

MISSISSIPPI KIDS COUNT – EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

JARED FISHER

MAGGIE FRANCIS

ABRAM ORLANSKY

ELEANOR SIMON

MAY 2010

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION

II. CURRENT STATE OF EARLY EDUCATION IN MISSISSIPPI

- a. FEDERAL-LEVEL PROGRAMS OPERATING IN MISSISSIPPI**
- b. STATE-LEVEL OVERSIGHT AND COORDINATION**
- c. STATE RESOURCES FOR PARENTS AND CHILD CARE WORKERS**
- d. COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS**

**III. POLICY AND PROGRAMMATIC PROGRESS FROM OTHER STATES ON EARLY
CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

- a. MODEL POLICIES AND PROGRAMS OF OTHER STATES**
- b. FUNDING STRATEGIES OF OTHER STATES**
- c. PRIVATE ORGANIZATIONS**

IV. MOVING FORWARD

I. Introduction

Early education is crucial to supporting healthy childhood development and to providing a strong foundation for future schooling and general success. Defined as education between birth and age eight,¹ early childhood education is associated with a wide range of positive outcomes for both the child as well as the community as a whole. Scientific studies suggest that participation in high quality early education, which includes elements such as trained and skilled teachers, small class sizes, and frequent child interaction and participation, improves cognitive and social development among all, but especially among low-income children.² Research shows that children develop ninety percent of their adult-size brains in the first five years of life and therefore the provision of abundant information, proper stimulation and sufficient encouragement are keys to future success.³ Relationships that children form with parents, caregivers, teachers and other adults early in their lives actually shape brain circuits and establish bases for later developmental outcomes, including academic accomplishment, mental health and interpersonal skills.⁴ The quality of a child's early education and interactions at the early important stages of brain circuit development are "crucial to determining the strength or weakness of the brain's architecture, which, in turn, determines how well he or she will be able to think and to regulate emotions."⁵

While provision of such nurturing and stimulating environments for children is undoubtedly costly, the benefits of such education are clear and profound. In the long-run, effective early education programs more than pay for themselves through future benefits, including decreased education remediation, decreased crime, and increased taxes due to higher average

¹ National Association for the Education of Young Children, About NAEYC, <http://www.naeyc.org/content/about-naeyc> (last visited April 11, 2010).

² Harvard University Center for the Developing Child, A Science-Based Framework for Early Childhood Policy (August 2007), available at http://developingchild.harvard.edu/library/reports_and_working_papers/policy_framework.

³ Math and Reading Help, The Importance of Early Education, http://math-and-reading-help-for-kids.org/articles/The_Importance_of_Early_Education.html (last visited April 11, 2010).

⁴ National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, *Young Children Develop in an Environment of Relationships: Working Paper No. 1*, available at www.developingchild.harvard.edu.

⁵ National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, *The Timing and Quality of Early Experiences Combine to Shape Brain Architecture: Working Paper No. 5*, at 1, available at www.developingchild.harvard.edu.

incomes.⁶ Thus, it is clear that the benefits of strengthening access to and quality of early childhood education are concrete and far-reaching, affecting not only the children who have access but the well-being of the entire community.

Mississippi has a high rate of childhood poverty,⁷ which is associated with a variety of negative long-term effects on child development.⁸ Early childhood education may have the potential to mitigate some of the effects of poverty and play a particularly important role in the lives of children in Mississippi.⁹ Yet, there is evidence that the availability of quality early childhood education programs varies significantly between geographic regions in Mississippi, especially between certain counties the Delta region and the rest of the state.¹⁰ Moreover, the existing state policies, procedures and frameworks supporting early childhood education in Mississippi are far from ideal.¹¹ Thus, there is significant room for improving Mississippi's early childhood education programs and for ensuring that children in Mississippi begin their educations with as much support as possible.

The earliest of early childhood education, education before a child begins primary school, may occur in a variety of settings, including in center-based care, parental care, relative care, or non-relative care.¹² Center-based care includes the government's Early Head Start and

⁶ Harvard University Center for the Developing Child, In Brief: Early Childhood Program Effectiveness, available at http://developingchild.harvard.edu/library/briefs/inbrief_series/inbrief_program_effectiveness/.

⁷ See Early Childhood Atlas, Mississippi: Early Childhood Status Report, <http://ims2.missouri.edu/EarlyChildhood/step1.AOI/statelist.asp?tool=statusreport> (last visited April 11, 2010). See also Mississippi Head Start Association, Mississippi Early Care and Education Programs: Contact Information and Program Data, <http://www.msheadstart.org/early-care-and-edu-info.pdf> (last visited April 11, 2010) (noting that the number of children under five living in poverty is just over thirty one percent).

