

## Early Childhood and Primary Education

### Trends

- Pre-K enrollment continues to increase. In 2007 Enrollment increased by more than 108,000 children. More than 1.1 million children attended state-funded preschool education, 973,178 at age 4 alone. The growing enrollment in state pre-K, documented by NIEER, is valuable to children and the nation only if program quality is high enough to produce meaningful gains in learning and development. Thus, it is notable that states have continued their progress toward higher quality standards. In 2007-2008, improvements in program standards enabled 12 states (including three with new programs) to meet more benchmarks on NIEER's Quality Standards Checklist, while only two states moved backwards.
- Although the percent of 3-year-olds in state pre-K continued to climb slowly, approaching 4% for the first time during 2007-2008, access to state pre-K for 3-year-olds continues to lag behind. As in the previous year, only five states served more than 10% of their 3-year-olds outside of preschool special education. Illinois, Arkansas, Vermont, and New Jersey are the only states to serve more than 15% of 3-year-olds in state pre-K programs.
- Many programs gave bonuses to teachers with bachelor's degrees which had a two-fold effect. First, the bonuses were an incentive for teachers to stay in their programs instead of looking for higher paying jobs elsewhere. Second, bonuses to bachelor's-level teachers may have created an incentive for teachers with associate's degrees to obtain a bachelors.
- Pre-K educators are increasingly adopting assessment tools like Creative Curriculum.Net.
- MA requires use of any of four assessment tools for UPK funding: Creative Curriculum, Work Sampling System, High/Scope, Ages and Stages.
- There is growing recognition that investment in access to high-quality early childhood programs can create longitudinal, societal returns by reducing need for later remediation, social welfare programs, and juvenile justice system.
- The trend among early childhood educators has been towards a lower level of education. The following findings are from a study "Losing Ground in Early Childhood Education" that looked at data from 1979-2004:
  - The share of U.S. center-based teachers and administrators with at least a four-year college degree averaged 43% from 1983 to 1985, but only 30% in the last three years. Conversely, the share of ECE teachers and administrators with a high school education or less climbed from less than 25% in 1983 and 1984 to around 30% in recent years.

- The education levels of ECE teachers have fallen even further relative to the workforce as a whole, which has become better educated over time. From 1983 to 1985, the share of teachers and administrators with a college degree or more averaged 21 percentage points more than for all workers. Over the last three years, this gap vanished altogether.
- A dramatic demographic pattern exists to educational attainment among ECE teachers that is strikingly different than patterns for all workers. The younger a teacher or administrator is today, the less likely they are to have a college degree. Only a little over a quarter of those ages 24 to 36 have a college degree compared to 36% of those ages 40 to 50 and 43% of those over age 50. These patterns suggest that the industry has found it difficult, since at least the early 1980s, to attract and keep educated young teachers in ECE.
- Education levels are lower in home-based ECE than center-based. Since 2000, only about one in nine home-based early childhood educators has a college degree. Less than half have any education beyond high school.
- Consistently low wages and benefits from 1983 to 2004 help explain the low educational attainment of early childhood educators (or vice versa).
- Center-based early childhood educators are less than half as likely to get health care through their job as other workers (28% versus 66%), and they are three times as likely to lack health insurance altogether (21% versus 7%). Only a third of center-based teachers and administrators get health care through their job and only a fifth participate in any kind of pension plan.
- A quarter of center-based teachers and administrators have incomes below 200% of the poverty line, compared to one in five for all workers and one in 14 for all female college graduates.
- The recession appears to have stalled the expansion of state-financed pre-kindergarten programs, according to Steven Barnett, a professor at Rutgers University who is a co-author of a new report documenting trends in early childhood education. Given the economic decline, nine states — Alabama, California, Connecticut, Florida, Iowa, Minnesota, New York, North Carolina and South Carolina — have already announced cuts to state-run pre-kindergarten programs, Dr. Barnett said. (State of Preschool 2008)
- Federal stimulus money and federal increases to Head Start and Early Head Start counter this trend somewhat. President Obama and Education Secretary Arne Duncan say their enthusiasm for early childhood education is based on research showing large paybacks for every dollar spent on the careful nurturing of poor children. Mr. Duncan repeated those arguments at a forum on early learning in Washington this March. “For every dollar we spend on these programs, we get nearly \$10 back in reduced welfare rolls, fewer health care costs and less crime,” Mr. Duncan said.
- Almost a quarter of entering public-school teachers leave teaching within their first three years. (Who Leaves? Teacher Attrition and Student Achievement, 2008)

- Technology cannot and should not replace human interaction or relationships, or take the place of activities such as reading stories together or sharing conversations with children. Properly used, however, computers and software can serve as catalysts for social interaction and conversations related to children's work (Clements & Nastasi, 1993). A classroom set up to encourage interaction and the appropriate use of the technology will increase, not impair, language and literacy development. Strategies to build socialization into computer use include placing two seats in front of the computer to encourage children to work together, placing computers close to each other to facilitate sharing ideas, and locating computers in a central spot to invite other children to participate in the activity (Clements, 1999). When used appropriately:
  - Computers are intrinsically motivating for young children, and contribute to cognitive and social development (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 1996). Computers can enhance children's self-concept and improve their attitudes about learning. (Sivin-Kachala & Bialo, 1994)
  - Children demonstrate increased levels of spoken communication and cooperation during computer use. (Clements, 1994; Haugland & Wright, 1997)
  - Children share leadership roles on the computer, and initiate interactions more frequently. (Clements, 1994; Haugland & Wright, 1997)
- Children covered by public health insurance are almost twice as likely as uninsured children and children with private insurance to be identified as having a learning disability (12% of children covered by public health insurance versus 6% of uninsured children and 7% of children with private insurance in 2004).
- Children living in families that receive welfare payments are much more likely than other children to be identified as having a learning disability (16% compared with 8% of other children in 2004).
- MA: preschools must have NAEYC accreditation to be eligible to receive UPK funds.