practice

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First Printing, 1998

SERVE

SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education
Associated with the School of Education
University of North Carolina at Greensboro

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This document was produced with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. RJ96006701.

Acknowledgments

We wish to thank each of the representatives from North Carolina and South Carolina who participated in the policy conference for their hard work and dedication to young children and their families.

Special thanks also to the following NCEDL and SERVE staff who contributed to the development of this publication:

National Center for Early Development & Learning

James Gallagher, Director of Policy Studies

Robin Rooney, Research Associate

SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education

Charles Ahearn, Senior Editor/Director of Publishing and Quality Assurance

Lynn Amwake, Program Specialist, SERVEing Young Children

Glyn Brown, Program Specialist, SERVEing Young Children

Christy Casbon, Communications Specialist

Stephen Chapman, Program Specialist

Chrissy Karantinos, Art Illustrator

Nancy Livesay, Program Director, SERVEing Young Children

Donna Nalley, Senior Program Specialist

Adapted from an earlier proceedings document written by
Loyd Little, Media Specialist, National Center for Early Development & Learning

Conference Summary

In the fall of 1997, SERVE and NCEDL held a conference in Fort Mill, South Carolina. The goal of the conference was to develop a model conference to help state policymakers turn research into policy and policy into practice. Nationally known researchers and early childhood policy and decision makers from North and South

Carolina convened for this conference. Participants discussed current research findings and their implications for policy and programs. New models for addressing policy barriers to quality programs for young children and their families were developed.

Conference Background

SERVE, one of the ten Regional Education Laboratories funded by the U.S. Department of Education, was charged with providing policymakers with the most current and relevant information pertaining to recommended practices in early childhood education. NCEDL, one of the U.S. Department of Education's newly funded Research Centers, had a responsibility to develop a summit on child care to bring together those who make policy, those who implement policy, and those who study policy. Through the collaborative efforts of both of these federally funded groups, researchers in 1996 began discussing the possibility of a joint conference.

In early 1997, SERVE's Early Childhood program staff conducted focus groups in five of the six states that comprise the SERVE region to determine what the policy issues were for these states (Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina). In addition, a survey was distributed in the sixth state, Alabama. Based on the results of those focus groups and the survey, SERVE identified topics that participants requested for

the policy conference. They also compiled presentation suggestions, potential speakers, recommendations on who should be invited to attend, dissemination results and strategies, and expected outcomes. At the same time, NCEDL strand members were surveying the literature, discussing plans with NCEDL research advisors, and doing preliminary planning in support of the process.

Invitations for the conference were sent to researchers at SERVE and NCEDL and to numerous child care policymakers, advocacy groups, officials of child care organizations, school officials, community college officers, and representatives of professional groups in North and South Carolina. (See participant list in the appendix.)

Prior to the conference, SERVE and NCEDL representatives produced a notebook for each participant which included selected research findings, policy papers, impact studies of federal policies, and other materials directly related to policy and child care.

The Conference: Day 1

More than 70 participants convened in the Radisson Grand Resort, Fort Mill, SC, for the noon start of the conference on September 29, 1997. (See attached participant list in the appendix.) Opening remarks were made by Dr. Roy Forbes, Executive Director of SERVE; Dr. Jim Gallagher, Director of Policy Studies at Frank Porter Graham (FPG); and Nancy Livesay, Director of Early Childhood at SERVE.

The afternoon consisted of three speakers from the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill presenting the latest research findings. Between speakers, SERVE staff facilitated group discussions and conducted group activities to inspire sharing of information.

Dr. Donna Bryant, an investigator with Frank Porter Graham, spoke first on the following question: "What does research tell us about quality programs for young children and families?"

Informing participants on the most current research applicable to the issues at hand, Dr. Bryant reported that, according to the official government definition of poverty, a quarter of the nation's children live in poverty. She pointed out that during the last 50 years, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of working mothers, the number of single mothers, and the number of mothers who return to work before their children reach age one.

Citing data from Head Start and Smart Start studies, Dr. Bryant said that a significant correlation exists between program quality and outcomes for children. Outcomes related to quality include cooperative play, sociability, creativity, ability to solve social conflicts, self-control, and language and cognitive development. Children who attended community child care programs the year prior to kindergarten scored higher than children in the other groups on individual assessments of language and math and were rated higher by their kindergarten teachers on social skills and communication development. In summary, she noted that positive outcomes appear to be associated with more developmentally appropriate classes.

