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Improving School and Care Settings for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities **Early Childhood Takes Center Stage**



By Ross A. Thompson, Department of Psychology, and Janet E. Thompson, Center for Child and Family Studies, both at the University of California, Davis

High-quality early childhood education is important to ensuring school readiness and future academic success. This is the message that has emerged during the past 15 years from research on early brain development, a national focus on school readiness, and the work of Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman and others concerned about the development of human capital. The research affirms the fact that the foundations for enduring capacities for learning are established in early childhood, when some young children are at risk of falling behind their peers even before they enter the primary grades.

This conclusion has been acknowledged by the Obama administration in its commitment of funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to expanding Head Start and Early Head Start programs, as well as to improving quality in child care and programs for children with special needs. Furthermore, the administration's Race to the Top initiative specifically includes a priority on early childhood, with a focus on the quality of preschool education and the transition from preschool to kindergarten. Recognition of the importance of early childhood education by parents, practitioners, policymakers, and the public is

one of the most important ways that our shared understanding of young children has changed during the past 15 years.

High-quality early childhood education is perhaps even more important for children with special needs. Children with disabilities require special assistance, but they also proceed through the same developmental stages and face comparable challenges and opportunities as all young children. These include developing cognitive, language, and motor skills suitable for their age and capabilities, and developing self-confidence, social skills with peers and adults, self-regulation, initiative as learners, and responsible classroom citizenship. Cognitive, motor, social-emotional, and self-regulatory skills are each important to school readiness and classroom success, and all are supported by high-quality, early education environments for children with disabilities.

The Ingredients of High-quality Early Education

What are the ingredients of a high-quality environment for early education? The most important components include the following:

- Highly skilled teachers
- Small class size and high adult-to-child ratio
- A developmentally appropriate curriculum with plenty of

opportunity for constructive play and child-driven choices

- A language-rich environment
- Warm, responsive interactions between adults and children
- High levels of child participation
- A safe physical setting

These and other indicators of early educational quality—including approval by accrediting agencies (such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children), high scores on an

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**California Services for
CalSTAT**
Technical Assistance and Training

Informing and supporting parents, educators, and other service providers on special education topics, focusing on research-based practices, legislation, technical support, and current resources

By Kristen Wright, Chair, California Advisory Commission on Special Education

Both federal and state statutes define the California Advisory Commission on Special Education (ACSE) as “an advisory body required by Federal [20 USC 1412(a)(21)] and State Statute [EC 33590-6]. The Commission provides recommendations and advice to the State Board of Education, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Legislature, and the Governor in new or continuing areas of research, program development and evaluation in California special education.”

But how does the commission, made up of volunteers—primarily parents of children with disabilities, as directed by state statute—and supported by limited funds, keep tabs on the vast and changing landscape of special education in California?

One could argue that, by holding the governmental body in charge of monitoring and guiding our system of education—the California Department of Education—accountable, the commission is already accomplishing an important part of its purview. Further, one could argue that, since it regularly hears testimony from the public and representatives from the field of special education, the commission is ensured of discovering trends and bringing to light unmet needs in our system. This kind of input, captured and synthesized, can and does yield important information and recommendations, which the ACSE brings to its appointing bodies. These entities—the Governor, the State Board of Education, and the State Legislature—in turn work to facilitate necessary change. This is ultimately the charge of the commission: bringing to light and keeping in the light those issues and concerns that need addressing in the effort to best serve children with disabilities, especially with those organizations that have the power to change how children are served.

In order to do the best job possible in hearing, collecting, synthesizing, recommending, and reporting, the ACSE must task its members to do more individually outside of the hours already spent attending public meetings; and it must rely more heavily on the California Department of Education to support its efforts. Finally, it must, as a body, work, efficiently and systematically to maximize the effectiveness of its messages.

That message will focus on how to support the following issues so that children with disabilities are well served:

- The caseloads of special education teachers
- The changes in teacher credentialing that involve relabeling special education positions
- Regionalized special education local plan areas (SELPA) and access for students with disabilities to charter schools
- Best practices in inclusive education
- Full federal funding of special education
- The California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE)
- Response to intervention (RtI) and its implications for special education
- The State Performance Plan
- Parent involvement
- Teacher training and retention
- Disproportionality

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National Initiative Collaborates with California

Why is it important to comfort an infant when she cries? To be gentle and understanding with a defiant toddler? To patiently describe strong emotions to a preschooler who is experiencing them? An overwhelming amount of new research in the field of early childhood development concludes that these kinds of responses ensure optimal social and emotional health in young children. This is logical. But what is also true is that social and emotional health is the foundation for a child's development in all areas, including physical and intellectual. In effect, children's personal futures are built on the treatment they receive in their earliest years.

Some readers may wonder what exactly social and emotional competence looks like. According to Head Start consultant Geri West, "It's those things that, for a long time, we have assumed children simply pick up in their environments: how to take turns, how to share, how to be a friend. It includes emotional literacy, which involves understanding our own feelings and the feelings of others; recognizing what it is to be sad, hungry, happy, or angry; and learning some basic skills for handling those feelings. We now know that not everyone learns these things when they're little. Maybe we didn't cry because it was forbidden at home, so we didn't know what to do with feelings of sadness or disappointment, and we ended up expressing them in destructive ways. Adults and children alike are learning new skills through the way we are now beginning to understand the importance of—and how to support—social and emotional health at the earliest ages."

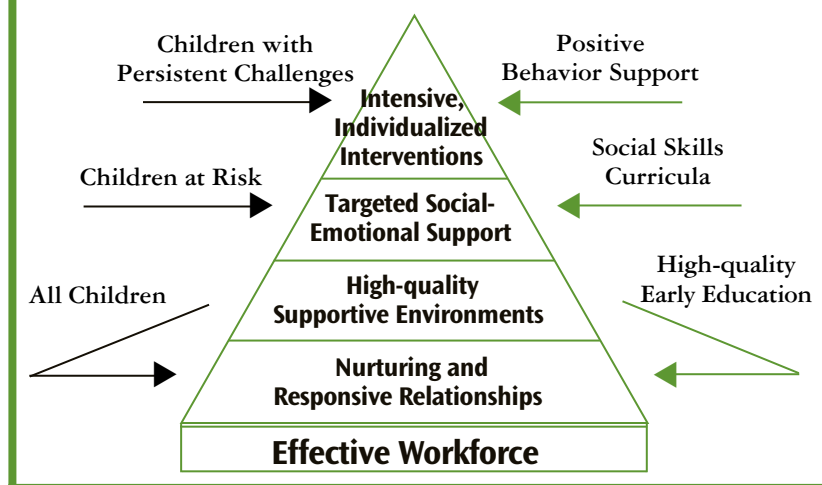
Enter the National Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL; www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel). Funded by the Office of Head Start and the Child Care Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the center was created to provide training and technical assistance in selected states to support early childhood teachers and caregivers in promoting the social and emotional development of young children. California is one of the selected states and is implementing these trainings through CA CSEFEL—the California Collaborative on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning.