⁸ See generally National Center for Children in Poverty, Child Poverty, <http://www.nccp.org/topics/childpoverty.html> (last visited April 11, 2010).

⁹ See, e.g., National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, "Enriched Environments in Adolescence Prevent Long-Term Effects of Early Impoverished Environments," available at <http://www.nccp.org/projects/ITOAdolescents.html>.

¹⁰ See generally MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY, EARLY CHILDHOOD INSTITUTE, NATIONAL CENTER FOR RURAL EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING INITIATIVES, INDICATORS OF ACCESS TO EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES IN THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA (May 2007), available at <http://ruralec.msstate.edu/reports/delta-report.pdf>.

¹¹ See generally NATIONAL CENTER FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES, POLICY MATTERS FOR SCHOOL READINESS: MISSISSIPPI FINAL REPORT (March 2005), available at http://www.earlychildhood.msstate.edu/MS_FinalReport_3-31-05.pdf (discussing multiple domains of policy in Mississippi necessary to support proper early childhood education).

¹² U.S. Dept. of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, What are the Most Prevalent Forms of Childcare, <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=4> (last visited April 11, 2010).

Head Start programs, as well as other forms of pre-school, kindergarten, and daycare.¹³ In 2005, a national study found that approximately fifty-seven percent of children aged three through five were enrolled in a center-based program, although those programs were more common among the children of wealthier, college-educated parents.¹⁴ Outside of center-based programs, twenty-six percent of children received only parental care, while relatives and non-relatives cared for the remainder of the children.¹⁵ The Harvard University Center for the Developing Child has found six elements that distinguish effective center-based early childhood education programs (whether pre-school, kindergarten or daycare): qualified and appropriately compensated personnel, small group sizes and high adult-child ratios, language rich environments, developmentally appropriate curricula, safe physical settings, and warm and responsive adult-child interactions.¹⁶

Once a child begins center-based care or school, additional programming is still important for the child's development. Afterschool programs in particular offer such enrichment for young children. Such programs may take a variety of forms and may engage children in numerous types of activities, but the common thread is keeping children active, involved and stimulated for additional hours of the day. Afterschool programs have been proven to have significant impacts on children and their communities including: improved school attendance and engagement in learning (e.g. less likely to drop out of school in the future, less likely to miss days of schools), improved test scores and grades, improved social, behavioral and health outcomes (e.g. decreased aggressive behavior toward others, less drug and alcohol use, lower prevalence of obesity), and improved outcomes for parents (e.g. parents of children in afterschool programs missed fewer days of work, worried significantly less about their children's safety, and felt an improved work/family life balance).¹⁷ Further, students at the greatest risk, such as those students who were behind in reading levels, show the greatest

¹³ U.S. Dept. of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, What are the Characteristics of Children in Early Childhood Programs, <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=78> (last visited April 11, 2010).

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ U.S. Dept. of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, What are the Most Prevalent Forms of Childcare, *supra* note 12.

¹⁶ Harvard University Center for the Developing Child, In Brief: Early Childhood Program Effectiveness, *supra* note 6.

¹⁷ Afterschool Alliance, Afterschool Programs: Making a Difference in America's Communities by Improving Academic Achievement, Keeping Kids Safe and Helping Working Families, http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/documents/outcomes_0208.pdf (last visited May 4, 2010).

gains from these types of programs.¹⁸ Despite the clear successes of afterschool programs, only 8.4 million children today are in afterschool programs – but parents of another 18.5 million children say their children would participate if afterschool if a program were available.¹⁹ In Mississippi, of all children not currently enrolled in afterschool programs, close to sixty percent would be likely to participate if an afterschool program were available in their community.²⁰

While attention to pre-kindergarten, kindergarten and afterschool programs are crucial, it is also important to note that, as mentioned above, early education includes infants and toddlers and a focus must be placed on the provision of stimulation and quality care to those children as well. It has been shown that as public support and attention is placed on the provision of care to children aged three and four, the provision of care for younger children in some places may have suffered.²¹ High-quality infant and toddler care, however, has been proven to enhance child development and is particularly crucial for disadvantaged children. Thus coordinated planning, infrastructure, data systems, professional development and funding are crucial for beginning at infancy and continuing throughout childhood.

It is clear that early childhood education can improve outcomes among children in all states, including Mississippi. Early childhood describes a relatively brief period of time in a person's life, but its impact on human development is considerable. In order to protect its future, Mississippi must invest in its young children by ensuring access to affordable and high quality early childhood education. This paper will provide additional information about early education programs, within Mississippi and more generally, as well as discuss opportunities and challenges related to expanding and improving Mississippi's early childhood education programs.

