
Young Children Face the State: Issues and Options for Early Childhood Programs

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The growing demand for compensatory education and for child care has generated a rash of federal legislation; many states have enacted new early childhood programs, most of them located within schooling systems, and many others are considering their options. This article examines the basic policy issues governments confront in early childhood education, including the content of programs, their financing, and the inevitable trade-off between cost and quality. The final section of the article outlines the available policy options.

Little kids make hot copy: they're cute, they need our protection, and everyone wants the best for them. But lovable as children can be, taxpayers do not always want to spend public money on them. Children do not vote, so their political cause has always been weak. For children under 6, public support has always vied with the idea that parents should be wholly responsible. For poor children, the most needy and most vulnerable, antipathy to their parents has often outweighed any sense of public responsibility. Americans are fond of proclaiming children "our most precious natural resource," but they have less often followed this rhetoric with public support. Government programs for children have been on the defensive ever since the 1960s, and, in the Reagan administration, the attack on public funding for children—especially poor children—was especially vicious (Grubb and Lazerson 1988; Kimmich 1985).

Against this background, a recent surge of interest in early childhood programs is both welcome to children's advocates and unexpected. At the federal level, more than 80 bills related to early childhood have been introduced (Robins 1988), some of them—notably the Act for

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Better Child Care (the ABC bill, H.R. 3660/S. 1885)—with considerable support, and new federal funds supporting child care for welfare recipients have been authorized by the Family Support Act of 1988. Since 1979, at least 20 states have enacted some form of early childhood education; a few others have used their existing school aid mechanisms to fund early childhood programs in the schools. Many other states have formed commissions to study their options, and prominent politicians and commissioners of education have taken up the cause of young children (Marx and Seligson 1988). The National Governors' Association (NGA) has also supported early childhood programs as one of several proposals to "help at-risk children succeed in meeting the new educational requirements," thereby explicitly linking early childhood programs to the school reforms of the past few years (NGA 1986). Even the business community, long indifferent or even hostile to social programs, has added its support of early childhood programs as valuable "investment strategies" (Committee for Economic Development 1987).

Still, such enthusiasm is not necessarily sufficient to win fiscal support for new initiatives. Despite the backing of much of the early childhood community, the ABC bill failed to pass Congress, and it and its many companions will now have to vie with efforts to cut the federal deficit. Most of the recently enacted state programs are small pilot projects, not commitments to large-scale funding of early childhood education. The idea of extending education to younger ages has been around for almost 150 years without winning many political battles except the movement for kindergarten and the institution of Head Start. Substantial confusion persists about early childhood programs—about their basic purposes, their costs and effects, and what constitutes good quality. Turf battles continue, and the major professional communities with an interest in young children—educators in the public schools, the child-care community, and those controlling welfare programs—often fight each other over purpose and method as well as economic issues of jobs and control. Public policies keep replicating the divisions among

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those with interests in young children, to the detriment of the children and of political support for public programs.

The rebirth of interest in federal legislation and the emergence of states as independent actors—partly in response to the indifference of the Reagan years—offer new possibilities for a partnership in which the federal government provides funding and broad goals while states also play active roles in defining early childhood policy. If, as many observers feel, there will be legislative breakthroughs in the near future, it will be important to develop policies on the basis of sound principles, since poor practice, once enacted, may develop constituencies and become harder to change.

In this article, I examine the basic policy issues in early childhood education, after reviewing the different purposes of such programs both historically (in Section I) and currently (in Section II). The content of early childhood programs poses critical choices both for federal policy and for state governments, with some resolution necessary of the substantive differences between preschool and child-care programs, and between elementary educators and early childhood educators—differences examined in Section III. The financing of early childhood education (ECE)—including its costs, the effects on quality, and the trade-offs between cost and quality—is another important issue (presented in Section IV) that must be resolved before federal and state governments can develop their own policies. Finally, the policy options available, and particularly those that might integrate the different strands of support for young children, are outlined in Section V.

As an area of governmental concern, early childhood policy is still in its infancy. The problems to resolve often seem hideously complex and the choices politically intractable; the legislator in search of calm might be tempted to move to another arena or to substitute platitudes for legislation. But we should keep in mind the goals: to meet the needs of young children and to redress developmental and educational problems by nipping them in the bud. “What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children,” declared John Dewey; so for policymakers the prospects of improving the lives of young children should be worth the trouble.

I. The Historical Strands of Early Childhood Education

The proposal to extend schooling downward to younger children is an idea that every generation seems to rediscover. Different motives—in turn educational, economic, and reformist, sometimes stressing the *needs of children* and sometimes forgetting the child in favor of adult

concerns—have prompted these proposals. Many have died, but their legacies have included models that continue to influence and confuse us.

One of the earliest justifications for educating young children was the compensatory rationale. In the growing cities of the early nineteenth century, philanthropers began to support charity schools to provide political and moral education for poor children whose parents “seldom keep any government in their family” and who therefore “unavoidably contract habits of idleness and mischief and wickedness.” Others, intent on rescuing poor children from their allegedly harmful parents as early as possible, instituted infant schools for those as young as 18 months old. The infant school movement, most active in the 1830s and 1840s, died out as the view spread that mothers should care for their own children (Kaestle 1983). But its essential vision—that schools should take in children as young as possible, to teach them and protect them from the evil influences of home—lived on in many forms. The movement for the kindergarten, begun in the 1880s, also developed as part of urban reform to teach poor children the values of industriousness, cleanliness, discipline, and cooperation; kindergartens were then incorporated into the public schools as a way of expanding their funding and scope (Lazerson 1972; Grubb and Lazerson 1977). More recently, the institution of Head Start represents yet another attempt to compensate for the deficiencies of parents by educating their children earlier, and most of the recent state preschool programs also have an explicitly compensatory purpose.

A very different institution for young children developed at the turn of the century, again in response to the wretched conditions of urban slums. The day nurseries established by settlement houses were, like the charity kindergartens, directed at low-income children. They had two purposes, according to one nursery school director: “to provide a shelter for the children of mothers dependent on their own exertions for their daily bread; [but] also to rear useful citizens among the class represented by the children we reach” (Steinfels 1973, p. 29). However, mothers were supposed to be caring for their own children rather than working, and the day nurseries therefore became associated with pathological families and the problems of the “unworthy poor.” While the day nurseries themselves declined under this stigma, their legacy has been the “welfare” or “custodial” model of child care, providing extended care so that mothers of poor children can work (Grubb and Lazerson 1988, chap. 8; Steinfels 1973).

The “developmental” model of programs for young children was born in the nursery school movement of the 1920s. Nursery schools emerged as complements to mothering rather than “mother substitutes”

like the day nurseries; they were part-day rather than full-day programs, directed at the cognitive enrichment of middle-class children (National Society for the Study of Education [NSSE] 1929). Because of their firm links to parents and to middle-class children, the nursery schools avoided the stigma of the day nurseries and provided a strong institutional image of what early childhood programs should be. With their success and the decline of the day nurseries, the split widened between self-consciously “developmental” programs for young children and more obviously “custodial” programs.