parent could understandably become fearful/defensive/anxious (you choose) about what that conversation might hold. But if you ask that same parent for a conversation about ensuring her child's success in school, there are not many parents who would respond with anything but "How soon can we talk?" The topic and focus of both proposed conversations could be fundamentally identical, but, according to Zecher, the CSEFEL approach has removed the stigma of addressing behavioral issues in children by changing the language. Zecher sees the CSEFEL trainings as "giving us a nice language to use when speaking to parents," language that focuses on positive behavior, not just because young children need it to get

along with their pals in preschool, but because all people need it to succeed in life. CSEFEL uses the pyramid model of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), based on the work of Rob Horner and George Sugai, who first conceived of the model in the 1980s in their work at the University of Oregon. The

concept is grounded in the belief that the skills involved in positive behavior can be taught and learned. The pyramid model emphasizes putting the most energy into best practices at the base of the pyramid—in the case of CSEFEL, building relationships and creating early childhood environments and schedules that support positive behavior and learning. This emphasis effectively decreases the number of children who need the most intense and costly supports at the top of the pyramid and ensures that

CSEFEL Teaching Pyramid



Craig Zecher is Disabilities and Mental Health Manager for the Head Start grantee at San Francisco State University. For a number of reasons, he sees CSEFEL as an exceptionally innovative approach to improving the early childhood education curriculum and to training early childhood professionals. First, because language matters. As Zecher explains it, if you approach a parent and ask to talk about her child's "mental health issues," which is how early education previously referred to social and emotional development, the

CSEFEL continued, page 4

teachers will no longer have to spend most of their time addressing the problem behaviors of a few children, with little time left to support the development and learning of the others. (For more information on PBIS, go to www.pbis.org.)

The way CA CSEFEL trains early childhood teachers is innovative as well, says Zercher, and grows out of years of research in Adult Learning Theory. Studies in business and the military, as well as in education, have shown that single-shot trainings are, for the most part, a waste of time. In order for adults to change their own behavior and not only implement but make habitual new practices, those adults need support over an extended period of time, with regular follow-up, coaching, encouragement, and refresher courses. This approach is built into CA CSEFEL.

Finally, there is the content of the training curriculum, which focuses on four areas:

1. **How to prevent challenging behavior** through strong relationships and supportive, nurturing environments
2. **How to help children develop** their ability to solve problems, communicate emotions appropriately and effectively, manage strong emotions, and build friendships
3. **How to observe children** and determine the meaning of any challenging behavior; how to help children learn to communicate that meaning more effectively; and how to create a plan that supports the use of new, effective communication skills and lessen the use of challenging behavior
4. **How to become an administrative leader** in the area of social and emotional development: developing strategies for identifying and overcoming barriers to implementing these effective practices; developing program policies and staff development plans that promote the use of effective strategies; and identifying steps to collaborative planning for programs and systems that support

the social and emotional development of all young children

In support of this work, the national center has developed training materials, videos, and print resources to help California's communities and programs implement the model, which is already being used in many early childhood classrooms across the state.

Joyce Darbo was witness to these first efforts. She is Special Services Manager for the Merced County Office of Education's Head Start program. As she recounts, "We heard about the CSEFEL approach as part of the First 5-funded Special Needs Project, where Merced County was a demonstration site." When the County Office of Education became the grantee for the county's Head Start program, she explains, "the Special Services Department was inundated with internal referrals for help with children displaying challenging behavior. We were a two-person department at the time, serving 1,060 children, putting out fires all over the county and proving pretty ineffective. We attended the CSEFEL training, created administrative buy-in, and were off and running. Lots of development and training for staff has made them much more effective in their own classrooms, with their co-workers, and with families. Referrals went way down, and staff now have the skills to teach their preschoolers using the CSEFEL model. It has changed the culture of our program completely."

Lucia Garay has a similar story. Before the CSEFEL approach was introduced in Chula Vista three years ago, numerous young children from local Head Start programs and preschools were being referred for comprehensive assessments for challenging behavior. "It's not that these teachers wanted to get rid of the children; the teachers just didn't have the skills to deal with them," she says. However, with training through the CSEFEL demonstration project, "there have been significantly fewer referrals for challenging behaviors. The teachers are no longer saying 'I just don't know what to do with the

child.' They now have the strategies they need. As a result, more children are able to stay in general education settings and fewer are being given a 'special education' label."

Garay is understandably excited about the proven effectiveness of the CSEFEL approach—about how it is developmentally appropriate, inclusive, and research based. She sees it as a good fit for her district, which also uses the pyramid model throughout its system in response to intervention (RtI) efforts, so "it aligns things vertically."

And there's even more. The new California Preschool Learning Foundations feature social and emotional development as the first and most fundamental foundation in a way that dovetails seamlessly with the CSEFEL approach. That approach also aligns in significant ways with the California Early Childhood Educator (ECE) Competencies that are at the end-stages of development. Finally, the approach aligns with PBIS efforts that are increasing and realizing success in K–12 schools across the country. These consistencies throughout the system make it hard to overstate the justified excitement that early childhood educators have for the CSEFEL effort.

Because of the proven effectiveness of the pyramid model in so many aspects of education, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has funded a partner project called TACSEI: Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Interventions for Young Children (www.challengingbehavior.org). TACSEI works in concert with CSEFEL on the research, promotion, and development of materials related to the pyramid model. These materials are free, user-friendly, and invaluable for early childhood educators.

Mary Louise Hemmeter, director of CSEFEL at the national level, worked with Garay and her colleagues in Chula Vista. Now Hemmeter and others from the national center are collaborating with California preschool administrators and educators to accomplish the following four goals:

1. To develop an enhanced capacity of early childhood education programs to adopt the pyramid model
2. To increase the number of high-quality trainers and coaches
3. To create a cadre of local implementation sites
4. To evaluate the outcomes of the three above efforts

California's Vision of CSEFEL

The CSEFEL vision for California entails an integrated system of early childhood efforts that connects early childhood programs, including state- and federally funded programs, with trainers versed in the national center's conceptual framework for promoting social and emotional competence in infants and young children. Cecelia Fisher-Dahms, administrator of the Quality Improvement Unit for the Child Development Division of the California Department of Education, writes: "Having a common vision for social-emotional development across all training efforts by using the pyramid model framework will create a cohesive and effective approach to addressing the needs of very young children with challenging behaviors and special needs that aligns with California's social-emotional learning foundations."