II. Current State of Early Childhood Education in Mississippi

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ Afterschool Alliance, About the Afterschool Alliance, <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/aboutUs.cfm> (last visited May 4, 2010).

²⁰ Afterschool Alliance, The State(s) of Afterschool, Mississippi, http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/policyStateFacts.cfm?state_abbr=MS (last visited May 4, 2010).

²¹ Ackerman, Debra J. and Barnett, Steven W., *Does Preschool Education Policy Impact Infant/Toddler Care?*, National Institute for Early Education Research (March 2009), available at <http://nieer.org/resources/policybriefs/21.pdf>.

The state of Mississippi has established and currently funds a voluntary kindergarten program for all five-year-old children.²² Additionally, in 2007 there were 26,657 children enrolled in Mississippi Head Start, which received \$162 million in funding that fiscal year.²³ The Mississippi legislature has also established various task forces to assess the state of early education, developed collaborative efforts among public and private pre-kindergarten programs and Head Start programs, offered grants to early education and child care centers, and provided tools and resources for parents and child care workers. Despite these strengths and real achievements, early education and childcare in Mississippi is acutely lacking as Mississippi is one of only nine states that do not have state funded pre-kindergarten programs;²⁴ and Mississippi is the only Southern state without a pre-kindergarten program.²⁵ The lack of state funded pre-kindergarten is a fundamental omission in the state's role in providing comprehensive early childhood education. This section will discuss the above-mentioned legislative accomplishments and what is currently in existence in Mississippi, but additional action is necessary in Mississippi to increase access to and quality of early childhood education.

A. Federal-Level Programs Operating in Mississippi

The federal Head Start program is one of the most well known examples of early childhood education. In fiscal year 2007, over 900,000 children were enrolled in Head Start programs throughout the United States.²⁶ Founded in 1965, Head Start funds “local public and private non-profit and for-profit agencies [that] provide comprehensive child development services to economically disadvantaged children and families, with a special focus on helping preschoolers develop the early reading and math skills they need to be successful in

²² H.B. 80, Reg. Sess. (Miss. 2010) (enacted).

²³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Head Start Program Fact Sheet, <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs/about/fy2008.html> (last visited May 25, 2010).

²⁴ Pre-K Now, Resource Center, Mapping Pre-K, Pre-K Availability Map, <http://www.pre-know.org/resource/mapping/accessmap.cfm> (last visited May 25, 2010).

²⁵ Early Childhood Focus, Preschool Program is Vital for Mississippi, August 5, 2008, http://www.earlychildhoodfocus.org/artman2/publish/preschool/Preschool_Program_is_Vital_for_Mississippi.shtml (last visited May 25, 2010).

²⁶ U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Office of Head Start, Statistical Fact Sheet Fiscal Year 2008, <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs/about/fy2008.html> (last visited April 11, 2010).

school.”²⁷ As of its January 2010 report, the congressionally mandated Head Start Impact Study found that access to a Head Start Program resulted in statistically significant improvements in indicators related to school readiness.²⁸ The study also found associations between Head Start and improved preschool experience, which was measured through factors including teacher qualifications, teacher-child ratios, and established childhood environment scoring systems. Although the study found that differences between Head Start and non-Head Start children decline by the end of first grade, Head Start children retained a higher first grade vocabulary, as well as some positive health and family indicators.²⁹ Furthermore, certain subgroups of children, including children with special needs or low cognitive skills, showed additional favorable outcomes after participating in Head Start. As of 2007 there were 26,657 children enrolled in Head Start programs throughout the state of Mississippi.³⁰

Early education also includes childhood learning before the age at which many children enroll in pre-school. Thus in addition to its traditional pre-school programs, Head Start includes the “Early Head Start” initiative, which serves over 70,000 children.³¹ Described as a “two-generation” program, Early Head Start works with families before birth through age three, focusing on both child and family development.³² Research has shown that Early Head Start exerts a positive impact on the emotional, cognitive, and language development of its enrollees.³³ The same study found that Early Head Start also increases parental involvement in a child’s education, as well as parental job-seeking activities.³⁴ As in studies of the

²⁷ U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Office of Head Start, About the Office of Head Start, http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs/about/index.html#prog_desc (last visited April 11, 2010).

²⁸ U.S. DEPT. OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES, ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES, HEAD START IMPACT STUDY: FINAL REPORT (Jan. 2010), *available at* http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/hs/impact_study/reports/impact_study/executive_summary_final.pdf; *see also* National Forum on Early Childhood Policy and Programs, Understanding the Head Start Impact Study (2010), *available at* http://developingchild.harvard.edu/index.php/download_file/-/view/627/.