Other institutional developments for young children were temporary responses to specific crises. During the Depression, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) established a series of federally funded nursery schools, primarily to provide employment for teachers. Since they were administered through state departments of education and local school boards, they developed an educational orientation. But they ended when the Depression was over and federal funds ceased. During World War II the Lanham Act provided funding for day-care centers to facilitate the employment of mothers for the war effort. While some of these centers were run by schools, care of children during working hours was their central purpose. Like the WPA nurseries, they folded as soon as the crisis was over, with no pretense that what had been acceptable during wartime might continue.

Once the kindergarten had become part of the public schools, the idea of extending schooling to even younger children kept reappearing. In 1945 the Educational Policies Committee of the National Education Association recommended that schooling be extended to 3- and 4-year-olds, “closely integrated with the rest of the program of public education,” especially to provide education for children “whose parents are not able by circumstance, nature, or training to give them the values inherent in a carefully directed program” (Educational Policies Committee 1945). These proposals failed to have any general influence as they were blocked by the ideology that mothers should remain in the home. In the 1960s, however, programs for young children went through a renaissance. New research—especially J. McVickar Hunt’s *Intelligence and Experience* (1961) and Benjamin Bloom’s *Stability and Change in Human Characteristics* (1964)—was widely cited as confirming that the early years are critical and that slow development in the early years may be irremediable. Another “crisis”—once more, the recognition of poverty—spurred the federal government to action. The Head Start program, a centerpiece of the War on Poverty, was explicitly educational and compensatory (Zigler and Valentine 1979). Others proposed a similar model for all children; for example, the Education Policies Commission of the National Education Association recom-

mended in 1966 that “all children should have an opportunity to go to school at public expense at the age of four,” relying on the convention of how crucial the first five years of life are to subsequent development (quoted in Frost [1969]).

Other federal programs of the 1960s aimed at young children were more obviously attempts to provide child care. Part of the War on Poverty was the “services strategy,” designed to provide various training, counseling, and social services to help them escape poverty. The child-care programs, explicitly intended to reduce poverty, became the archetype of the “welfare” approach to child care, with low costs and custodial care more important than the education of the child. Thus the major federal programs of the 1960s left the division between developmental programs and welfare-related custodial programs intact.

With early childhood programs now established and increasing numbers of women working, proposals and legislative initiatives multiplied during the 1970s. Major federal legislation to expand support for child care was introduced in 1971, 1975, 1976, and 1979; each was defeated, partly because of attacks from antifeminist conservatives and partly because of reactions against government intervention and the Great Society. In the midst of battles over federal funding, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) proposed that the public schools should control federally subsidized early childhood and day-care programs, arguing that the schools were dedicated to education, that professionalism would improve the low quality of existing care, and that the schools already had a well-developed organizational structure (AFT 1976). However, with a surplus of teachers looming, many interpreted this argument as a self-serving attempt to put unemployed teachers back to work. The early childhood community rose to the attack, arguing that elementary teachers were inappropriately trained for young children and that the schools were rigid, uncommitted to young children, and hostile to parents (Grubb and Lazerson 1977; Fishhaut and Pastor 1977). The episode revealed the deep rift between educators and the early childhood community, though the demise of federal legislation made the debate moot.

The legacy of this history, then, was fragmentation and paradox. The historical division continued between developmental programs for young children and custodial programs, the latter providing care while parents worked. Another split had emerged between custodial care associated with efforts to reduce welfare costs, and therefore of the lowest possible cost and quality, and the ideal of the high-quality child care that most working parents sought. Still another division, one between elementary educators and early childhood educators, had been reopened for the first time since the kindergarten movement.

More women have been working, and while the need for more child care of better quality has been generally acknowledged, its provision has been fought bitterly by those arguing that mothers belong at home. The view that early childhood is a crucial stage of development has become widely accepted, but until recently Head Start was embattled and other proposals for governmental support have languished. The cause of young children seems important, but government support for early childhood programs has remained weak.

II. The Current Movement: The Conflicting Purposes of Early Childhood Programs

In the past few years, political interest in young children has bloomed again. The plethora of federal legislation is one sign of interest, and the legislation enacted by states is another. At least 20 states and New York City have enacted legislation since 1979 supporting early childhood programs; in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and the District of Columbia, existing mechanisms to finance the regular school programs are being used to support early childhood education. Most of these are half-day preschool programs, administered by state departments of education, and run by local school districts; most programs are quite limited in scope and can best be considered pilot projects.

These recent actions by state governments, which have historically committed very few revenues to early childhood programs, remain somewhat puzzling.¹ In several states—Texas, Massachusetts, and South Carolina—additional funding for prekindergarten programs came as part of more general educational reforms. In some states, including Washington, Texas, Kentucky, and Connecticut, blue-ribbon commissions supported early childhood. Often this support was generated by one or two commission members, usually those who had heard about positive evaluations of early childhood programs, rather than by more widespread support. In other cases, individual politicians—like Mayor Koch in New York and Governor Castle of Delaware—have championed the cause of young children without much public pressure to do so.² The political influences have therefore been varied and idiosyncratic. With a few exceptions—especially South Carolina, whose recent educational reforms involved a broad spectrum of citizens and educators—there is little evidence of concerted political action by educators, by the early childhood community, by the women's movement, or by parents.

However, the broader influences contributing to the interest are clear. One has been the continued increase in mothers working. In

1986, 54.4 percent of mothers with children under 6 years of age were in the labor force, up from 46.8 percent in 1980, 38.8 percent in 1975, and 25.3 percent in 1965 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 1986; Hayghe 1986; U.S. Department of Labor 1982). To be sure, these trends are hardly novel, since the participation of women in the labor force has been increasing at least since 1890; but passing the magical 50 percent has clarified that the trend is irreversible and working is now the norm for women rather than an aberration. About two-thirds of women with children younger than 6 work full time, so that part-time programs—like traditional preschools and nursery schools—are insufficient.

A different strand of support has emphasized the wisdom of educating children at an earlier age, particularly low-income and other disadvantaged children. The movement for “excellence” with its emphasis on higher academic standards has coexisted with a growing alarm about dropout rates and illiteracy. Earlier schooling promises one way of meeting the needs of remediation and the demands for excellence simultaneously. The link between the two has been made most explicit by those states adopting preschool programs as part of more general educational reforms and by the National Governors’ Association Task Force on Readiness to Meet the New Standards (1986).