While language about the importance of emotional intelligence has entered into common parlance, some adults still have a hard time accepting the fact that positive behavior can and should be taught in schools. But if a child comes from a home where he was not taught how to swim, you would not punish him or throw him in the water; you would teach him to swim. Within the realms of social and emotional development, the CSEFEL project is training teachers to help children capably navigate the emotional waters of their lives—a realm that influences all others.

For more information about the California Collaborative and for trainings information, go to www.cainclusivechildcare.org/camap/csefel.html. To learn more about the national CSEFEL movement and to see some of the curriculum strategies in action, go to www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel. ♦

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early childhood environmental rating system, attainment of educational degrees by teachers, completion of mandated health and safety training by staff, and procedures to encourage parent education and participation—can be monitored and evaluated by a state-level Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). Currently, 18 states have implemented a statewide QRIS that objectively evaluates the quality of early childhood settings and provides parents with essential information concerning the quality of care provided for their children. California is in the process of developing its own QRIS. (See CAEL QIS article on page 11.)

A young child's "why" is likely to be followed by the teacher's "let's find out!"

Although there are a number of components of a high-quality early education environment, researchers and practitioners agree that the "active ingredient" for a young child's positive experience is the teacher. An early educator's skill in interacting with children, knowledge of child development, sensitivity in responding to young children's feelings and needs, and ability to develop warm relationships is crucial to children's success. This is especially true for children with special needs. When a teacher is thoughtfully aware of the challenges faced by young children with disabilities in an early childhood classroom, that teacher can organize and facilitate the child's experience to encourage learning, classroom participation, and self-confidence.

Teachers are central to an early childhood classroom in a manner that is different from their role in a classroom for older children. With older children, most teachers work from a defined agenda, instruct their class, and provide structured assignments that children complete individually or in small

groups. By contrast, in a high-quality early education environment, a teacher facilitates children's active learning by capitalizing on their interests and curiosity and engaging them in discovery and problem solving, often in small groups of peers. A young child's "why" is likely to be followed by the teacher's "let's find out!" (rather than a quick statement of facts) in a classroom that is humming with language and spontaneity. What enlivens this shared learning environment is the teacher's skill in organizing a classroom that invites inquiry (with such elements as a science area, where children can explore sea shells and replicas of underwater creatures), encouraging children's initiative in figuring things out for themselves and exploiting their interests to create learning opportunities. This is one reason why a small group, high adult-to-child ratio, and child participation are essential ingredients of a high-quality early education environment.

Early Education for Children with Disabilities

For children with disabilities, an early education classroom can be both inviting and challenging. Young children with speech and language delays may be excited by a science table but find it difficult to comment on their discoveries or ask questions in a manner that others can comprehend. Those with physical disabilities may have problems navigating the classroom in a wheelchair or walker or gaining access to materials that have captured their interest. Young children who are developmentally delayed may have difficulty understanding a teacher's or peer's instructions for a shared project, game, or pretend play, even though they want to participate. Teachers can encourage and facilitate the active learning of children with disabilities in an early educational classroom when the environment, routines, and schedules within that classroom have been designed with the needs of all children in mind. A sensitive teacher can help a child bridge the challenges to classroom participation by assisting

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in her communication, clarifying the expressions of others, and making the physical and social environment of the classroom more accessible. Teachers can draw attention to the good ideas hesitantly offered by a child with a language delay so that others can recognize the child's contributions. Most of all, they can help children with disabilities by conveying explicitly and in their demeanor that all children are competent and can participate actively.

Peers are a significant component of the classroom environment, and research shows that the quality of young children's peer relationships is important to their attitudes toward early education and their participation in classroom activities. The acceptance of children with disabilities by their peers can be enhanced by the ability of adults to respond to questions and observations (which can, at times, be blunt) in a helpful, supportive manner. In responding to comments and questions about disability from other children, highly skilled teachers can provide information and model and teach social skills that support positive peer relationships between children with special needs and their typically developing peers. The limitations to participation that are imposed by children's behavioral and developmental challenges can be reduced in a high-quality early childhood classroom, and the efforts of teachers can help to ensure that children with special needs are successful in their desire to be socially engaged in the peer environment.

Because learning is intrinsically social in an early education classroom, and shared play is one of the important avenues for early learning, sensitive teachers recognize the need to create opportunities for developing positive social interaction between children with disabilities and their peers and to teach social and emotional skills to everyone. They can bring together small groups of children with compatible characteristics and mediate their shared activity

around a problem to solve or a game to play so that a child with a cognitive delay is fully involved. In some circumstances, they can encourage tasks in which a child with an autism spectrum disorder, for example, can excel. Above all, teachers can model attitudes that reflect the value of each child in the classroom and communicate to peers (and sometimes their parents) that differences are not difficulties but are part of the constellation of strengths and weaknesses that each individual brings to the group. This is important not only to children with disabilities but to typically developing children as well.

Special Challenges for Children with Special Needs

Self-regulation is a developmental challenge for all preschoolers. This is because the brain areas most relevant to self-control have a long maturational course, and young children are only at the beginning of this process. For some children with special needs, however, self-regulation presents special challenges, such as when a young child with behavioral problems erupts unpredictably with emotional outbursts and aggressive behavior. Such outbursts can scare other children (and their parents) and contribute to the social isolation and low self-esteem of the child who is having problems. Just as teachers in a high-quality early education environment structure the daily schedule and the environment to assist young children in their self-control, these teachers can also provide additional behavioral support and instruction to children with special needs in this area. This can include creating a special place where these children can withdraw when events start to feel overwhelming, teaching and coaching strategies for maintaining self-control (especially in conflict-prone or potentially frustrating social situations), and anticipating the circumstances in which these children are likely to become overstimulated and undercontrolled and making proactive efforts to provide supports, such as visual schedules or social stories¹ that help them develop coping strategies.

For children with special needs, the stresses of being different and of sometimes struggling to do what comes more easily to peers make their lives more demanding than those of typically developing children. A high-quality early education classroom can be a safe haven for them. In such an environment, young children have a primary teacher who is reliably available to them when needed and a peer group that includes children with a wide range of abilities who provide modeling across all developmental domains. The classroom is organized around a predictable, comfortable daily schedule that is child-centered, helpfully structured, and responsive to changing needs. A high-quality program also facilitates ongoing communication between teachers and family caregivers, ensuring that all the important adults in a young child's life are aware of the events of significance to the child. In addition, teachers have access to consultants (e.g., behavioral, mental health, developmental) in the community who can help families identify early any emergent problems requiring attention, as well as potential avenues for helpful intervention. Teachers can also draw on the resources of the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL; see page 3), the California Preschool Instructional Network (CPIN; see page 9), and other resources to assist children with disabilities. In this respect, a high-quality early childhood program becomes a resource for families in their efforts to provide a supportive early education for their child with special needs.