Dr. Bryant also stated that research has shown that the education of child care center staff is positively related to the quality of care. Two recent studies found that only a small percentage of teachers in child care programs have

a bachelor's degree or higher. Turnover rate in child care centers is high, ranging from 25 to 50 percent per year. This means that children are constantly adapting to new caregivers, and administrators are constantly orienting and training staff. Child care center staff compensation, including benefits and wages, is exceptionally low. Child care staff are among the lowest paid of all classes of workers in the United States.

Following Dr. Bryant's talk, participants discussed the implications of research for policy to practice. During their discussion, participants were asked to consider such questions as, "Should all states have Pre-K? Why or why not?"

Dr. Dick Clifford, a Frank Porter Graham investigator and Associate Director of NCEDL, was the next presenter. He questioned, "Can we define quality? Do we know it when we see it?"

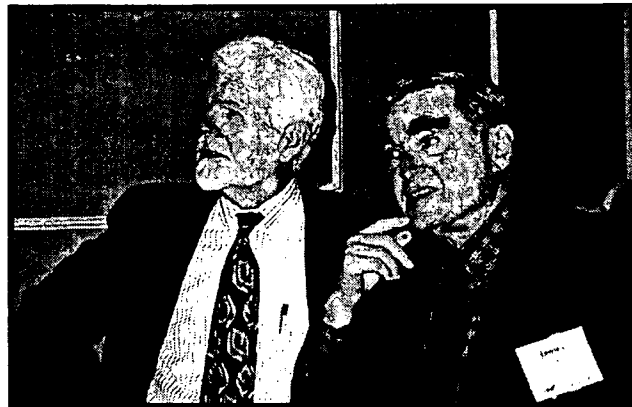
Citing the *Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study* (1995), Dr. Clifford reported that the quality of care in child care centers around the country is often mediocre. Of more than 400 centers studied in four states, only eight percent of infant and 24 percent of preschool classrooms were of good or excellent quality. He noted that 10 percent of preschool programs and 40 percent of infant programs were rated as having poor quality. Less than 25 percent of children enter school without some previous experience in child care or pre-school.

The study further revealed that the level of training for teachers in child care centers varies widely from program to program and by type of sponsor. The three most significant factors in predicting outcomes for children, based on data from the *Cost, Quality, and Outcomes Study*, are child-staff ratios, staff education, and the prior experience of program administrators. Further analysis of the data identifies characteristics that distinguish among centers of poor, mediocre, and good quality. The most important discriminators included how much teachers are paid, the number of years of school that teachers have, and the amount of specialized teacher training.

Dr. Clifford noted that in 1993 the average cost for a child at a child care center was \$86 per week. That figure is probably now more than \$100 and more than \$120 a week for true quality care. In other words, he said, in the four

years before a child is in child care prior to entering school, the parents will pay approximately \$20,000. This is about the amount a middle class family would pay for a nice car.

In summary, Dr. Clifford said that people know what quality is in a car and how to evaluate it, but identifying quality child care is not always clear to parents. Parents require help in making choices, and America lacks a system that weeds out very poor programs. He said the nation needs the will and the resources to take action. Following Dr. Clifford's presentation, SERVE staff facilitated a discussion on the implications for policy from Dr. Clifford's speech.



Finally, **Dr. James Gallagher** spoke on the topic, "What are policy barriers to quality?"

He stated that there are no simple answers to questions on child care policy. Strong leadership is essential in persuading people to change, despite initial resistance. Social policies are the rules and standards by which scarce public resources are allocated to almost unlimited social needs.

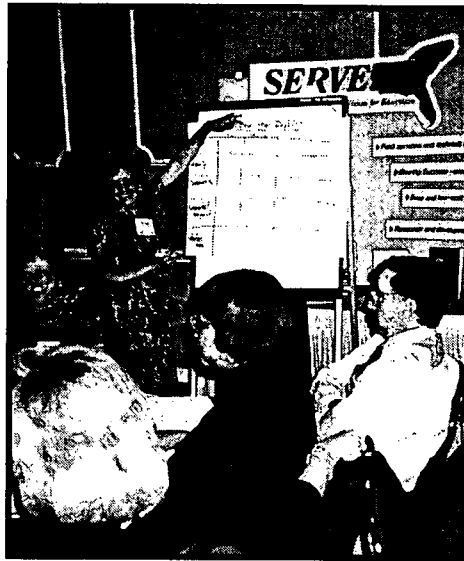
Written social policy should provide the answer to four major questions:

- Who will receive the resources?
- Who will deliver the resources?
- What is the nature of the resources?
- What are the conditions under which these services will be delivered?