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Statistical Fact Sheet Fiscal Year 2008, <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs/about/fy2008.html> (last visited April 11, 2010); *see also* Mississippi Head Start Association, Locations, <http://www.msheadstart.org/locations.php> (last visited April 11, 2010).

³¹ U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Office of Head Start, About the Office of Head Start, *supra* note 27.

³² *Id.*

³³ U.S. DEPT. OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES, ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES, EARLY HEAD START BENEFITS: CHILDREN AND FAMILIES (April 2006), *available at* http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/ehs/ehs_resrch/index.html.

³⁴ *Id.*

traditional Head Start program, researchers observed above-average gains among families in particular sub-groups. Those groups included families who enrolled in Early Head Start during pregnancy and those with moderate demographic risk factors.³⁵ There are forty-two Early Head Start programs currently operating in Mississippi.³⁶

Mississippi currently has one federally funded afterschool program: 21st Century Community Learning Centers (“21st CCLC”), which provides funds for afterschool programs that serve primarily Title I, low-income, students.³⁷ This program currently serves 213 afterschool centers with students from 345 feeder schools.³⁸ The Child Care and Development Block Grant (“CCDBG”) is another federally funded program, which provides vouchers or subsidies for low-income parents to pay for childcare, including preschool, before-school and afterschool and summer care for school aged children (ages 5-12).³⁹ In fiscal year 2009, Mississippi received a total of close to \$95 million in CCDBG funds, of which \$87.5 million was federal money.⁴⁰ These programs, however, are not meeting the need. Only eleven percent of Mississippi’s children (kindergarten to twelfth grade) participate in afterschool programs, while nearly sixty percent would participate if such programs were available to them.⁴¹ Further, No Child Left Behind money, distributed through 21st CCLC, has a full authorization of close to \$32.5 million for Mississippi, but the fiscal year 2010 distribution of funds was only about \$15 million.⁴² Mississippi can do more with the federal programming already in place.

B. State-Level Oversight and Coordination

The Mississippi legislature has enacted various pieces of legislation in the last several years that endeavor to provide sufficient oversight, coordination and management of early

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Early Head Start Locator, <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/HeadStartOffices#map-home> (last visited April 11, 2010).

³⁷ Afterschool Alliance, State Documents, Mississippi, http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/states_docs/pdfs/2009/Mississippi_Fact_Sheet_2009.pdf (last visited May 4, 2010).

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹ *Id.*

⁴² *Id.*

education programs. These laws work to ensure basic standards and levels of support across Mississippi programs.

Senate Bill 2636, which was signed into law in 2003, provides for evaluations to be conducted of the status of early childhood education programs, both public and private, in Mississippi.⁴³ This effort includes establishing an oversight committee, providing recommendations on the need for more public school pre-kindergarten programs in the state, and detailing the steps necessary to ensure pre-kindergarten programs meet or exceed the established standards.⁴⁴

Several pieces of legislation have also been enacted to provide support to early childhood education programs in various ways. In 2007, the Early Learning Collaborative Act of 2007 authorized the Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS) to “implement a voluntary early child care and education grant program.”⁴⁵ This program facilitates collaborative efforts among entities such as Head Start, childcare centers, and public school pre-kindergarten programs, and allows eligible entities to apply for funds to enhance or expand their services.⁴⁶ In 2009, the Children First Act was signed into law, which requires underperforming school districts to establish a community-based council that is focused on Pre- kindergarten through higher education.⁴⁷ That same year, Section 37-7-301 of the Mississippi Code was amended to authorize school districts to “operate and expend funds from any available sources for voluntary early childhood education programs.”⁴⁸ These laws all have the common aim of supporting pre-K programs by allowing for collaboration among educational entities and community resources to implement, fund, and improve early childhood education.

In addition to above-mentioned legislation, in 2008 the Governor’s State Early Childhood Advisory Council was formed, as mandated by the federal Improving Head Start for School

⁴³ S.B. 2636, Reg. Sess. (Miss. 2003) (enacted).

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ S.B. 2667, Reg. Sess. (Miss. 2007) (enacted).

⁴⁶ *Id.*

⁴⁷ S.B. 2628, Reg. Sess. (Miss. 2009) (enacted).

⁴⁸ S.B. 2314, Reg. Sess. (Miss. 2009) (enacted).