Conclusion

High-quality early childhood education is a benefit for all children and may be especially beneficial for children with disabilities. It offers a sensitively stimulating, supportive, safe, and engaging environment in which each child's developmental potential can be realized. ♦

1. A tool for teaching social skills to children with certain disabilities, *social stories* provide accurate information about situations that a child may find difficult or confusing.

Preschool Standards Make Assessment Possible



By Mary McLean, PhD, Consultant, Desired Results access Project; Professor, Department of Exceptional Education, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Michelle Rodriguez is a preschool special education teacher in California. A big part of her job is to write the initial individualized education programs (IEP) for three-year-old children who are entering the school district for the first time. Michelle has always referred to preschool assessment instruments to determine what the annual goals for a particular child should be. Some of the instruments have an accompanying curriculum, which is very helpful. Some children, however, exhibit enough developmental delay in certain areas that they don't demonstrate any of the skills on the preschool version of the instruments. Michelle knows that her colleagues in other districts use different instruments to inform the development of IEPs, and she wonders whether hers are the best ones to help her children gain the skills they need for their next school environment. She would like to know that she is developing IEP goals that will help each child be as prepared for kindergarten as possible. She has heard her colleagues in the elementary school talk about aligning IEPs to state standards. But what about standards for preschool children?

The Evolution of Services, Standards, and Accountability

Mandated Services. Since 1975, federal law has entitled all school-aged children with disabilities to, among other things, a "free appropriate public education." A similar entitlement for preschool children with disabilities was authorized 11 years later. These were landmark pieces of legislation, especially for preschool children with disabilities, since their peers without disabilities were not then, and in many states are not now, provided with the right to a free appropriate public education.

About a decade later came a national

push to raise educational expectations through standards-based education (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). While children with disabilities were often not included in this initial effort, that changed in 1997 with the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Under this new law, children with disabilities became entitled not only to a free appropriate public education but also to access, participation, and progress within the general education curriculum.

Desired Results for Early Childhood Programs

1. Children are personally and socially competent.
2. Children are effective learners.
3. Children show physical and motor competence.
4. Children are safe and healthy.

Standards. While standards-based education has been a part of K–12 education for some time, early childhood educators have been slower to develop standards for preschool outcomes. However, the success of school-aged, standards-based reforms, along with incentives from such federal programs as Good Start, Grow Smart, has resulted in most states now working to develop early childhood standards. These standards are based on research about early learning and development and have been adapted for children with disabilities and children who are from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds (NAEYC and NAECS/SDE, 2004; Shore, Bodrova, and Leong, 2004).

Accountability. No Child Left Behind, signed into law in 2002, mandated increased accountability for child outcomes in general education. In 2004, the reauthorization of IDEA increased the accountability requirements for early childhood special education by requiring reports on child progress toward three conditions of well-being for all infants, toddlers, and preschoolers being served by IDEA in the states:

1. Positive social-emotional skills (including social relationships)
2. Acquisition and use of knowledge and skills (including early language/communication and early literacy)
3. Use of appropriate behaviors to meet their needs

Meanwhile, in California . . .

In 1996, Delaine Eastin, then State Superintendent of Public Instruction, pushed California to the forefront of the accountability movement by challenging all California Department of Education (CDE) programs to develop outcome standards and revise monitoring systems to include the assessment of child progress toward those standards. Subsequent to this direction, the CDE's Special Education Division (SED) entered into a collaborative effort with the Child Development Division (CDD) to develop an instrument for monitoring the progress of young children with and without disabilities who were enrolled in publicly funded state preschool programs. At that time, four Desired Results had been identified for CDE programs:

1. Children are personally and socially competent.
2. Children are effective learners.
3. Children show physical and motor competence.
4. Children are safe and healthy.

By the fall of 2000, the CDD had

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introduced the use of the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) into all publicly funded child development programs as part of its statewide monitoring system. Measurement was based on the observation of each child during daily routines and activities. In 2002, the DRDP was revised (DRDP-R) to incorporate a more rigorous measurement system.

The DRDP Assessment System includes separate instruments for three age groups: infants and toddlers, preschoolers, and children in CDD-funded after-school programs. Some children entering preschool special education, however, function below the developmental level of a three-year-old and cannot be adequately assessed with a preschool-only instrument. As a result, the DRDP *access* was developed for those children who require a birth-to-five instrument to adequately measure their progress during the preschool years.

Currently, the DRDP instruments are administered to preschool children in California twice each year (fall and spring) in keeping with California's assessment requirements. The SED collects statewide assessment data to provide reports to teachers and families about the progress of their preschoolers with IEPs. These data are also used for reporting to the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), U.S. Department of Education, as required by IDEA 2004.

What about standards for preschool children? The fact is, California does have them. The first volume of the *California Preschool Learning Foundations* was published in 2008 and is available online (www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/rel/ps/foundations.asp). CDE then published the *California Infant/Toddler Learning and Development Foundations* in 2009 (available at www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/rel/itfoundations.asp). A second volume of preschool foundations is scheduled for publication early in 2011.

The DRDP instruments are aligned

with the foundations. This alignment helps to link the foundations to program planning and to each child's progress toward curricular or IEP goals. The DRDP assessment system and the foundations also are helping to make access to the general education curriculum a reality for young children with disabilities in California.

In addition, curriculum frameworks that are grounded in research and informed by practice are being developed to help early care and education professionals implement developmen-



tally appropriate curriculum. Preschool administrators and teachers can use the frameworks to plan their programs and implement early experiences that will allow young children to acquire the skills they need for kindergarten and the early grades. Preschools and early care centers can use both the foundations and the curriculum frameworks for pre-service and in-service professional development training.

How Is This Helpful for California?

Having a unified and clearly articulated system of standards-based education and progress monitoring for all young children with disabilities in California will be beneficial for everyone involved. Families will have access to information that will help them gain a clear understanding of their children's development. Special education teachers will have an accessible connection to

the general early childhood curriculum, a connection that will assist them in developing standards-based IEPs. And teachers will have progress-monitoring information that will allow them to adjust interventions to the individual needs of a child. This unified system will also give programs the information that will help them evaluate, monitor, and improve the quality of their efforts; it will allow special education local plan areas (SELPA) to better determine technical assistance needs; and it will give CDE the ability to monitor the quality of its programs and appropriately target resources for quality improvement.

So yes, Michelle, there are state standards for preschool children in California. There are state standards and a whole lot more! ♦

An expanded version of this article is available online at www.calstat.org/infoAdditionalResources.html.

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System Helps Teachers Support All Children

Most seasoned teachers have a story about “that one year”—the September they showed up to teach and found the stars so perfectly aligned that every child in their classroom was bright and curious and ready to learn. For most teachers, this is a rare occurrence. And some teachers never experience it at all. However, there is an organization in California working hard to turn it into a regular event.