The current wave of interest also owes a great deal to publicity surrounding one particular project, the Perry Preschool. Even though few reformers know what this program did or what it cost, everyone cites its benefit/cost ratio of 7:1. In the search for educational solutions, many reformers have latched onto the Perry Preschool—and by extension, to any kind of early childhood program—as the latest panacea. Since the Perry Preschool was only one tiny program, with extraordinary expenditures and special circumstances, these results might be dismissed. However, other studies confirm that well-designed early childhood programs can have consistent positive effects on development.³

The major reasons for current interest in young children replicate the historic divisions among early childhood programs. Those concerned with working parents are the heirs of the custodial model of child care—except that no parent supports low-quality care. Those promoting the compensatory education of young children continue to argue the benefits of earlier intervention for poor and disadvantaged children. But right away there is a conflict between these strands of thought. The compensatory strand usually promotes half-day programs, lasting two-and-one-half to three hours a day during the school year; but these are of little help to full-time working parents. Conversely, purely custodial programs may not provide the self-consciously developmental experiences envisioned by early childhood educators and proponents

of the Perry Preschool, and they do not provide the array of services included in the Head Start model. Inconsistencies abound: some advocates mention the increasing numbers of women working and then press for half-day programs that most working mothers cannot use. Others note that more and more young children *are* cared for outside their homes and use this fact to argue the *appropriateness* of earlier schooling.

Right at the start, then, there is a conflict over the basic purposes of early childhood programs, a split with crucial implications for the hours of operation, program philosophy and content, the training of teachers, and costs. But while this division has deep historical roots, it is no longer appropriate to maintain the distinction between developmental and custodial programs. One reason is that the reality of mothers working has undermined the usefulness of the older developmental model; nursery schools, which used to be half-day programs, have generally evolved into full-day programs for working parents. Many children—especially most “at-risk” children, whose mothers are more likely to be single, poor, and working full-time—can no longer attend half-day programs.⁴

Conversely, the view that the early years are important to development has become conventional wisdom. In my experience, most child-care centers have some conscious policy about a developmental curriculum; many devote some time during the day to formal instruction, and most state a variety of developmental goals for children. There is no real difference between the activities in *good* child-care facilities—both day-care centers and family day-care homes—and self-consciously developmental preschool programs. Many child-care workers call themselves teachers and consider themselves professionals, resenting deeply the common notion that they are merely baby-sitters. The notion that child care is intrinsically “custodial” is badly out of date.

Above all, the idea that early childhood programs are either developmental or custodial can only limit these programs. After all, the schools are rich, multipurpose institutions with economic, political, moral, and avocational purposes coexisting. Early childhood programs at their best are similarly rich and multifaceted, providing cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development for children, security and full-time care for working parents, substantial cooperation between parents and care givers, and parent education for parents seeking different ways of interacting with their children. The best programs provide children early, noncompetitive, and supportive experiences with children of other races and class backgrounds, rather than segregating children. To search for a single purpose for early childhood

programs is to destroy this vision of what early childhood programs can be.

One laudable goal of both federal and state policy, therefore, would be to bridge the deep division between developmental and custodial programs, between preschool and child care. One way to do that is to be sure that early childhood programs cover the working day for parents who need that, but that programs also maintain a developmental focus and avoid the indifferent care of many mediocre programs. The recent initiatives from the states have given little thought to such integration, however. Most have created half-day preschool programs for at-risk children, administered by state education agencies and local school districts, without any connection to existing child-care programs (public or private). At the same time, in different legislative committees and different agencies, states have been making decisions about Title XX/Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) child-care programs, with at least 13 states making substantial increases in funds available for child care—but with no relation to schools or to experimental preschools, and the Family Support Act will add its own independent support.⁵ Of course, a variety of fiscal, philosophical, and administrative barriers to integrating the strands of early childhood programs exist, none of them easy to topple. But the goal of integration is important since the alternative is a limited vision of what programs for young children can be and a set of programs that are less effective than they could be.

III. Philosophy and Turf: The Split between Early Childhood and Elementary Education

Another split in approaches to young children has been replicated in recent developments. At least since the turn of the century and the kindergarten movement, a division has existed between teachers and administrators in programs for young children and those for children in the elementary schools. This split emerged with some force in the 1970s, and the early childhood community still fears that public school control of programs for young children could ruin early childhood education (Morgan 1985; NAEYC 1986).

Not surprisingly, one argument between the two camps has involved turf—control over jobs and revenues. When the American Federation of Teachers proposed in the mid-1970s that public schools be the prime sponsors of federally funded programs, it was widely interpreted as an attempt to grab jobs for surplus elementary teachers. More

recently, debate erupted in New York City about who would control new funds for early childhood programs; the resolution was to split funds equally between the public schools and the Agency for Child Development, which administers publicly funded child-care programs. The turf issues have been especially desperate for the early childhood community because salaries are so low and jobs so few; even though public school teaching is not a high-status profession, it still has a stature and stability that early childhood lacks.

However, the turf issues should not be as serious at the moment, because there is a shortage rather than a surplus of schoolteachers. Instead, the deepest differences between the two factions are those of philosophy, method, and purpose, disagreements difficult to reconcile because the practices deeply embedded in the schools and resistant to change are anathema to early childhood educators.

To be sure, there is enormous variety in both early childhood programs and elementary education. There are rigid and didactic forms of early childhood programs as well as informal, child-oriented elementary classrooms associated with “open classrooms” and the free school movement. But the differences between the two approaches to education are real, and they can be readily seen by contrasting a typical early childhood classroom with an elementary school classroom. In child care, children are likely to be moving among different activity centers with a relatively high noise level. Periodically a teacher will gather all children for instruction, reading, or some version of assembly (chapel, temple, or a visiting fire fighter), but instruction is limited to perhaps a half-hour per day and children are usually free to choose their own activities. The progression of activities throughout the day is geared to the capacities and attention spans of small children and the rhythms of child care: early and late periods tend to be absorbed in free play because the arrival and departure of children can be disruptive; instruction is limited to short periods, usually in mid-morning when young children are most alert; scheduling is generally flexible. Teachers circulate to make sure that all children are engaged, to provide guidance and informal instruction to individual children (rather than large groups), and to prevent disruptions; they are “guides and facilitators,” rather than instructors. Rooms are arranged so that there are areas for privacy as well as “public” areas with different activities. To the untrained observer, there seems to be little planning or structure to the classroom, but, in fact, structure is pervasive if covert: in the arrangement of the classroom, in the constant monitoring of the teacher and interaction with children, and in the progression of activities throughout the day.

In contrast, elementary classrooms are dominated by lessons taught by teachers to children: “teacher talk” is pervasive (Sirotnik 1983). Children are at individual desks, sometimes in “islands” but often in rows; there may be some freedom for children to go to activity centers when they have finished lessons, but there is much less freedom for children to choose what to do. In general the noise level is much lower than in early childhood classrooms; order and quiet are intrinsically much more important as goals and are not merely instrumental to learning. The day begins and ends at prescribed times, and the scheduling of subjects is much more regular and rigid than in child care.

Of course, class size is usually much smaller in early childhood programs compared to the elementary grades. Smaller classes are not simply more pleasant; large classes force upon the teacher an attention to control and order rather than interaction and guidance, and they force instruction to be more formal, group-oriented, and didactic rather than informal, individualized, and interactive. Large classes also make child-initiated activities more difficult to manage.