Success in policy implementation depends on knowing the nature of barriers so that effective strategies can be devised to overcome them, Dr. Gallagher noted. He presented the following examples of barriers: institutional, psychological, sociological, economic, political, and geographic. For each barrier, he discussed approaches to overcoming it or at least to better understanding it. After Dr. Gallagher's presentation, SERVE once again led a discussion on implications for policy and practice through a group activity.

The Conference: Day 2

The second day opened with Dr. Gallagher helping the group apply the previous day's information by introducing some tools and speaking on "Policy and Program Options: A Model for Addressing Barriers." Dr. Gallagher distributed a policy-options decision matrix to participants and demonstrated the use of a decision-making matrix. The exercise questioned, "Who cares for the children? If there is a collective obligation of a society to aid families in the care of young dependent children, how should such aid be provided?" These were the options listed:



- Lower the age for children to begin public schools.
- Set up programs for children with special needs.
- Give incentives for companies with more than 150 employees to create child care programs for their employees.
- Provide direct subsidies for child care centers.
- Use parent vouchers for child care.
- Give tax credits to parents.
- Maintain the status quo.

Each option was then considered in light of these criteria:

- Additional costs
- Vertical equity
- Program effectiveness
- Personnel needs
- Political acceptance
- Public acceptance
- Other considerations

To demonstrate, Dr. Gallagher asked participants to consider the first option: if North Carolina lowered the age for children to begin school, it would cost between \$400 million and \$600 million. Then, with Dr. Gallagher's assistance, the participants filled out the matrix for practice.

After Dr. Gallagher's presentation, the participants were divided into groups by state. SERVE policy staff, Dr. Vicky Mikow-Porto and Chip Jackson, and NCEDL staff, Dr. Robin Rooney, facilitated the group work. Each state selected a specific research finding to be turned into policy and then to be worked through a decision-making matrix. Each state group could also break into smaller groups to work on related issues. For example, one group from North Carolina designed their matrix to focus on how to increase the education/training of the early child care and education workforce. Another group built its

matrix around the issue of increased family involvement to ensure children's optimal growth and development.

Once the matrix was completed, each group was directed to choose one or more options based on their work. Having done that, each group then listed the next steps necessary to take in making policy. A spokesperson from each group then gave a summary of their group's work to all participants.

Dr. Forbes delivered the closing remarks:

I am extremely optimistic. We've got the research base. We see a growing need. Welfare reform will result in an even larger need in the early childhood area. With a booming economy, I feel people will be a little more "sharing" in their tax dollars. And I have great faith in politicians because they will look for something to capture public attention. We have a great opportunity to have a dramatic impact on the future of early childhood education and development in America.

On that note, the meeting was adjourned.

Conference Evaluation

To assess the immediate impact of the conference and the effectiveness and replicability of this model, participants were asked to complete a brief survey. The survey was designed to determine participants' overall satisfaction with the conference, as well as with specific topics, activities, and speakers.

In general, conference participants expressed high approval and satisfaction with selected speakers and discussion activities. When asked about specific benefits received, most participants mentioned the opportunity to meet and network with representatives of other agencies and organizations. Others cited the opportunity to exchange new ideas and engage in joint planning as the major benefit received.

In terms of changes anticipated as a result of the policy conference, most participants did not envision specific policy changes. They did, however, believe that the discussion and planning which began at the conference would continue once participants returned to their respective jobs and duties.

To improve the conference and make it more useful to policymakers, most participants emphasized the need for

more time to process information received and to work within their state teams. Although the conference was originally designed to minimize the amount of time that policymakers had to spend away from their work, the feedback received indicated that participants may actually benefit from additional time.

There also was some concern that participants were not allowed adequate time to network across states. While they were able to meet and work with representatives from their own state, several of the participants expressed a desire to connect with individuals from outside their state, particularly those from a parallel agency.

Finally, participants were asked to comment on the overall effectiveness of the conference as a means of discussing specific issues and planning possible solutions. Most participants indicated that the conference was helpful toward providing important information and identifying critical issues; however, there was some concern that the persons actually responsible for making policy (e.g., governor's office staff, key legislators, other elected officials) were not present at the conference.