CPIN—California Preschool Instructional Network—was inspired by two research-proven conclusions: 1) that children thrive in their K–12 school years when they attend a quality preschool and 2) that a quality preschool needs quality educators. The unfortunate corollary to these findings is that a child who starts school academically lagging behind his age-mates will, in most cases, stay behind. CPIN is designed to provide high-quality professional development, technical assistance, and support to California’s preschool program administrators and teachers so that they can prepare all children to show up for school “bright and curious and ready to learn.” The network operates under the direction of the Child Development Division (CDD) and the Special Education Division (SED) of the California Department of Education (CDE).

CPIN professional development sessions address numerous topics: social and emotional development, language and literacy, English language development, mathematics, the California Preschool Learning Foundations, school readiness and transition to kindergarten, and including children with disabilities and other special needs. Several qualities set these sessions apart and contribute to their effectiveness. The first is the organization’s team approach. CPIN teams are made

up of three individuals, each with a different area of expertise: childhood development, early English language acquisition, and early childhood special education. A second defining feature of CPIN’s professional development sessions is their grounding in the new California Preschool Learning Foundations, which describe what to expect in early childhood development, particularly in terms of what a preschool-aged child can know and do. (It is important to note that these learning foundations, although aligned to the state’s



academic content standards for grades K–12, are not technically “standards” to be taught. Rather, they represent what individual development can look like in a supportive preschool environment.) This knowledge of what to expect from young children helps early childhood educators employ instructional strategies and provide activities that are developmentally appropriate, that support how young children learn in an integrated way through their play, and that promote the optimum development of all children in the classrooms.

The third unique aspect of CPIN is its organizational structure, which takes advantage of the existing 11 regions designated by the California County

Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA). A team of CPIN trainers (“leads” in CPIN terminology) serves each of these regions, and this geographic focus allows CPIN to support existing regional communication and collaboration among various early childhood education and school readiness efforts.

Dillon Henry is a Special Education Services Coordinator for the Orange County Department of Education and in that role supports early intervention and preschool special education services in the county. She is also the CPIN early childhood special education lead in Region 9, which includes Orange, San Diego, and Imperial Counties. She says she appreciates the state-level partnership between CDD and SED in promoting quality preschool education that includes young children with disabilities. In this collaborative effort, SED helps fund trainers such as Henry who have an expertise in early childhood special education.

Henry also applauds the fact that the Preschool Learning Foundations are becoming a tool in the decision-making process about goals and least restrictive environments. “Historically preschool special education has taken the form of therapy services or self-contained classrooms,” she says. “But the recent focus on federal performance indicators has influenced how services are being designed to give children access to the core curriculum and preschool experiences. Our new learning foundations provide research-based, age-appropriate knowledge and skills and reflect typical early childhood development. The Preschool Learning Foundations also provide a context for designing individualized education program (IEP) goals and making decisions about appropriate services and supports. The foundations have helped special

CPIN continued on page 10

educators, parents, and general education preschool teachers talk together about getting children ready for reading, for example, or using inclusion to promote social-emotional development. Because we come together for training at our CPIN workshops, we get these conversations started.”

Clearly, Henry sees great potential in the new foundations and the reach CPIN is having in terms of fundamentally changing how all young children experience preschool. This is, she says, a “very exciting time in the field. The current recognition of the power of preschool comes out of the ‘achievement gap’ research and our awareness that children who start behind, stay behind. Research has proven the importance of intervention in the birth-to-five area. What we’re doing goes a long way toward getting children ready for school and preventing school failure—for children with and without IEPs.”

Cindi Kaup, another CPIN early childhood special education lead, also wears two hats. She is an inclusion specialist, funded through the First 5 initiative, while being a CPIN lead for Region 1 in northwestern California. She sees her two jobs as “a good marriage—I have a pulse on children and families [through First 5], so I can weave a lot of that experience into the CPIN presentations. A big part of what I love about the CPIN work is the team approach. It is a wonderful model for looking at all children in a preschool classroom. We [leads] co-present everything, and we’re always looking at the needs of all children. Of course the thing that constantly surprises teachers is how so many of the strategies we recommend for children with disabilities are effective with all children, including those who are learning English.”

Kaup also says she likes the way the CPIN sessions are constructed. “We’re given the content and the materials to present, but with room for flexibility. We always vary the presentations, keeping in mind who the participants

are and tailoring the content to fit the specific needs of the audience.” This points to the advantage of the regional structure, as team members can get to know the unique challenges and strengths of a specific area.

Lisa Lachnicht has attended CPIN sessions in Kaup’s region. As she explains, “I have been in the field [of early childhood education] for 35 years, and I’ve always been interested in special education. But I have learned so much from [the CPIN leads], especially about brain development and literacy. The ideas and projects I take away from the CPIN trainings are invaluable.” Kaup has even come into Lachnicht’s classroom to show her how to make adaptations to include



children with disabilities. Lachnicht believes that she herself is “immensely more effective with children with IEPs” as a result of the CPIN sessions.

Stephanie Gassaway is a new special education preschool teacher who admits that being in charge of her own classroom has been a challenge. Her students range in age from three to eight and they have moderate to severe disabilities, particularly in the area of communication delay. While she is also new to CPIN sessions, she has already incorporated what she has learned about adaptations to support the range of ability levels in her classroom. “What I also

love about CPIN is the opportunity it gives me to network with other teachers and get great strategies and information. And the content is excellent. I keep looking at how I can do things better, and CPIN helps me do just that.” According to Gassaway, “CPIN also transcends the budget cuts,” in the way that it offers its sessions after work hours and on weekends, thus eliminating the need to find and pay for substitute teachers.

To find out more about CPIN and the sessions in your regions or to take advantage of the organization’s online resources, go to www.cpin.us. ♦

CPIN is one of many organizations in California that offer high-quality, professional development and support to early childhood care and education professionals. The following list offers five more:

Beginning Together

www.cainclusivechildcare.org/bt

Faculty Initiative Project

www.wested.org/facultyinitiative

Family Child Care at It’s Best

www.cclld.ca.gov/PG512.btm

Program for Infant/Toddler Care

www.pitc.org

SEEDS: Supporting Early

Education Delivery Systems

www.scoe.net/SEEDS

The commission is fortunate to have many seasoned members who are capable of assisting with this effort and who are dedicated to the goals of the organization. The ACSE faces the challenge of setting up, adhering to, and maintaining a constant flow and division of its work and staying focused on designated areas of interest. With a great sense of moral purpose and responsibility, particularly in these difficult budget times, look for the Advisory Commission on Special Education to step up its game in the coming months and be an even stronger voice for quality education and access for students with disabilities in California. ♦

California Coordinates Early Childhood Education

The system of early childhood education in California is complicated. There are currently several state programs that serve infants and toddlers, all with different administrative and financial requirements, different certification demands, and different rubrics for evaluation. This complex structure makes it very hard for parents to navigate the system or even compare one school to another; it makes it difficult for programs to share resources and coordinate administrative efforts; and it makes it close to impossible to evaluate these programs effectively and consistently.