The appearance of different classrooms is not simply happenstance; the basic philosophy of teaching and learning varies dramatically.⁶ Most child-care centers and preschool programs in this country adopt (even if unconsciously) Piaget’s model of children: children are active learners and learn by initiating activity and by experimenting (including playing); the teacher’s role is to facilitate rather than to direct the child’s learning. In contrast, most elementary teachers implicitly follow a behaviorist model, one in which the child is a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate onto which lessons are written by the teacher. With the importance of rewards and punishment in the behaviorist model, the schools have developed highly formalized assessment mechanisms including grades and tests. One deep fear of early childhood educators is that the emphasis on formal evaluation and assessment in the elementary classroom would, if extended to earlier years, bring the devastating experience of failure to young children, with detrimental consequences including poor self-esteem, lower expectations of subsequent teachers, and placement in lower tracks. Partly because black children so often experience this kind of treatment in the schools, the National Black Child Development Institute has condemned school sponsorship of early childhood programs as an “incubator for inequality” (NBCDI 1985).

Another division involves the scope of education. Although public education encompasses vocational preparation, political and moral education, and cultural and avocational development, the elementary grades have focused on basic cognitive skills emphasizing the manip-

ulation of symbols and the mastery of facts. In contrast, early childhood programs uniformly place cognitive skill development—"prereading" and "premath"—alongside social skills (especially the behavior appropriate in group settings), the ability to recognize and control emotions, and the development of fine and gross motor skills. Early childhood advocates generally fear that educators would convert programs for young children into more "school-like" settings by reducing the importance of noncognitive goals and by emphasizing one kind of learning (epitomized by the three R's and memorizing facts) over more creative, independent, and active forms of cognition. Certainly the current attention to preschool programs as mechanisms of compensatory education can only strengthen this fear since the most important criterion of success in compensatory programs is later success in school.

Early childhood advocates place great value on flexibility and variety in programs, since parent schedules, preferences about types of curricula, and the learning styles and personalities of young children vary so much. There is a similar ethic within elementary education: the ideals of local control and individualized instruction express the view that variation within and among classrooms should respond to local conditions, parental preferences, and student differences. But despite these claims, elementary classrooms look remarkably the same across the country, with little variation in teaching methods or content (Sirotnik 1983). Certainly hours of operation—a crucial issue to working parents—vary only in trivial ways. As a result, early childhood advocates have complained that school control of preschools would standardize and rigidify current practices. From their side, the variety that early childhood advocates extol often looks to educators as chaos, with abysmal custodial programs and unregulated facilities coexisting with sophisticated, high-quality programs.

Finally, early childhood educators and elementary educators differ on the roles of parents. A shibboleth of early childhood practice is that parents must be involved in the care of their children because parents know their children best and because consistency and support between home and program are crucial. Many advocates like to cite evidence, from early Head Start evaluations and other sources, that parental involvement enhances the development of children. Early childhood advocates fear that the public schools, with weak commitment to parental involvement and a history of demeaning some parents (especially parents of poor and minority children), would abandon any pretext of including parents if they ran preschool programs. On the other hand, parent participation in child-care and preschool programs has been difficult to develop because working parents are pressed, some administrators resent the additional burdens parents impose,

and some facilities—especially proprietary day-care centers—will brook no intrusions on their operations.

In sum, the differences between elementary education and early childhood education reflect basic differences in conceptions of learning, in the roles of parents and teachers, in the training necessary for teachers, and in purpose. The question for policy is not whether these differences exist but whether they can be contained and narrowed. Then it would be possible to use the institutional structure of the educational system—certainly the best-developed structure available and the only institution now providing social programs to large numbers of children—to administer early childhood programs while still assuring that the content of these programs is appropriate to young children.

One way of answering this question is to examine early childhood programs operated by the public schools. The programs recently initiated by states provide some evidence. Most of these programs have at least two elements crucial to the success of early childhood programs: their teacher/pupil ratios are high, around one teacher for every 10 students or 1:10 (with the conspicuous exceptions of Texas, Maine, and New Jersey), and most of them require or prefer teachers with early childhood training. In addition, most state-run public school programs require some form of parental involvement, consistent with good practice in early childhood programs (Gnezda and Robinson 1986). Once in operation these programs may bend in the direction of elementary goals and methods, but at the outset they indicate that programs for young children controlled by the schools are not just downward extensions of kindergarten.

Other evidence comes from early childhood programs that have been operated by the public schools for longer periods of time. About 20 percent of Head Start programs are administered by school districts, and there are few differences between the programs run by school districts and those managed by other agencies.⁷ Over the past two decades, some local districts have incorporated a variety of early childhood programs—including preschool programs funded with Chapter 1 revenues, after-school programs, and parent education programs—indicating that schools can be flexible and imaginative in their approaches to young children. A study of exemplary school-based programs concluded that they displayed the same range of quality as those run by other agencies, suggesting that the institutional sponsorship of early childhood programs is less important than the qualifications of teachers and the quality of leadership (Mitchell 1988).

California provides the best evidence concerning the ability of schools to develop good early childhood programs. School districts have operated

full-day programs for children aged 2–5 ever since World War II. The Children's Centers are relatively well-funded, with higher teacher salaries and teacher/child ratios (and therefore higher costs) than most child-care centers. They provide full-day child care, but they also emphasize cognitive development and usually have well-developed curricula and assessment methods. Compared to community-based child-care programs, the Children's Centers are more cognitively oriented, are more consistently pulled in the direction of school-like practices (such as curriculum development and more formalized assessment mechanisms), and they have slightly less parental involvement. But the potential excesses of school-based programs are generally held in check because teachers must have a Children's Center permit requiring early childhood education and because an active early childhood community monitors and advises the Children's Centers.⁸

At the other extreme, the Texas prekindergarten program enacted in 1984 illustrates the worst fears of early childhood advocates. The legislation, drafted with no consultation from the early childhood community, requires prekindergarten programs in every district with at least 15 eligible children. Districts were generally unprepared for this aspect of the comprehensive reform legislation; many administrators were hostile to early childhood programs as mere baby-sitting, very few districts had any experience with early childhood programs, and the Texas Department of Education had no personnel to offer guidance. The maximum class size of 22 children is far in excess of the ratios recommended by early childhood education groups, and a preference for teachers with "teacher of young children" certificates was relaxed because of shortages. Some districts may be able to use state funds to develop strong programs on their own, but the state's legislation does not encourage exemplary programs (Grubb et al. 1985).

Evidently, then, it is possible for the schools to operate exemplary early childhood programs; it is also possible to legislate inappropriate programs of low quality. Despite the difficulty in legislating quality, some legislative direction about quality—teacher/student ratios, teacher qualifications, and purposes in particular—is absolutely crucial, both as a way of reconciling the conflicts between elementary educators and early childhood advocates and as a way of realizing the benefits of exemplary programs.