Readiness Reauthorization Act.⁴⁹ The Council’s purpose is to develop proposals on how to coordinate services involving children so that they may receive adequate support and obtain successful educational development.⁵⁰ Among the recent recommendations provided by the Council to the Governor were (i) create an information system to improve delivery of quality care and education services, (ii) construct a work force development plan for people seeking employment as early childhood educators, and (iii) develop a process to supply communities with information and coordinate service models to replicate early childhood program successes across the state.⁵¹ The Council also recommended implementing both training programs on early learning guidelines and curriculum and a career advancement ladder for early childhood educators.⁵² Through its research and recommendations, the Council claims to have “crafted a plan for early care and education services at the local level connected through statewide systems for young children and their families.”⁵³

By establishing oversight and advisory committees, facilitating collaboration, and allowing greater flexibility for the funding of pre-K programs, the laws outlined above aim to provide the resources and support necessary to enable early childhood education programs in the state to expand their services and maintain a minimum standard of quality.

C. State Resources for Parents and Child Care Workers

Mississippi has also enacted programs and policies whose aims are variously to provide resources, support, training, and assistance to parents and/or early child care providers. Examples of these types of programs are as follows:

- The Mississippi Education Reform Act of 2006 instituted a number of measures affecting early childhood education.⁵⁴ Among them was Section 16 of the Act, which provided that the Office for Children and Youth (OCY) in MDHS would “develop and implement a pilot

⁴⁹ THE STATE EARLY CHILDHOOD ADVISORY COUNCIL, REPORT TO GOVERNOR HALEY BARBOUR: LAUNCHING A SYSTEM OF EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION FOR MISSISSIPPI’S PRESCHOOL CHILDREN (Dec. 2008), *available at* <http://www.governorbarbour.com/links/SECACReport08.pdf>.

⁵⁰ *Id.*

⁵¹ *Id.*

⁵² From Birth to Beyond: Developing a System of Early Care and Education for Mississippi’s Preschool Children (Dec. 2009), *available at* <http://ecac4ms.files.wordpress.com/2009/06/secac-2009-rpt-exec-summary.pdf>.

⁵³ *Id.*

⁵⁴ S.B. 2602, Reg. Sess. (Miss. 2009) (enacted).

voluntary Quality Rating System” for early childcare and education programs that would be phased in over a five year period.⁵⁵ Such a rating system would enable better monitoring and improved training for teachers. Section 17 also required the OCY to assess the need for a program that would provide incentives for teachers and directors in participating programs to advance their own education.⁵⁶

- To make child care more accessible to working families, Mississippi offers an income tax credit of fifty percent of the actual cost of employer-sponsored, state certified dependent day care.⁵⁷ This credit is available to all types of businesses, and is limited to fifty percent of the Mississippi income tax liability.⁵⁸
- The Mississippi Child Care Resource and Referral network (MSCCR&R) is a system serving childcare providers and parents seeking referrals for childcare. The objectives of MSCCR&R include: providing technical assistance to licensed childcare providers and home providers utilizing the Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines for three and four year old children, offering training and career building tools to early care and education providers, and maintaining a database of licensed centers to help parents find child care.⁵⁹ In the 2008 fiscal year, the state granted \$1 million to the organization.⁶⁰
- The Mississippi Child Care Quality Step System (MCCQSS) is a voluntary pilot quality rating system in sixty Mississippi counties.⁶¹ The MCCQSS seeks to promote the implementation of an age-appropriate curriculum in childcare centers across the state.⁶² The Office of Children and Youth (OCY) in MDHS contracted with Mississippi State University’s Early Childhood Institute to enact the program, and the state legislature appropriated \$2 million for it in the 2008 fiscal year.⁶³

The above listed programs thus constitute a solid effort by Mississippi to begin providing access to strong early childhood education for all Mississippi children. As noted elsewhere,

⁵⁵ *Id.* at §16.

⁵⁶ *Id.* at §17.

⁵⁷ Mississippi Building Blocks, Current Efforts, State Level Programs, <http://www.msbuildingblocks.ms/mx/hm.asp?id=StateLevel> (last visited April 11, 2010).

⁵⁸ *Id.*

⁵⁹ Mississippi Child Care Resource and Referral Network, <http://msucares.com/childcare/> (last visited April 11, 2010).

⁶⁰ Mississippi Building Blocks, Current Efforts, State Level Programs, *supra* note 57.

⁶¹ Mississippi Child Care Quality Step System, <http://www.qualitystep.msstate.edu/> (last visited April 11, 2010).

⁶² *Id.*

⁶³ Mississippi Building Blocks, Current Efforts, State Level Programs, *supra* note 57.

however, additional steps must be taken.