Efforts to reshape early childhood education have been at the forefront of educational and legislative efforts in California for a number of years. It's fair to say that this effort received a significant boost with State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell's initiative to close the achievement gap, which began in 2006. And in 2008, Senate Bill 1629 gave preschool reform even more traction when it established an advisory commission to propose a preschool quality improvement system that would include three critical components: a quality rating scale for programs serving children from birth to age five, a funding model that is aligned with that quality rating scale, and strategies for how best to use government and private resources to improve the systems for child care and child development. The ultimate intent of these initiatives is to improve outcomes for children and close the school readiness gap. The state has translated this effort into the California Early Learning Quality Improvement System, or CAEL QIS (pronounced "cal-quis").

Roberta Peck, a consultant at the California Department of Education, is directly involved in the work of CAEL QIS. Undaunted by the magnitude of

the task, the political obstacles, and the logistical difficulties, she keeps her focus strictly on the outcome. As she sees it, "This is an incredible window of opportunity. We have an unprecedented chance to work together and align early learning efforts for all children, birth to five.

"For many years, [policymakers] got together, agreed on the importance of early intervention, quality early childhood education, and inclusive practices for kids with disabilities. And they put the policies in place. But then they'd go home and there was never

Individuals with an expertise in special education are particularly needed.

any implementation plan. What's different now is that we have the chance to implement that policy, to make it operational. On top of this, we have strong commitment and leadership at local, state, and federal levels."

As the CAEL QIS advisory commission is working to foster an early childhood education system that is collaborative and inclusive, it also is trying to model those qualities in the way it approaches its own work. According to Peck, "Everyone is invited to participate in the committees, but especially in the subcommittees, which is where the important ideas are developed."

Her enthusiasm is contagious as she talks about the importance of getting people from all parts of the early childhood system to participate in building an integrated infrastructure. "When everyone sits down at the same table to work this out, they all end up seeing how this [integrated system] benefits everyone. People start developing a

mutual respect and understanding for how others need to operate. And they then understand the importance of compromise in our efforts to shape a better system. We're currently trying to build on all of the work that's been done and move it forward so that we have something that's effective and coherent for children and families."

One essential ingredient to the success of any effort of this magnitude, of course, is available money. While the CAEL QIS commission is supported by the First 5 California Children and Families Commission and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the actual work of changing the system will be funded by other sources. Because the Obama administration has placed a major emphasis on early childhood education, California's efforts to reshape early childhood education in the state will receive a great deal of support from federal dollars earmarked for improving preschool systems.

In conversation, Peck did let one note of worry color her optimism: what if that one person with that most transforming idea has not yet participated in the effort? She encourages anyone who is new to the work of CAEL QIS but who is interested and would like to participate to become familiar with the progress of the work to date—progress that is both considerable and easily available—and then to join the effort. Individuals with an expertise in special education are particularly needed, and getting "up to speed" is not difficult, as records of past meetings and reports are available online, along with calendars of future meetings.

There is an old saying: "Decisions are made by those who show up." Those who would like to show up for the work of CAEL QIS can go to www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cdl/re/sb1629committee.asp for more detailed information. ♦



than twenty-four months at the time of referral, then that child must have a delay of 50 percent in one area or a delay of 33 percent in two or more areas in order to qualify. (These delays are determined by assessments conducted through the regional centers.) The delays that a child twenty-four months of age or older must display at referral are now significantly higher than previously needed in order for the child to be served by Early Start.

One final, central change to Early Start involves medical insurance. Aside from services related to the evaluation and assessment of an infant or toddler, families now must access their personal medical insurance before the regional center can pay for “early intervention services [that are] specified on the infant or toddler’s Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) [and] that are determined to be medical in nature (such as speech or physical and occupational therapies).”²

Prevention Program

Clearly no one is happy with this decrease in services—not the people at DDS, not the staff at the state’s regional centers, not family resource centers, and not early childhood professionals who help to deliver Early Start services. And certainly many parents are very disappointed with the news. But there is one silver lining. The legislation that made the budget cuts also calls for the creation of the above-mentioned Prevention Program for those infants and toddlers who are no longer receiving Early Start services but who would benefit from developmental monitoring.

This new program was put in place on October 1, 2009, to serve children birth to thirty-five months of age who are at high risk of having a disability and toddlers who first enter the regional center system when they are between twenty-four- and thirty-five-months-old and who have a 33- to 49-percent delay in at least one area. Regional centers will implement the Prevention Program, and the regional center staff will partner

with parents and other family members to ensure that they are an integral part of the planning process for each child.

Designed to serve as a safety net, the Prevention Program will provide intake, assessment, developmental monitoring, and guidance and case management services to those families whose infants or toddlers have two risk factors that result in their being at high risk of developing a disability. In general, the program is designed to follow those children previously served in Early Start and to refer families to the public services (called “generic services”) that are required to serve eligible populations. These generic services include Head Start and Early Head Start programs, California Children’s Services, the California Department of Social Services, state preschools, and the child care resource and referral agencies in each county.

It is important to note the specific limitations of the Prevention Program. Unlike Early Start, it is not an entitlement program, so it is possible that not everyone who qualifies will be able to participate, in large part because the amount of money available for the effort is capped. Families can appeal if they are denied eligibility, bearing in mind that the program does not purchase services; it is designed to help parents work with their infants and toddlers to prevent further developmental delay. Then, if a child does demonstrate a developmental delay, the Prevention Program case manager will support the parents in referring their child to Early Start.

Sources of Additional Information

Parents can find additional information about the changes to Early Start, as well as other resources that support children and their families, at family resource centers (FRC). Go to www.frcnca.org/contact.html to find the FRC closest to you.

Marion Karian from Exceptional Parents Unlimited, the FRC in the Fresno area, encourages parents of children who no longer receive Early Start services to “stick with it” by making sure that “their children are enrolled in the Prevention Program at their regional center

to ensure that their children receive regular assessments. This way parents can stay on top of their child’s development.” And then if the child does develop a definite delay, he or she will be eligible for Early Start services, with as little time lost as possible.

There is another way for parents to “stick with it,” and that is by doing all of those things that will promote their child’s optimal development. Parents are their child’s best teacher, and so children thrive when their parents play with them, read to them, and interact with them in creative ways. The Prevention Program provides developmental guidance. (For an overview of developmental delays and a discussion of how parents can best support their child’s development, go to www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment.htm.)

