

Creation of The Early Childhood Care and Education Task Force

University Children's Policy Collaborative: The Early Childhood Care and Education Task Force

In 1999, the Institute and the Prevention Research Center joined with nationally-recognized researchers from the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development and the Temple University Center for Public Policy to form the Universities Child Policy Collaborative (UCPC). UCPC was initiated to provide cross-university capability and cooperation in providing policy-relevant research on issues related to children and families to the State of Pennsylvania. Formed by the three major state-related universities, UCPC has built a matrix of research capabilities and a network of colleagues here and nation-wide to answer the most pressing questions about advancing the well-being of Pennsylvania's young children.

In April 2002 Governor Richard Schweiker created the 33-member Early Childhood Care and Education Task Force which was empowered to provide recommendations for the future of early childhood services in Pennsylvania. The Governor's Office asked UCPC to play a key role in assisting the task force and Dr. Greenberg and the Prevention Research Center lead and coordinated the overall effort which examined existing and potential programs and services for children from birth to age 8 and made recommendations for improving educational opportunities for children. Penn State contributors to UCPC included Dr. Richard Fiene and E. Michael Foster, professor of Health Policy and Administration.

Governor Schweiker signing the executive order to create the Early Childhood Care and Education Task Force.

The task force submitted two reports in 2002. The first, *Early Care and Education: The Keystone of Pennsylvania's Future*, detailed research findings from four studies conducted by UCPC and cited four key factors in ensuring that Pennsylvania's children enter school ready to learn: gubernatorial leadership and vision; key components of school readiness: early care and education, health and family supports; foundation elements that assure progress toward the goal; and public information and engagement.

The second report, led by Dr. Fiene and entitled *Quality of Early Childhood Education Programs in Pennsylvania*, was the first comprehensive quality study completed in Pennsylvania that provided an evaluation of the services currently provided to children and outlined recommendations for developing baseline quality expectations for all early-childhood programs. The survey of 372 early care and education providers found: 80% of care in Pennsylvania has been rated minimal or adequate at best; only 20% was rated good; Head Start's quality was significantly higher than all other forms of early care and education; 46% of Head Start programs are of high quality; preschool programs scored significantly higher on quality than did childcare centers and homes; and the quality of childcare centers and family/group childcare homes decreased since the mid-1990s.



UCPC research indicated areas that must be addressed to improve the quality of Pennsylvania's early care and education delivery system:

•**Teacher Education:**

Individuals with college degrees provide a much higher level of quality than individuals with a high school diploma; however, in Pennsylvania, only 58% of teachers have early education degrees.

•**Planned Curriculum:**

More than 90% of childcare centers, Head Start sites, preschools and group homes reported use of a written program guide or curriculum, while about 50% of the family homes and legally unregulated providers reported using written sources to plan activities.

•**Accreditation:**

Since this report Pennsylvania has fully launched its Keystone Stars quality improvement program to recognize childcare providers who exceed state health and safety licensing requirements. This incentive program may help contribute to a rise in the level of quality offered to children by licensed childcare providers.



Mr. Rogers and friends from the Early Childhood Care and Education Task Force.

Information on the Web

For more information on the Early Childhood Initiative, visit the Institute's Web site at <http://caecti.org>; to review task force reports and other publications relating to the UCPC, visit <http://caecti.org/ucpc/index.htm>.