Follow-Up Efforts

As a result of some of the work that began at the conference, efforts to address early childhood issues are continuing in North Carolina and South Carolina. For example, in South Carolina, John Niblock, President/CEO of Alliance for South Carolina's Children, has been working with others, including Rep. Govan, to address the issue of quality child care. This legislative session has seen the introduction of several key bills designed to improve the care and education of young children.

In North Carolina, a task force that was formed at the September meeting has continued to meet and is planning a conference to be held this coming fall. The conference is co-sponsored by Day Care Services, Frank Porter Graham Center, and the Center for the Child Care Workforce and will bring together planning teams from various states to focus on the issue of compensation.

In addition to work that is happening within the states, SERVE and NCEDL are continuing their efforts to bring the most recent early childhood research to policymakers and offer strategies for effective policy decision making. Most recently, NCEDL and SERVE conducted follow-up training in Atlanta, GA, for SERVE policy staff, the Regional Education Laboratories' Early Childhood Laboratory Network Program members, and policy representatives from state and national early childhood groups.

Finally, there are plans underway to adapt and replicate the model in other states within the SERVE region. SERVE and NCEDL hope to target two additional states this fall and, once again, help bridge the gaps between research, policy, and practice.

Agenda

Early Childhood in the Carolinas: Research to Policy to Practice

Day 1

- 12:00PM – 1:00PM **Luncheon**—Grand Ballroom West
Welcome and Introductions:
Roy Forbes, SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE)
Jim Gallagher, National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL)
- 1:00PM – 2:30PM **Speaker**—**Donna Bryant**, NCEDL: “*What does research tell us about quality programs for young children and their families?*”
Discussion Facilitators—**Nancy Livesay and Roy Forbes**, SERVE: “*What are the implications for policy and practice?*”
- 2:30PM – 2:45PM **Break**
- 2:45PM – 4:15PM **Speaker**—**Dick Clifford**, NCEDL: “*Can we define quality? Do we know it when we see it?*”
Discussion Facilitators—**Nancy Livesay and Roy Forbes**, SERVE: “*What are the implications for policy and practice?*”
- 4:15PM – 5:45PM **Speaker**—**Jim Gallagher**, NCEDL: “*What are policy barriers to quality?*”
Discussion Facilitators—**Nancy Livesay and Roy Forbes**, SERVE: “*What are the implications for policy and practice?*”
- 6:15PM – 7:00PM **Reception**—Cash Bar outside the Trellis Room
- 7:00PM – 9:00PM **Buffet Dinner**—Trellis Room

Day 2

- 8:00AM – 8:30AM **Continental Breakfast**—Grand Ballroom West
- 8:30AM – 9:15AM **Jim Gallagher**, NCEDL—Presentation of program planning/decision model: “*Policy and program options: A model for addressing barriers.*”
- 9:15AM – 11:45AM **State Team Meetings:** “*What are our goals and options for increasing quality in programs for young children and families?*”
NC—Facilitated by Vicky Mikow-Porto, SERVE, and Robin Rooney, NCEDL
SC—Facilitated by Chip Jackson and Nancy Livesay, SERVE
- 11:45AM – 12:00PM **Break**
- 12:00PM – 12:30PM **Participant Panel Discussion:** *What have we learned? Where do we go from here? What are the implications for policy and practice in our states?*—Facilitated by Robin Rooney, NCEDL
- 12:30PM – 1:30PM **Lunch, Wrap-up, and Charge to States:** Roy Forbes, SERVE
- 1:30PM **Adjourn**

List of Participants

B

Kathryn Baars
619 Coordinator
North Carolina Department
of Public Instruction
301 North Wilmington Street
Raleigh, NC 27601
919-715-1598

Peggy Ball
Deputy Director
Division of Child Development
P.O. Box 29533
Raleigh, NC 27626
919-662-4543

Ms. Nancy Brown
President
North Carolina Association for the
Education of Young Children
3509 Haworth Drive
Suite 200
Raleigh, NC 27609
919-510-5034
919-510-5033 fax

Joyce Brown
Director, Community-Based Services
South Carolina Department of Health
and Environmental Control
Division of Women
and Children's Services
Box 101106, Robert Mills Complex
Columbia, SC 29211
803-737-4012

Kathryn Brownfield
Consultant
North Carolina Division
of Maternal and Child Health
P.O. Box 29597
Raleigh, NC 27626
919-715-3429