Karian also encourages parents to be persistent with their pediatrician and to “believe in what you’re seeing, no matter how hard it might be to accept the fact that your child has a disability.” Research soundly reinforces Karian’s suggestions, as the rate of growth and development in a child’s earliest years is exponentially more rapid than it will ever be again in the child’s lifetime. Formal and informal intervention and support at this stage will have the greatest and most lasting impact on the child, making it worth every extra effort.

The California Disability Community Action Network has posted a telemeeting with an in-depth discussion of the Early Start changes at www.cdcan.us. Questions and concerns can be e-mailed to Julia Mullen at DDS: Julia.mullen@dds.ca.gov. ♦

2. www.dds.ca.gov/Director/BudgetReductionSummary.cfm

Additional Supports for Parents

California Children Services:

www.dbcs.ca.gov/services/ccs

California Head Start:

www.cabeadstart.org

First 5 California: www.cfcf.ca.gov

California Department of Social Services:

www.dss.cabunet.gov/cdssweb

Internet Resources

Early Intervention

www.cde.ca.gov/sp/selfpl/ecseries.asp

The seven handbooks in the **Early Childhood Special Education Series**, all available at the above site, address the concepts and preferred practices for successful, high-quality intervention.

www.idaofcal.org

The **Infant Development Association (IDA) of California** brings together parents and professionals committed to ensuring optimal developmental outcomes for infants with special needs and their families. IDA supports collaborative efforts to encourage best practices in the field of early intervention.

Preschool

<http://caeyc.org>

California Association for the Education of Young Children (CAEYC) unites educators of young children and advocates for political and professional leadership.

Preschool Learning Foundations

www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/rel/documents/preschoollf.pdf

For the first time, California offers its early childhood educators a set of preschool learning foundations, an important step toward unifying and coordinating the system of early childhood education in the state and raising the quality of all educational services for young children. These foundations are research based, developmentally appropriate, and invaluable for both educators and parents. The foundations are grounded in the principles of universal design for learning, so they foster the learning and development of all young children in California, including children with disabilities. The foundations are available for download from the above Web page.

www.draccess.org

The **Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) Assessment System** is a statewide accountability and progress assessment system for preschool-age children with individualized education programs (IEPs). For detailed information about the system and for training in its use, visit the above Web site. For materials and forms, go to www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/drdpforms.asp.

www.preschoolcalifornia.org

Preschool California is a nonprofit advocacy organization working to increase access to high-quality preschool for all California children. Among other resources available on this site are two ground-breaking reports: the 2004 “Kids Can’t Wait to Learn” and the 2005 “Praise for Preschool.”

www.scoe.net/seeds

The **SEEDS Project** offers training and technical assistance to administrators, staff, and families involved in early childhood special education programs serving children ages birth to five in local education agencies (LEAs) throughout California.

www.tr.wou.edu/train/cdcecse.htm

The **Teaching Research Institute** makes available a concise guide to effective practices for early childhood special education.

www.challengingbehavior.org

The **Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children** takes the research that shows which practices improve social-emotional outcomes for young children with, or at risk for, delays or disabilities and creates **FREE** products and resources to help caregivers and service providers apply these practices in their work.

Inclusion

www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/DEC_NAEYC_EC_updatedKS.pdf

The **Division for Early Childhood (DEC)** and the **National Association for the Education of Young Children**

(NAEYC) have published a joint position statement, *Early Childhood Inclusion*, on the topic of including young children with disabilities in early care and education settings. The document offers a comprehensive and compelling guide to inclusive practices.

www.specialquestlibrary.org

The SpecialQuest Multimedia Training Library supports high-quality inclusion of young children with disabilities, from birth to age five (pre-kindergarten), and their families in early care and education settings. SpecialQuest Birth–Five has just added its *Preschool Inclusion Series* to this library. The new series focuses specifically on high-quality inclusion of preschoolers (ages three to five) with special needs in early care and education settings. All SpecialQuest videos, training sessions, and handouts are available at no cost, thanks to funding from the Office of Head Start, and can be downloaded; or DVD/CD sets can be requested from the Web site.

Family Literacy

www.sonoma.edu/cibs/familyliteracy

The **National Head Start Family Literacy Center (NHSFLC)**, Sonoma State University, provides training and technical assistance in family literacy and early mathematics, complete with adaptations and accommodations for children with disabilities. The NHSFLC provided 574 trainings in fiscal year 2008–09 to Head Start programs and their partners, all of whom received training and materials free of charge. All NHSFLC materials are research-based and grounded in practical approaches for ready application by families, caregivers, teachers, and interventionists. Materials can be ordered and others downloaded from the above Web site. For more information, contact Joanne Knapp-Philo PhD, Director, at 805-388-5634.

Library Resources

Why buy...

... when you can borrow?

The RiSE (Resources in Special Education) Library lends materials free of charge to California residents; the borrower only pays for return postage. The items listed on this page are a small sample of what the library offers. Go to www.php.com/services/libraries to view all holdings. To order materials, either phone or e-mail RiSE librarian Judy Bower: 408-727-5775; judy.bower@php.com.

Inclusion

The Current Legal Status of Inclusion

Steven Lake and John Norlin. Horsham, PA: LRP Publications. 2006. 100 pages. This reference guide examines the evolution of inclusion case law and explores the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act's least restrictive environment (LRE) obligation, as well as how LRE carries over into extracurricular activities and related services. Call #23922.

Everybody Belongs: Changing Negative Attitudes toward Classmates with Disabilities

Arthur Shapiro. New York, NY: Routledge Falmer. 2000. 551 pages. This engagingly written and comprehensive book offers practical, research-based guidance to educators and policymakers wrestling with the process of including children with disabilities in the general education classroom. Call #23595.

Inclusion—A Fresh Look: Practical Strategies to Help All Students Succeed

Linda Tilton. Shorewood, MN: Covington Cove. 2003. 202 pages. Designed specifically for teachers but useful for parents as well, this book offers practical ideas for how to modify materials for students with disabilities, how to use a variety of activities to create an inclusive classroom, how to maintain high standards but allow for different outcomes, and how to schedule students for balanced classrooms. A chapter written specifically for parents

suggests ways to help children at home. Call #23406.

Inclusion Works: Creating Child Care Programs That Promote Belonging for Children with Special Needs

California Department of Education. Sacramento, CA: CDE Press. 2009. 85 pages. This practical guide is especially useful for child care providers who are new to enrolling children with special needs in their programs. The document describes ways to successfully create an inclusive child care setting, along with strategies for finding additional help and support for children and their family members. Call #24212.

Preschool Inclusion

Claire Cavallaro and Michelle Haney. Baltimore, MD: Paul Brookes Publishing. 2008. 399 pages. Designed for educators, Head Start personnel, and child care providers, this resource offers field-tested, research-based strategies, replicable forms, and case studies, all

selected to support the inclusion of young children with disabilities in early childhood programs. Call #24010.