D. Community-Based Programs

In addition to the state-wide legislation and programming, some communities and organizations are focusing their efforts on smaller-scale local programming, in an attempt to bridge some of the gaps left by the lack of statewide pre-kindergarten and other forms of statewide support. Below is a listing of several examples of such efforts:⁶⁴

- Excel By 5 is a community based early childhood certification project, which has been tested in Pascagoula, Petal, West Point, and Cleveland, Mississippi as well as Monroe County, Mid-Jackson and, more recently, Moss Point and Biloxi. Excel By 5 focuses on communities that voluntarily direct and coordinate their local assets to provide children the resources they need to succeed in kindergarten.⁶⁵
- Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids (SPARK) Mississippi works to guarantee that vulnerable children aged three to eight are ready for school. The organization collaborates with other entities on the local level including parents, schools, childcare providers, child advocacy groups, Head Start providers, businesses, and state and local government agencies to ensure that all come together and work together. SPARK currently works in the Cleveland, Hollandale, North Bolivar, Pearl, and Mound Bayou communities of Mississippi.⁶⁶
- The Gilmore Foundation is a private non-profit grant making organization that currently works in Amory, Monroe County, and all of Northeast Mississippi to solicit, organize, and distribute grants to build and strengthen organizations dedicated primarily to health and education.⁶⁷

It is clear that Mississippi is making progress on the issue of early childhood education and has passed legislation to that effect. There is still more to be done, in particular on pre-

⁶⁴ Mississippi Building Blocks, Current Efforts, Community- Based Efforts, <http://www.msbuildingblocks.ms/mx/hm.asp?id=CommunityBased> (last visited April 11, 2010).

⁶⁵ Excel by 5 website, <http://www.excelby5.com/> (last visited April 11, 2010).

⁶⁶ SPARK Mississippi Initiative website. <http://www.spark-ms.com/welcome.htm> (last visited April 11, 2010).

⁶⁷ Gilmore Foundation website, <http://gilmorefoundation.org/> (last visited April 11, 2010).

kindergarten. In addition, Mississippi should look to other states for models of what can be accomplished.

III. Policy and Programmatic Progress from Other States on Early Childhood Education

Policies, programs and funding strategies employed in other states across the country provide helpful examples and possible suggestions of additional steps Mississippi may take to improve the current state of its early childhood education. While not every policy may be needed in Mississippi, it is crucial for the state to draw from these potential options and opportunities.

A. Model Policies and Programs of Other States

The National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) at Columbia University details several baseline policies that can improve the quality of or access to early childhood education and care. The policies and the number of states who employ those policies are as follows:⁶⁸

Policies Promoting Quality:

- Fifteen states require *one adult for every ten four-year-olds*, and a maximum class size of twenty in child care centers. [2007]
- Eight states require *one adult for every four eighteen-month-olds*, and a maximum class size of eight in child care centers. [2007]
- Twenty-two states allocate state or federal funds for a *network of infant/toddler specialists* that provide assistance to child care providers. [2009]
- Thirty states have *early learning standards or developmental guidelines* for infants and toddlers. [2009]
- Twenty-two states have an *infant/toddler credential*. [2009]
- Twenty-three states require through regulation that infants and toddlers in childcare centers be assigned a *consistent primary caregiver*. [2008]
- Nineteen states operates a *statewide Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS)* [2009]

⁶⁸ NAT'L CENTER FOR CHILDREN IN POVERTY, UNITED STATES EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFILE (Dec. 4, 2009), available at http://nccp.org/profiles/pdf/profile_early_childhood_all.pdf.

Policies Promoting Access:

- Seventeen states set the *income eligibility limit for child care subsidies at or above 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL)*. [2009]
- Eight states' child care *subsidy reimbursement rate* meets the recommended 75th percentile of the market rate [2009]
- Twenty-two states *re-determine the eligibility for child care subsidies no more than once per year* [2008]
- Seventeen states *supplement Early Head Start* with state or federal funds. [2008]
- Forty-three states *fund a pre-kindergarten program and/or supplement Head Start*. [2008]

These general state policies have proven effective in improving early childhood education and care in the states in which they have been implemented. As of the completion of the NCCP study, Mississippi only followed two of the twelve recommended baseline policies: supplementing Early Head Start with state or federal funds and operating a statewide QRIS.⁶⁹ Adopting other recommended policies would make concrete and necessary improvements in Mississippi's current early education framework.