Donna Bryant
Research Investigator
Ecological Interventions
Frank Porter Graham Child
Development Center
University of North Carolina
at Chapel Hill
CB#8180, 105 Smith Level Road
Chapel Hill, NC 27599
919-966-4295

C

Karen Carlson
Director, Early Childhood
Minnesota Department of Children,
Families, and Learning
550 Cedar Street, Suite 136
St. Paul, MN 55101
612-296-4059

Kitty Casoli
Department Head
Department of Child Care
and Development
South Carolina Department
of Health and Human Services
P.O. Box 8206
Columbia, SC 29202
803-253-6154

Richard Clifford
Research Investigator
Quality Studies
National Center for Early
Development and Learning
University of North Carolina
at Chapel Hill
CB#8040, 300 NationsBank Plaza
Chapel Hill, NC 27599
919-962-4737

Barbara Cooper
Education Coordinator
PeeDee CAA Head Start
P.O. Drawer 12920
Florence, SC 29504
803-678-3417, ext.113

Rhonda Corley
Director, Early Childhood
Greenville County Schools
301 Camperdown Way, Box 2848
Greenville, SC 29602-2848
864-241-3191

Susan Cranford
Vice President
North Carolina Head Start
Association
300 Kerr Street, NW
Concord, NC 28025
704-784-3614

D

Barbara Davis
Research Associate
SouthEastern Regional Vision
for Education
1203 Governor's Square Boulevard
Suite 400
Tallahassee, FL 32301
850-671-6093

David Denton
Director
Health and Human Resources
Southern Regional Education Board
592 Tenth Street, NW
Atlanta, GA 30318
404-875-9211

Mary Lynne Diggs
Director
South Carolina Head Start
Collaboration
South Carolina Department
of Health and Human Services
1801 Main Street, 10th Floor
Columbia, SC 29201
803-253-6177

Norma Donaldson-Jenkins
619 Coordinator
Office of Programs
for Exceptional Children
South Carolina Department
of Education
1429 Senate Street
Columbia, SC 29201
803-734-8811

Dennis Drew
Owner
The Sunshine House
1709 Gateway Drive
Greenwood, SC 29646
864-223-3945

Roseann Drew
Owner
The Sunshine House
1709 Gateway Drive
Greenwood, SC 29646
864-223-3945

Sherry Driggers
Director
Division of Child Day Care
Licensing and Regulatory Services
South Carolina Department
of Social Services
1535 Confederate Avenue Extension
Columbia, SC 29202
803-734-5740

E

Terry Elofson
Director
Child and Family Program
Northwest Regional
Educational Laboratory
101 SW Main Street, Suite 500
Portland, OR 97204
503-275-9500

Joanne Emerson
Director
Interfaith Community Services
of South Carolina, Inc.
P.O. Box 11570
Columbia, SC 29211
803-252-8390

F

Jana Fleming
Research Associate
Quality Studies
National Center for Early
Development and Learning
University of North Carolina
at Chapel Hill
CB#8040, 300 NationsBank Plaza
Chapel Hill, NC 27599
919-962-7322

Sue Fleming-Hansen
Director
Child Care Resource and Referral
of Wake County
3901 Barrett Drive, Suite 104
Raleigh, NC 27609
919-571-1520, ext. 3007

Roy Forbes
Executive Director
SouthEastern Regional Vision
for Education
University of North Carolina
at Greensboro
1100 West Market Street, 3rd Floor
Greensboro, NC 27403
336-334-3211

Phyllis Ford
Early Childhood Consultant
Charleston County School District
75 Calhoun Street
Charleston, SC 29401
803-937-6563

G

James Gallagher
Research Investigator, Policy Studies
National Center for Early
Development and Learning
University of North Carolina
at Chapel Hill
CB#8040, 300 NationsBank Plaza
Chapel Hill, NC 27599
919-966-7373

Charlotte Gardner
414 Street Johns Drive
Salisbury, NC 28144
704-636-5775

Heather Gilmer
Director
State Interagency
Coordinating Council
South Carolina Governor's Office
1205 Pendleton Street, Suite 369
Columbia, SC 29201
803-734-0561

Owens Goff
Coordinator, Research and Planning
South Carolina Department
of Health and Environmental Control
Division of Women
and Children's Services
Box 101106, Robert Mills Complex
Columbia, SC 29211
803-737-4012