Staff Training Tips: Focusing on LRE and Inclusion

Sheila Fernley. Horsham, PA: LRP Publications. 2007. 96 pages. This handbook explains the legal and practical compliance issues surrounding LRE (least restrictive environment) and inclusion. Each of the book's activity guides supports high-quality, comprehensive professional development and offers questions to facilitate discussion, supporting articles, facilitator resources, and much more. Call #24071.

Especially for Parents

IEP and Inclusion Tips for Parents and Teachers

Anne Eason and Kathleen Whitbread. Verona, WI: Attainment Company. 2006. 76 pages. This book offers practical tips for parents to become more effective advocates for their child's inclusion into general education classrooms and for teachers to encourage effective partnerships with families. Call #23885.

Should The Special EDge Go "Green"?

How do you like to read *The Special EDge*? What do you think of it being made available primarily as an e-mailed attachment or as a downloadable file from the *EDge* Web site? Please let us know what you think by e-mailing, phoning, faxing, or writing to us; or by completing an online form. One way or another, we look forward to receiving your answers to the following questions:

- ✓ How do you prefer to read *The Special EDge*: online, in PDF, or in hard copy?
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2010 Calendar

April 20–24

Program Improvement Starts At Home . . . “IT TAKES A PARENT”

This Fourth Annual California Title 1 Parent Conference is designed for parents, school administrators, and all educators. The conference will focus on student achievement, leadership for school improvement, parent involvement, best practices, and more. San Diego. For more information, contact Diane Haney at info@caceeconference.com or 619-822-4382; or go to www.californiatitle1parentconference.com.

June 21–23

Head Start Tenth National Research Conference

Head Start’s research conference this year will, among other things, highlight research on promoting the development of young children and on understanding how families, schools, communities, and culture shape young children’s development. Washington, DC. For more information, phone 202-232-8777 or 800-424-2460; or go to www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/oprelbsrc.

August 2–4

OSEP Early Childhood Mega-Conference

This conference of the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) is designed to bring together the entire OSEP community (OSEP and partners) to engage in a collaborative dialogue to achieve a common understanding of shared responsibilities for improving results for infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities and their families. The event includes the **Parent Center Conference**, the **National Early Childhood Conference**, a **Collaborative Leadership strand**, and the **OSEP Leadership Conference**. Arlington, VA. For the Parent Center Conference, contact Kerry Jo Johnson at kerryjo.johnson@pac.org; for the National Early Childhood Conference, contact Betsy Ayankoya at ayankoya@mail.fpg.unc.edu; and for the OSEP Leadership Conference,

contact Tamara Infante at tinfante@aed.org. All attendees are required to participate in the Collaborative Leadership strand. Registration begins in May.

October 14–17

International Conference on Young Children with Special Needs and Their Families

“Intentional Interventions” is the theme of this Division for Early Childhood (DEC) conference, which will explore ways for teams and professionals to be thoughtful, purposeful, and data-driven in creating learning environments that promote the growth of young children with diverse abilities within family and community settings. Kansas City, MO.

For more information, phone 406-543-0872; e-mail dec@dec-sped.org; or go to www.dec-sped.org/Conference.

November 3–6

NAEYC Annual Conference & Expo

The National Black Child Development Institute and the National Association of the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) are collaborating on a joint conference for parents and professionals to present best practices and new research in child care, education, youth development, child welfare, family support, parenting, and much more. Anaheim, CA. For more information, phone 202-232-8777 or 800-424-2460; or go to www.naeyc.org/conference.

STAR Opportunity

Educational Testing Service (ETS) and the California Department of Education seek knowledgeable, current, California teachers to participate in a standards-setting workshop for the California Modified Assessment (CMA), part of the STAR tests. To be eligible, educators must teach upper-level English-language arts, life sciences, or algebra. All expenses for attending this workshop are covered by ETS, including reimbursements to your school district for the cost of a substitute teacher. This three-day workshop takes place in Sacramento, CA, the week of August 16, 2010. Apply now at www.startest.org/cma, or contact Dan Stanley at 916-403-2428 or dstanley@ets.org.

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Mail To	California Services for Technical Assistance and Training (CalSTAT) c/o Napa County Office of Education 5789 State Farm Drive, Suite 230 Rohnert Park, CA 94928 707-849-2275



California's Budget Crisis Hits Infants and Toddlers



Early Start has been California's program for providing "front line" early intervention services to infants and toddlers who have—or who are at risk of having—a disability or developmental delay. The program was created in 1993 through the California Early Intervention Services Act in response to the mandates of Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). It is funded through the California Department of Developmental Services (DDS) and administered through a coordinated effort between regional centers and local education agencies, including county offices of education. Early Start has been shaped by a commitment to family-focused services for infants and toddlers from birth to age three. Essentially, the program is designed to provide a system of referral and assessment that results in individualized early intervention services, provides supports to infants and toddlers and their families within their community and in "natural environments," and includes families as collaborative decision makers.

In many ways, Early Start is a victim of its own success. Until October 1, 2009, the program exceeded IDEA mandates and provided effective quality services and early intervention not only to thousands of infants and toddlers in California who had disabilities but also to those who were at risk of developing a disability or developmental delay. Then came the state's current budget crisis, which required the State Legislature to reduce DDS's budget by \$334 million in 2009, and which in turn produced cutbacks to the variety and number of services that regional centers can pay for

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with DDS funding. Unfortunately, Early Start services are among those being cut. As a result, changes have been made to eligibility requirements for Early Start, changes that have the program aligning more exactly with—and no longer exceeding—IDEA mandates.

Changes in Early Start Services

The primary change in Early Start hangs on the difference between infants and toddlers who have an "established risk" for a disability or developmental delay and those who are "at high risk." Those with an established risk will continue to receive services as required under IDEA Part C; those who are at high risk will not be served under Early Start but will receive developmental monitoring under a new Prevention Program provided by regional centers. An established risk is any known condition or major medical factor that contributes to an infant's or toddler's delayed development. For example, children diagnosed with a single, low-incidence impairment—such as children with a hearing, vision, or orthopedic impairment and

children with Down syndrome, Fragile X syndrome, or other genetic conditions that may lead to a disability—will continue to be eligible for Early Start services. However, those children who have two or more risk factors that may lead to a disability—infants who are born prematurely or with a low birth weight, for example, or children whose mothers used drugs or alcohol when they were pregnant—are now not eligible for Early Start unless they have been diagnosed with a specific disability or significant delay.

In addition, Early Start has had to change the degree of delay in a child's development that determines that child's eligibility. If under twenty-four months of age at the time of referral, a child must exhibit a 33-percent delay in one or more areas.¹ If a child is older

Early Start, continued on page 12

1. These five areas include cognitive development; physical and motor development, including vision and hearing; communication development; social or emotional development; and adaptive development.