IV. Financing Early Childhood Programs: Costs, Quality, and Trade-offs

The issue of government finance is especially difficult for early childhood programs. The costs of early childhood programs are hard to calculate

and the trade-offs between cost and quality inexorable. Some programs, including several exemplary models, are enormously expensive; spending enormous amounts for new programs, on top of existing commitments to the public schools and the welfare system, is hardly appealing.

It is difficult to know how much good programs cost. There are substantial variations in costs among states, and among regions within states, principally because of differences in wages and space costs. One study found cost-of-living differences of 23 percent between the lowest-cost state (Arkansas) and the highest-cost state (Connecticut) (Fournier and Rasmussen 1986). Within-state differentials are surely as large if not larger because of rents in dense urban centers. For legislative purposes, therefore, national figures may be meaningless.

Another reason for cost variation is obvious: the hours that different programs operate vary wildly. Some early childhood education programs that are essentially parent education operate for only a couple of hours per week, for perhaps six to eight months, for a total of 50–60 hours per child. Many preschool programs operate half-day programs, usually a session of two-and-one-half hours per day for the school year of 180 days, or 450 hours per year. In school settings, a full-day program usually operates the same hours as elementary grades, or about six hours per day during 180 days (about 1,080 hours per year). Of course, none of these is sufficient to cover the hours of working parents who normally need care for about nine hours per day for about 50 weeks—a total of about 2,250 hours per year. Thus a full-time child-care program provides about five times the hours of contact with a child that the usual half-day preschool does, and the costs per child must therefore be higher if all other characteristics of the programs are the same. In fact, the higher costs of full-time child care may have been a factor leading states to emphasize half-day preschool programs.

Costs also vary because some necessary costs may not be charged to a program. For example, programs that are run by school districts may have their administrative and cleaning expenses paid by the elementary school budget and will not report any expenses for rent or utilities. Many child-care centers operate in churches and other quasi-public places where they may pay little or nothing for rent or utilities; in fact, one-quarter of all child-care facilities report paying *no* occupancy costs whatsoever. Many programs and centers rely on volunteer time, some as a matter of principle and others out of necessity. In estimates from the National Day Care Study, donated resources averaged about 14 percent of direct expenditures; other calculations indicate that donations equal about one-fifth of expenditures (Coelen et al. 1978). With so many resources available free or at reduced cost, reported

cost figures may seriously underestimate the true costs of operating early childhood programs.

In addition, some programs provide food and transportation while others do not. Most exemplary early childhood programs provide some health screening, psychological testing, some counseling, and other supportive services; a surprising fraction of child-care centers report providing services.⁹ Head Start, usually cited as a model, has provided a large number of services. From the viewpoint of custodial care such services are ancillary, though they may be crucial to the success of self-consciously developmental programs. Variation among programs in the supplemental services they provide will make costs vary in ways that are difficult to detect.

The other major choices affecting the cost of early childhood programs involve personnel costs, which average around 69 percent of total resource (Coelen et al. 1978). Here, unfortunately, there is an inexorable trade-off. For teacher costs only, it is obviously true that the cost per child is the product of the cost per teacher and the teacher/child ratio. A concern with costs implies keeping the cost per child low. However, a concern with quality implies that the cost per teacher—salaries and benefits—should be high in order to attract and retain competent teachers; and the number of teachers per child should also be kept high.

To see how teacher costs vary, table 1 presents figures from various child-care and preschool programs. Despite the uneven quality of the data, several patterns emerge. Child-care teachers are paid one-fourth to one-third more than aides. For full-time work, child-care teachers are paid roughly half of what elementary teachers earn. In California, those in publicly subsidized centers earn more (around one-third more) than those in unsubsidized programs, and those in school-district programs earn even more—so that public subsidy and school sponsorship do increase salaries. The average annual pay for all child-care workers (teachers and aides) is roughly \$14,000 per year in 1988 dollars—though the census data indicate that roughly two-thirds of child-care workers work less than full-time and less than a full year, so that the average earnings of all child-care workers are closer to \$6,900. With a poverty level of about \$12,000 for a family of four, this means that a substantial fraction of child-care teachers are below the poverty level. The consequences of low salary levels are generally considered to be dismal. Child-care programs across the country have reported high turnover and severe shortages of staff.¹⁰ Particularly in caring for young children, where continuity is important to maintaining the trust and affection of children, turnover itself can harm the quality of programs.

Just as salaries vary substantially, so do adult/child ratios, and these affect costs directly. Exemplary programs tend to have high ratios, as summarized in table 2: the Perry Preschool project with 1:6, Head Start with 1:7.5, the California Children's Centers with 1:8. The Federal Interagency Day Care Requirements, applicable to federally funded child care before 1980, required 1:7 for 4-year-olds; in practice, federally subsidized centers averaged 1:6 (for all age groups) in the late 1970s, with privately supported child care averaging 1:7.3. In most states, licensing standards for 4-year-olds vary between 1:10 and 1:20. The preschool programs recently legislated in many states generally require a ratio of 1:10, although New Jersey permits 1:25 (the same as the kindergarten ratio) and Texas allows 1:22. The Texas ratio was a new legislative target for kindergarten through third grade classrooms and illustrates that applying elementary school standards to early childhood programs can result in ratios that are much too low.

The National Day Care Study, initiated in part to examine federal standards, found that ratios between 1:5 and 1:10 made little difference to program quality and recommended ratios between 1:8 and 1:10 based on enrollments. Above the 1:10 level, however, the study found that quality would deteriorate and, in particular, that children show less persistence and less interest in activities. Consistent with these recommendations, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (1986a) recommended a ratio of no more than 1:10 for 4- and 5-year-olds, with gradual increases in this ratio as children move into the primary grades. Despite the diversity in practice, some consensus has emerged about acceptable ratios, with a standard of 1:10 the outer limit of most recommendations. Evidently, the class sizes of even kindergarten classrooms—which average about 23 children with one teacher (Educational Research Service 1986)—are outside the range of acceptable ratios for early childhood programs, particularly those considered exemplary.

Despite the serious trade-offs between costs and quality, there are two aspects of quality that do not require higher expenditures. The National Day Care Study determined that smaller class sizes enhance quality, regardless of the adult-child ratio, because smaller groups reduce distractions and chaos and increase the interaction between teachers and children; thus two classes of 20 are better than one class of 40 children, even with the same numbers of teachers. In addition, specific preparation in early childhood development matters more than formal years of schooling. This implies that teachers need not have bachelor's degrees, and a community college certificate in early childhood or a Child Development Associate credential would be preferable to an elementary teaching certificate.