H

Dorothy Ham
Early Childhood Specialist
Orangeburg Consolidated School
District Five
578 Ellis Avenue
Orangeburg, SC 29115
803-533-7950

Cliff Hammond
Early Childhood Program
Central Piedmont
Community College
P.O. Box 35009
Charlotte, NC 28235
704-330-6764

Kathryn Hart
Program Manager
DHEC/Baby Net
Box 101106, Mills/Jarrett Complex
Columbia, SC 29211
803-737-4045

Margaret Harvey
Board Member
North Carolina State
Board of Education
910 Dewey Street
Kinston, NC 28501
919-523-4490

Catherine Haselden
Coordinator, Planning and Research
South Carolina Governor's Office
1205 Pendleton Street, Suite 366
Columbia, SC 29201
803-734-0397

Estella Holliday
Education Associate
Parent Education and Even Start
South Carolina Department
of Education
1429 Senate Street
808 Rutledge Building
Columbia, SC 29201
803-734-2291

Baron Holmes
Assistant Executive Director
State Budget and Control Board
612 Wade Hampton Office Building
P.O. Box 1244
Columbia, SC 29211
803-734-2291

Beverly Hunter
Director
Division of Outstationed
Program Monitoring
South Carolina Department
of Health and Human Services
P.O. Box 5616
Greenville, SC 29606
864-250-8297

J

Katura Jackson
President Elect
North Carolina Day Care Association
c/o Child Care Resources
700 Kenilworth Avenue
Charlotte, NC 28204
704-376-1018

Calvin Jackson
Policy Analyst
SouthEastern Regional Vision
for Education
1429 Senate Street
1005 Rutledge Building
Columbia, SC 29201
803-734-8496

Mickie Jennings
Curriculum Specialist
Sunshine House
1709 Gateway Drive
Greenwood, SC 29646
864-223-3945

Linda Jones
Department Head
South Carolina Department
of Health and Human Services
P.O. Box 8206
Columbia, SC 29202
803-253-6154

K
Krista Kustra
State Director
Center for Child Care
Career Development
P.O. Box 5616
Greenville, SC 29606
864-250-8581

L
Loyd Little
Media Specialist
Frank Porter Graham Child
Development Center
University of North Carolina
at Chapel Hill
CB#8185, Sheryl-Mar 100
Chapel Hill, NC 27599
919-966-0867

Nancy Livesay
Program Director
SERVEing Young Children
SouthEastern Regional Vision
for Education
1203 Governor's Square Boulevard
Suite 400
Tallahassee, FL 32301
850-671-6076

M

Lynda McCulloch
Education Advisor
North Carolina's Governor's Office
Administration Building
116 West Jones Street
Raleigh, NC 27603
919-715-3535

Vicky Mikow-Porto
Policy Analyst
SouthEastern Regional Vision
for Education
North Carolina Department
of Public Instruction
301 North Wilmington Street
Raleigh, NC 27601-1245
919-715-1278

Linda Mims
Primary Specialist
Office of Technical Assistance
South Carolina Department
of Education
507 Rutledge Building
1429 Senate Street
Columbia, SC 29201
803-734-9052

Sally Mullen
Day Care Trainer
400 Cold Branch Road
Columbia, SC 29223
803-788-0859

Duncan Munn
Branch Head
North Carolina Infant-Toddler
Program
DD Services
325 North Salisbury Street
Raleigh, NC 27603
919-733-3654

N

Sandy Newman
Director of Provider Services
Child Care Resources, Inc.
700 Kenilworth Avenue
Charlotte, NC 28204
704-376-6697

John Niblock
President/CEO
Alliance for South Carolina's
Children
P.O. Box 11644
Columbia, SC 29211
803-343-5510

O

Mark Orf
Director
Division of Program Development
South Carolina Department
of Health and Human Services
P.O. Box 8206
Columbia, SC 29202
803-253-6154

P

Karen Ponder
Program Director
North Carolina Partnership
for Children
1100 Wake Forest Road, Suite 300
Raleigh, NC 27604
919-821-7999

R

Joseph (Mike) Rauseo
Program Coordinator II
South Carolina Department
of Social Services
3150 Harden Street, Suite 202
P.O. Box 1520
Columbia, SC 29202
803-737-5916

Lucy Roberts
Chief
Early Childhood Education
North Carolina Department
of Public Instruction
301 N. Wilmington Street
Raleigh, NC 27601-2825
919-715-1497