In addition to these general recommendations, two states, Oklahoma and California, may serve as specific models of a successful early education framework. Oklahoma provides a model of improvement for early childhood services particularly in terms of funding, access, and quality. Oklahoma has funded its early childhood education and care program through a combination of general public revenue and private donations, most notably from the George Kaiser Family Foundation.⁷⁰ Programs can choose to accept funding under an "Expansion" or an "Enhancement" model.⁷¹ The Expansion model allows programs to use the funds to extend access to more children than they would otherwise be able to serve, whereas the Enhancement model allows programs to use the money to improve the quality of their services or to extend the day or year during which they operate.⁷²

⁶⁹ *Id.*

⁷⁰ ELIZABETH DILAURO & RACHEL SCHUMACHER, BUILDING ON THE PROMISE: STATE INITIATIVES TO EXPAND ACCESS TO EARLY HEAD START AND THEIR FAMILIES, OKLAHOMA 1 (April 2008), *available at* http://www.zerotothree.org/site/DocServer/State_EHS_OK.pdf?docID=5850.

⁷¹ *Id.*

⁷² *Id.*

Further, Oklahoma has vastly improved the quality of its early childhood services through the simple act of requiring that its early education teachers be certified. Lead teachers in three-year-old classrooms must have an early childhood certification or be working toward one within a year of employment.⁷³ Oklahoma has a stringent set of requirements for pre-kindergarten teachers as well.⁷⁴ The imposition of these types of qualifications is credited with Oklahoma's significant gains in early literacy, vocabulary, and math skills.⁷⁵ It is important to note that states without such standards for teachers are less likely to get a similar return on their investments in early education.⁷⁶

California provides a helpful model in that the state has a rather decentralized system, with localities adopting different but successful policies within a larger local planning process. Approaches in California localities include:⁷⁷

- The City of San Clemente requires reports on child care needs within the city's general plan.
- South San Francisco and West Sacramento have done a good job of including in their general plans a reduction of zoning barriers to childcare centers.
- Several cities include incentives for developers to include child care facilities in their plans, and/or mitigation requirements to provide for the child care impact of any unrelated development.
- West Sacramento and San Diego County both provide for government assistance in developing child care facilities. This includes funding to the extent available, but also operational support and provision of under-utilized county property for building facilities.
- The South San Francisco and San Diego County plans include the strategy of coordinating with other local facilities, particularly parks and school districts, to maximize child care opportunities.

While it may be unlikely that many individual Mississippi communities have the resources to focus on general plans for community development, the strategies that have succeeded in

⁷³ *Id.* at 3.

⁷⁴ DIANA STONE, PRE-K NOW, FUNDING THE FUTURE: STATES' APPROACHES TO PRE-K FINANCE 2 (2006), available at http://www.preknow.org/documents/FundingtheFuture_Feb2006.pdf.

⁷⁵ *Id.*

⁷⁶ *Id.*

⁷⁷ All statistics from CHILD CARE LAW CENTER, INCLUDING CHILD CARE IN LOCAL PLANNING 9-12 (Sept. 14, 2006), available at <http://childcarelaw.org/docs/includingchildcareinlocalplanning.pdf>.

California could be applied to state, regional, or local development plans in Mississippi. Whether Mississippi applies a statewide policy like Oklahoma's, locally based methods like California's, or some combination of the two, these approaches provide good models for improving early childhood educational opportunities in Mississippi.

B. Funding Strategies of Other States

Implementing any of the above-mentioned early childhood education policies or other similar policies is expensive, but there are various means of obtaining funding. Other states have successfully utilized a combination of federal and state funding.⁷⁸ The federal government provides funds through programs like childcare grants, Title I, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Even Start, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Head Start. States supplement those federal dollars with sustainable state funds in various manners.⁷⁹ Many states, for example, use general tax revenue to supplement this federal money.⁸⁰ Using taxes is a dependable source of funding in a good economy, but such funds are susceptible to cuts in a downturn, creating potential instability in the funding.⁸¹ A second option taken by some states is some form of "dedicated dollars" program, whether from a state lottery, gaming taxes, tobacco settlement funds, or "sin taxes" on items such as cigarettes or alcohol.⁸² This approach is advantageous both because it sets up structural blocks to allocating the money away from early childhood education and because it is more likely to gain public support (as opposed to a policy that increases general taxes).⁸³ However funding education programs in this manner does have its disadvantages. For instance, pre-kindergarten and college scholarships in Georgia are funded entirely through the state lottery; if the lottery loses popularity, then the state will be forced to choose between cutting funding for early education or cutting funding for secondary education, or for that matter, both.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ NAT'L CENTER FOR CHILDREN IN POVERTY, UNITED STATES EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFILE, *supra* note 68. Examples include Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Nevada.

⁷⁹ STONE, *supra* note 74.

⁸⁰ *Id.* at 5. Particularly successful examples include Illinois, Wisconsin, and Oklahoma. Kentucky, Michigan, New York, Rhode Island, and South Carolina have also used general revenue to fund pre-kindergarten.