TABLE 1

Salaries for Early Childhood Teachers and Aides

Source	Compensation as Reported in Original Source	Compensation in 1988 Dollars*
National Day Care Study (March 1977):		
Teachers	3.36/hour	14,024
Aides	2.59/hour	10,810
National Association for the Education of Young Children survey (March 1984):		
Teachers	5.67/hour	13,626
Assistant teachers and aides	4.55/hour	10,916
Current Population Survey (March 1984):		
Child-care workers	9,204/year	11,209
Prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers	15,648/year	19,058
1980 census (1979 incomes):		
All child-care workers	3,877/year	6,900
Year-round full-time child-care workers	6,617/year	11,776
Title XX programs (June 1981):		
Teachers	8,258/year	12,777
Aides	7,259/year	11,231
Perry Preschool (1964–65):		
Teachers	6,435/year	27,941
California—all publicly subsidized centers (Spring 1986):†		
Teachers	8.29/hour	18,137
Aides	6.24/hour	13,652
California—school-based Children's Centers (Spring 1986):†		
Teachers	10.83/hour	23,694
Aides	7.45/hour	16,398

California—northern Alameda County (July 1984):		
Teachers	6.79/hour	16,035
Aides	4.80/hour	11,335
California—Los Angeles area (June 1986):		
Teachers	5.34/hour	11,683
Aides	4.38/hour	9,583
Minnesota (October 1984):		
Teachers	5.20/hour	12,279
Aides	4.00/hour	9,446
Michigan—Washtenaw County (1984):		
Teachers	6.35/hour	15,468
Assistant teachers	4.57/hour	11,132
New York State, except New York City (1986):		
Head teachers	4.98/hour	11,331
Aides	4.14/hour	9,420
Public school teachers:		
Elementary teacher average salary (1985–86)	24,762	25,577

SOURCES.—See Appendix A.

* For convenience, all amounts are expressed as 12-month salaries.

† In addition, teachers receive benefits averaging 25 percent of salaries, while aides receive benefits averaging 22 percent. Other studies do not provide information on benefits.

TABLE 2

Adult/Child Ratios in Different Programs

Provider	Adult/Child Ratio
Preschools:	
Perry Preschool	1:6
Head Start	1:7.5
California preschools	1:8
Child care:	
National Day Care Study:	
Average, all centers	1:6.5
Average, parent fee centers	1:7.3
Average, federally aided centers	1:6.0
California Children's Centers	1:8
State licensing standards (for 4-year-olds)	1:7–1:20
Federal Interagency Day Care Requirements (ages 3–6)	1:7
National Day Care Study recommendations	1:8–1:10
National Association for the Education of Young Children recommendations	1:10 or less

Given the variation in what teachers are paid, in ratios, in access to reduced-cost facilities and volunteer resources, in geographic costs of living, and in the ancillary services provided, it seems foolhardy to suggest what a “typical” early childhood program might cost. Still, a few figures provide some guidance about general magnitudes, as presented in table 3. As always, the programs considered exemplary—the Perry Preschool program, with its high teacher salaries, high ratios, and many ancillary services, and the California Children’s Centers with their explicitly educational focus, higher salaries, and greater services than most child-care programs—cost much more than other “average” programs. As programs draw closer to the public schools they tend to become more expensive because salaries tend to be higher. Finally, there is a difference between the costs of child care, which average around \$3,500 per year, and those of half-day preschool programs, which seem closer to \$2,000 (excluding exemplary programs). But these comparisons are potentially misleading, both because preschool programs are open for fewer hours and because they often report marginal costs for teachers and materials without considering space costs and administration. Exemplary preschool programs like Head Start with more complete cost accounting cost almost as much

TABLE 3

Per Pupil Costs of Preschool and Child-Care Programs

Provider's Cost	Annual Cost, 1988 Dollars
Preschools:	
Perry Preschool: 4,818/year (1981 dollars)	6,672
Head Start: 2,808 (1984 dollars) (includes a 20 percent local match)	3,286
California preschools: 10.37/day (1985–86)	2,030
Child care:	
National Day Care Study (March 1977):	
Total resources:	
All centers: 158/month	3,739
Publicly funded centers: 185/month	4,378
Parent-fee centers: 109/month	2,579
Expenditures (excluding donations):	
All centers: 138/month	3,265
Publicly funded centers: 158/month	3,739
Parent-fee centers: 99/month	2,342
California Children's Centers: 18.56/day (1985–86)	5,048
California alternate payment programs: 15.90/day	4,324
Publicly subsidized child care in California (1984–85):	
All programs: 17.94/day	4,879
Lowest-cost program: 8.36/day	2,273
Highest-cost program: 24.59/day	6,688
Public schools, K–12	
\$3,677/year (1985–86)	4,049

SOURCES.—See Appendix A.

most child care; shorter hours of operation are offset by higher salaries to teachers and a tendency to pay teachers for a full day even when they are with children for only half a day.

As a benchmark, the average expenditure per child in public school was \$3,677 in 1985–86, the equivalent in 1988 dollars of \$4,049. This is considerably higher than the costs of most preschools (always excepting the Perry Preschool), higher than the average \$3,500 cost for all child care, slightly more than as the \$3,739 cost of federally subsidized child care, and less than the cost of the exemplary Children's Centers. Of course, rough similarities in overall costs between school costs and child-care costs mask substantial differences, with elementary salaries much higher than salaries in child-care and preschool programs but adult/child ratios much lower in elementary schools. If ratios in early

childhood programs were maintained in the appropriate 1:10 range and if early childhood programs were incorporated into the schools and salaries increased because of comparisons with elementary teachers, the costs of early childhood programs would increase above the current average cost of children in elementary and secondary education.

One final, obvious implication of the figures in table 3, and Appendixes B and C is worth pointing out. The greatest excitement about early childhood education has been generated by the Perry Preschool program, which is consistently the program with the highest ratios, the highest salaries, and the highest costs, an extraordinarily expensive program by any standard. An understanding of its costs and quality has lagged, while the news about its 7:1 benefit-cost ratio has circulated widely and has been used to justify many other, completely different early childhood programs. The benefits of exemplary programs cannot be expected for very different programs or for those of low quality: *it is senseless to cite evidence from exemplary, high-quality programs and then to enact a program with low spending, low ratios, low salaries, and inadequate teacher preparation.* Some programs recently adopted by the states—like the Texas prekindergarten with its 1:22 ratio and perhaps some of the programs allowed in New Jersey—stand little chance of providing much benefit to children; many are likely to be purely custodial and some may even be detrimental.