Robin Rooney
Research Associate, Policy Studies
National Center for Early
Development and Learning
University of North Carolina
at Chapel Hill
CB#8040, 300 NationsBank Plaza
Chapel Hill, NC 27599
919-966-8788

Sue Russell

Director
Day Care Services Association
P.O. Box 901
Chapel Hill, NC 27514
919-967-3272

S**Paula Scher**

3519 Rogby Road
Durham, NC 27707
919-490-8493

Sara Sulzbach

Policy Consultant
Division of Child Development
P.O. Box 29533
Raleigh, NC 27626
919-662-4543

T**Kate Thegan**

1006 Broad Street
Durham, NC 27705
919-4799-8106

W**David Walker**

Executive Director
North Carolina Partnership
for Children
1100 Wake Forest Road, Suite 300
Raleigh, NC 27604
919-821-7999

Robert Walker

Representative
South Carolina House
of Representatives
P.O. Box 159
Landrum, SC 29356
864-457-3328

Dwight Whitted

Consultant
North Carolina Department
of Public Instruction
301 North Wilmington Street
Raleigh, NC 27601
919-715-1637

Dianna Wilson

North Carolina Rural
Economic Development
Rural Child Care
Wake County Office Park
4021 Cary Drive
Raleigh, NC 27610
919-250-4314

Diane Wilson

Project Administrator
South Carolina Department
of Health and Human Services
P.O. Box 8206
Columbia, SC 29202
803-253-6242

Z**Kathie Zigli**

Program Coordinator
South Carolina DHEC
Baby Net Program
MUSC c/o Baby Net Program
171 Ashley Avenue
Charleston, SC 29425
803-792-8881

About the SERVE Organization

SERVE, the SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education, is a consortium of educational organizations whose mission is to promote and support the continual improvement of educational opportunities for all learners in the Southeast. Formed by a coalition of business leaders, governors, policymakers, and educators seeking systemic, lasting improvement in education, the organization is governed and guided by a Board of Directors that includes the chief state school officers, governors, and legislative representatives from Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Committed to creating a shared vision of the future of education in the Southeast, the consortium impacts educational change by addressing critical educational issues in the region, acting as a catalyst for positive change, and serving as a resource to individuals and groups striving for comprehensive school improvement.

SERVE's core component is a regional educational laboratory funded since 1990 by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education. Building from this core, SERVE has developed a system of programs and initiatives that provides a spectrum of resources, services, and products for responding effectively to national, regional, state, and local needs. SERVE is a dynamic force, transforming national education reform strategies into progressive policies and viable initiatives at all levels. SERVE Laboratory programs and key activities are centered around

- Applying research and development related to improving teaching, learning, and organizational management
- Serving the educational needs of young children and their families more effectively
- Providing field and information services to promote and assist local implementation of research-based practices and programs
- Offering policy services, information, and assistance to decision makers concerned with developing progressive educational policy
- Connecting educators to a regional computerized communication system, so that they may search for and share information and network
- Developing and disseminating publications and products designed to give educators practical information and the latest research on common issues and problems

The Eisenhower Consortium for Mathematics and Science Education at SERVE is part of the national infrastructure for the improvement of mathematics and science education sponsored by OERI. The consortium coordinates resources, disseminates exemplary instructional materials, and provides technical assistance for implementing teaching methods and assessment tools.

The SouthEast and Islands Regional Technology in Education Consortium (SEIR♦TEC) serves 14 states and territories. A seven-member partnership led by SERVE, the consortium offers a variety of services to foster the infusion of technology into K-12 classrooms. The Region IV Comprehensive Assistance Center provides a coordinated, comprehensive approach to technical assistance through its partnership with SERVE.

A set of special purpose institutes completes the system of SERVE resources. These institutes provide education stakeholders extended site-based access to high quality professional development programs, evaluation and assessment services, training and policy development to improve school safety, and subject area or project-specific planning and implementation assistance to support clients' school improvement goals.

Following the distributive approach to responding and providing services to its customers, SERVE has ten offices in the region. The North Carolina office at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro is headquarters for the Laboratory's executive services and operations. Policy offices are located in the departments of education in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina.

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**Eisenhower Consortium for
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336-334-3211
800-545-7075
Fax 336-334-4671

Education Policy Analyst

Department of Public Instruction
Education Building
301 North Wilmington Street
Raleigh, NC 27601-2825
919-715-1245
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