⁸¹ *Id.*

⁸² *See id.* at 6-10. Examples include Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Missouri. Of particular interest, Missouri invests revenue from its non-lottery gambling industry into funding pre-kindergarten.

⁸³ *Id.*

⁸⁴ *Id.* at 6.

C. Private Organizations

Finally, there are a variety of private organizations and foundations that fund or otherwise assist with early childhood care and education programs in other states, presenting the possibility of their expansion into or to a greater extent in Mississippi. The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) Administration for Children and Families has compiled a sample list of over thirty of these foundations, ranging from corporate-based grant opportunities to committed non-profits.⁸⁵ The Bank of America Foundation is an example of a corporate-based opportunity – the Foundation gave twenty-nine percent of its \$200 million in charitable donations in 2008 to programs geared directly toward “education and youth development.” Of that large sum, \$33,000 was donated to Mississippi programs,⁸⁶ presenting an opportunity for significant growth. The Build Initiative is an example of a non-profit organization that does significant work in several states, but is not yet in Mississippi, again presenting an opportunity for additional support and involvement. The Build Initiative is an organization that is focused entirely upon children from birth to age five and provides material support for its state partners in improving their early childhood programs.⁸⁷ The Initiative assists its state partners in achieving and measuring improved outcomes in the areas of early childhood care and education.⁸⁸ Build currently has relationships with eight states: Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Washington.⁸⁹ In each state, the Initiative works with a lead organization on the ground and interfaces with various stakeholders in the state’s early childhood programs to improve all aspects of the state’s services.⁹⁰ Educare is another example of a potentially fruitful partnership. Educare is a year-round school that serves at-risk children from birth through age five.⁹¹ Educare understands the importance of early education and therefore focuses on improving school readiness for young children, involving and preparing parents for their children’s education, and general programming to “prevent the achievement gap from taking

⁸⁵ Foundations Supporting Early Childhood Care and Education at the State Level, <http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/poptopics/foundations.html> (last visited April 11, 2010).

⁸⁶ Bank of America Corporate Philanthropy: Our Funding Efforts, http://www.bankofamerica.com/foundation/index.cfm?template=fd_fundprior (last visited April 11, 2010).

⁸⁷ Build: Strong Foundations for Our Youngest Children, State Partners, <http://www.buildinitiative.org/content/state-partners> (last visited April 11, 2010).

⁸⁸ *Id.*

⁸⁹ *Id.*

⁹⁰ *Id.*

⁹¹ Educare Centers, What is Educare, <http://www.educarecenters.org/pages/index.php?q=node/1> (last visited April 11, 2010).

root in the early years.”⁹² Educare currently has learning centers in cities such as Chicago, Denver, Omaha, Seattle, Miami and Oklahoma City.⁹³ Inviting in and working with organizations such as these could enable Mississippi to more fully, effectively, and quickly achieve its early childhood education goals.

Thus it is clear that there are programs, policies and organizations available for Mississippi to implement and utilize. In learning what other states do and which of those policies and programs are most successful, Mississippi may be confident in taking its own steps forward.

IV. Moving Forward

As is apparent from the above-mentioned discussion, the current state of early education in Mississippi is somewhat varied. It is clear that the state legislature, community groups and private organizations have taken steps to improve the access to and quality of its early education and preschool programs in recent years. The task forces, collaborative efforts and other programs are unquestionably important structures for the success of early education. Despite this, however, more remains to be accomplished. The state does not fund universal pre-kindergarten services, a crucial omission that puts Mississippi behind most other similarly situated states. The Mississippi Legislature does currently provide for limited support to improve the quality and size of existing public and private entities that may provide pre-kindergarten; and while this support is necessary, it is not sufficient. This restricted support does not reach every community or center that needs it and does not provide the type of secure and comprehensive educational basis necessary to the children of Mississippi. Until Mississippi funds state-wide pre-kindergarten services, Mississippi will remain behind the vast majority of other states nationwide. This is problematic because, as noted above, dollars spent on early education are crucial to the future education and development of individuals in the state.

However the state chooses to fund or structure its early childhood education programs, it is clear that providing comprehensive and widely-available education early in a child’s life is crucial to the future success of the individual child, the community, the state, and the nation

⁹² *Id.*

⁹³ Educare Centers, What You Can Do, <http://www.educarecenters.org/pages/index.php?q=node/4> (last visited April 11, 2010).

as a whole. Access to quality early education provides the type of solid foundation necessary to creating a successful, engaged, and productive citizen.

The Harvard Law School Mississippi Delta Project is a student organization at Harvard Law School. The Harvard Law School name and shield are trademarks of the President and Fellows of Harvard College and are used by permission of Harvard University.