The possibility of inadvertently enacting low-quality programs illustrates the importance of explicit decisions about ratios, salaries, the training of early childhood teachers, and the provision of ancillary services. Even though data on costs are poor, it is still possible to construct representative budgets to determine rough orders of magnitude and to consider trade-offs among the components of early childhood programs. Appendix B presents some possible ways of calculating annual costs per child with different combinations of ratios, salaries, and ancillary services, based on data in the earlier tables. The effects on costs of increasing teacher-child ratios and increasing teacher salaries are obvious from these figures; increasing ratios above 1:10 is especially expensive. A preschool program that pays only marginal teacher costs, with a 1:10 ratio and a teacher paid more than child-care workers but less than elementary teachers, might cost about \$2,075 per year per child—just about what the California preschools report. For child care, it is possible to specify conditions leading to annual costs of about \$2,300. However, with more generous allowances for nonteaching costs (assuming fewer donations) and with more reasonable salaries, the costs per child increase to the range of \$3,000 to \$3,800—quite close to the averages reported in table 3. Increasing salaries to the level of elementary teachers further increases costs to

around \$4,500, and high-cost programs can easily cost another \$2,000. Of course, the issue of appropriate costs can never be finally decided. In public education, the notion of an “adequate” or “appropriate” level of spending has proved a chimera (Grubb and Lazerson 1982). In California, the only state with a well-developed early childhood policy, several political battles have surrounded the issue of appropriate spending levels, including the search for low-cost alternatives to school-based programs, efforts to narrow spending differences around the state, arguments over the salaries of child-care teachers versus elementary teachers, the appropriate cost-of-living adjustments, and inequities among different types of early childhood programs—all issues familiar in K–12 education. Analyzing costs carefully cannot eliminate these political wrangles or make the difficult trade-offs any easier, but it can clarify the choices available.

V. Policy Options in Early Childhood Programs

Early childhood policy stands at the brink of potentially crucial developments. The intense interest at both the federal and state levels is unmistakable, and most observers feel there will be legislative breakthroughs in the next few years. It is impossible to make policy *de novo*, because of existing programs like Title XX and Head Start, but most states and the federal government will have a rare opportunity to establish policies on the basis of sound principles.

One critical choice governments face is the question of which children should be served in what kinds of programs. Most of the programs recently enacted by states are half-day preschool programs for at-risk 4-year-olds, but each component of this decision—the age of children to serve, whether to include all children or only specific target groups, and whether to have part-day or full-day programs—involves a greater array of options. (Appendix C presents an outline of the options and choices states face.)¹¹ In particular, with the growing recognition that a majority of parents need full-day care for their children, the decision to offer a half-day or a full-day program is crucial—and part-day programs are increasingly anachronistic.

Decisions about funding are similarly important. Choices about which children are eligible and how many hours to operate will affect costs, of course, but funding levels may in turn affect quality, particularly through their influence on adult-child ratios and wage levels. Under some circumstances, funds for capital outlays—primarily to build facilities appropriate for young children—may be necessary, particularly in areas of rapid population growth. Finally, some decision must be

made about which, if any, ancillary services—including transportation, health screening, health care, psychological screening, counseling, and other social services—are to be publicly funded along with basic care and instruction. If advocates and legislators cite the positive effects of Head Start—which has always included a wide array of ancillary services—then it makes no sense to leave out such services despite their costs.

Inevitably, the level of funding will be a major issue. Given the current magnitude of need for child care and the demand for more compensatory preparation, the states and the federal government must be prepared to find that they have underfunded programs no matter how much they appropriate. The pressure to provide programs for more children—to serve more children at lower cost, rather than fewer children in better programs—will be ubiquitous. However, there is no reason for the inevitable battles over levels of funding to impede the development of coherent policy. A consensus has begun to develop in the early childhood community about lower bounds on quality, and it is important to adhere to these judgments: low-quality programs will satisfy neither parents, nor child developmentalists, nor those looking to replicate the benefit-cost ratios of the Perry Preschool—nor, in the end, the fiscal conservatives who press most insistently for “efficiency.”

Another fiscal decision involves the division of total costs. One way to stretch government funds is to require matching at each level of government, with state revenues matching any federal funds and local revenues matching state funds. However, if the required matching is too high, then few cities and school districts (or only wealthy districts) will participate and most community-based organizations will be unable to participate. Another option is to require parental contributions to programs, especially through a sliding fee schedule based upon income. The design of the fee schedule may be crucial to the participation of families with different incomes.

There are many ways of structuring early childhood programs. The simplest alternative would be to expand existing programs, either child-care programs funded through Title XX/SSBG funds or Head Start programs. Another alternative is to expand tax credits. In addition to the federal tax credit, 25 states have a credit or deduction for child care in their personal income tax system, and all but four of those are tied to the federal tax credit.¹² The amounts of money in most state credits are trivial and therefore provide little help to parents. An obvious step is therefore to expand a state’s credit, and, in addition, to make this credit refundable to extend the benefit to low-income parents, who pay no taxes and do not benefit from credits or deductions.

Yet another alternative would be to provide credits to corporations instead of individuals. At the federal level corporations may deduct their child-care contributions and take accelerated depreciation for any facilities they build. Some states have also experimented with corporate credits; for example, Connecticut allows a credit equal to 50 percent of amounts invested in day-care facilities (though with a limit of \$250,000 per year for the entire state). The strategy of tax credits to corporations is built on recent interest in encouraging corporations to provide child care as an employee benefit.

The strategy of increasing tax credits is always politically attractive, since credits are easier to enact than direct spending programs. However, there are several drawbacks to tax-based subsidies. Low-income parents tend not to benefit from tax subsidies; furthermore, benefits come in the year after child-care expenses are incurred. Tax-based subsidies (and vouchers as well) assume that parents are well-informed about child-care alternatives and that the “market” is responsive to prices and demand—and both assumptions may be false. Under tax credits it is impossible to monitor the quality of care; if public intent is to establish compensatory early childhood programs of high quality, tax subsidies would be inappropriate. The effectiveness of corporate credits is especially suspect: they would probably be used only by the largest, richest, and most socially conscious corporations, leaving behind most low-income parents with marginal employment whose need for subsidy is the most desperate. Finally, tax subsidies are poor instruments of policy because fiscal accountability is poor and the amounts involved are often unclear. Given these drawbacks, one alternative would be for states—and the federal government as well—to repeal their tax subsidies and fund early childhood programs directly.

However, the most serious problem with expanding existing programs—whether through tax mechanisms or direct spending programs—is that this approach would do nothing to reconcile the educational and the custodial side of early childhood programs or to bring the educational system and the early childhood community closer together. Governments have several options that could help realize the richest possibilities of early childhood programs, rather than simply following the models that happen to be in place. One approach might be termed the “California model.” California now supports a wide variety of separate programs; school-based child-care programs; community-based child care; half-day preschool programs; separate programs for migrant children, children of college students, and teenage mothers in high school; a voucher program that allows parents to choose among a range of child-care facilities; funding for family day-care providers, information and referral services, capital outlays, and

start-up costs (Grubb 1988a). Such a complex system allows eligible parents with different needs some choice of which program to use (though in practice choice is constrained by limited funding for each alternative). A different approach is to enact legislation that permits a wide variety of programs to be offered, depending on local conditions and need. To be sure, such an approach places greater responsibility in the hands of either some local decision-making body or a state agency that must formulate a coherent policy about how funds are to be spent and local priorities assessed.¹³ But the development of state and local competence to fashion early childhood policy would itself be a good thing. This approach promises flexibility and variety without the fragmentation of programs, with the inevitable invidious comparisons among them, and the serious coordination problems of the California model.

Once a basic framework for early childhood policy has been established, there are several funding mechanisms from which to choose. Many recent state initiatives have used project grants: local organizations apply for state funds with specific proposals, and the state administrative agency chooses among proposals based on their quality and other criteria like variety and geographical dispersion. While most states allow only school districts to apply, eligibility can be extended to community-based organizations as well. Project grants are appropriate for pilot projects, and they give the state maximum control over the content of programs. They are also good mechanisms for states to experiment with different approaches. However, project grants are less appropriate for general programs that provide early childhood programs statewide, and they may give an advantage to organizations—like wealthy school districts—which are sophisticated in writing grant proposals.

Some states, including New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Maine, have used their existing school aid formulas to direct revenues for preschool programs to districts, an approach that builds on familiar funding mechanisms. However, it restricts funding solely to school districts rather than allowing a wider variety of organizations to participate. In most states, state aid supports only a fraction of total costs in K–12 programs, and districts may be reluctant to fund novel or experimental programs out of local revenues. In addition, the well-known problem of inequalities among rich and poor districts implies that only wealthy districts aggressively committed to early childhood might receive state funds under this mechanism—and these are unlikely to be the districts where the children most in need of preschool programs live. An obvious alternative would be to devise a distinctive formula to fund early childhood programs, one that initially provides a higher

level of support and perhaps a greater inducement for poor districts to participate. Texas took this approach in funding its prekindergarten program, for example, providing a matching grant (different from the regular K–12 formula) where the state's share is higher for poorer districts.

To get around the problem of grants to school districts restricting the institutions that provide early childhood programs, yet another possibility would be to create a funding mechanism for which either school districts or community-based organizations could apply. Alternatively, a state formula could direct revenues to cities and towns as well as school districts, with the presumption that cities and towns would subcontract with community-based organizations for early childhood programs. Still another possibility would be to create special-purpose local governments—like the service delivery areas of the Job Training Partnership Act—as the local recipients of state and federal funds. In some areas, especially rural areas, the school system might be the only organization to participate in early childhood programs; but in most cities different kinds of organizations—existing child-care programs, church-based groups and social service agencies, neighborhood groups and minority advocacy organizations, lab schools based in colleges—could be expected to apply. Allowing a variety of organizations to receive funds would provide some competition with the schools and greater variety in programs. Furthermore, this approach provides another way of drawing together the different communities with interests in young children: schools can learn from organizations with different concerns and goals, and community-based organizations can absorb the educational techniques of the schools.

The funding alternatives outlined so far direct revenues to *programs*. Vouchers direct funds to *parents* to spend in programs of their choosing. Vouchers for early childhood programs would have the advantages that have been claimed for education vouchers—facilitating parental choice and supporting the large private sector that now exists—with fewer of the disadvantages; in particular, given the current segregation by race and class in programs for young children, vouchers would probably help integrate rather than further segregate these programs. Vouchers could be unrestricted, or they could be restricted so that parents could use them only for programs that meet specified quality standards. This approach would again help promote variety and flexibility, without (as tax credits do) sacrificing government control over the quality and content of early childhood programs. Vouchers can also be combined with direct funding of programs rather than having all funds go through either vouchers or direct funding. However, voucher

mechanisms require that parents have sufficient information; in California, with a voucher-like program, publicly funded information and referral agencies are generally thought to be necessary adjuncts.

Any of these approaches requires a state agency as well as local administrative agencies. The choice of which state agency will administer early childhood programs might be overtly political, but it is also important for the content of programs. Currently, most federally funded child care is administered through welfare agencies, while the recently enacted preschool programs have been placed in state departments of education (with the exception of Washington State) to emphasize their educational orientation. Neither alternative is completely satisfactory. Welfare agencies have an unavoidable stigma attached to them, and they possess a greater concern with moving families off welfare and with abused and neglected children than with “normal” children and educational goals. Education agencies are unfamiliar with early childhood programs and are often unsympathetic to child-care concerns. In fact, Washington State decided to administer its new preschool programs through the Department of Community Affairs, also responsible for Head Start, partly because of feelings that the education department would be unsympathetic to programs for young children.

To avoid these problems, states have sometimes considered administering early childhood programs in an independent state agency, like an office for children. Given the current divisions over early childhood programs, developing a new and probably weak agency is not necessarily a good resolution to the administrative dilemma. South Carolina has adopted a model of interagency coordination, in which an interagency coordinating council must approve all plans for the program. Unfortunately, many coordinating councils in social programs have poor records. The South Carolina effort is reputed to be successful because of the governor’s strong support, suggesting that the model of interagency coordination cannot work well without considerable political muscle—which early childhood programs usually lack. There is, then, no obvious resolution to the problem of choosing a state agency. Probably the best of the alternatives would be to grant administrative responsibility to the state’s education agency after developing the staff and connections to ensure that programs adhere to good early childhood practice and to bridge the different worlds of early childhood.

Once funding and administrative choices are made, governments still face the issue of how to ensure programs of good quality. Obviously, many of the choices about quality are made in legislative prescriptions about the hours of operation, adult/child ratios, teacher salaries (which may affect the caliber of teachers and turnover rates), costs per child,

and other aspects of program structure; a limit of spending of \$1,000 per child or an adult/child ratio of 1:22 is an implicit decision not to require programs of high quality. Still another mechanism for guiding the content of early childhood programs is teacher certification, specifying the education requirements for those working in child development agencies. In this area, there is one unanimous recommendation from the early childhood community and from research on the quality of care: teachers of young children must have specific training in early childhood development. Such a requirement—without waivers for teachers with elementary teaching certificates—is one way to prevent elementary teachers from being placed in such programs without retraining, as was proposed in the 1970s, and to ensure that programs are not simply downward extensions of kindergarten. A more controversial certification issue emerges from the National Day Care Study (Coelen 1978) finding that the quality of care is a function of specific training in early childhood and not just the number of years of education, implying that individuals with community college certificates and degrees or with Child Development Associate (CDA) credentials can be appropriate teachers.

Finally, program quality can be enhanced by the actions of the state administering agency through licensing requirements and technical assistance. Licensing is usually interpreted as assuring minimum health and safety standards rather than enhancing program quality. Technical assistance—consultation, workshops, information about model programs, and access to a network of early childhood practitioners concerned about quality—is a better way to encourage the development of good programs. Of course, technical assistance requires a competent state agency or some parallel legitimate institution; in California, for example, a good deal of technical assistance is provided by state-supported resource and referral agencies.

A final alternative is to adopt the model of accreditation that has developed for higher education and medical facilities. The National Association for the Education of Young Children has recently established voluntary accreditation involving guidelines for good practice, self-study, and a site visit by “validators” who present their findings to facilities they visit (Bredekamp 1984). In contrast to licensing, which is associated with requirements and coercion, the accrediting procedure emphasizes advice from peers and can cover the complex and subtle aspects of good practice that cannot be codified in simple licensing regulations.

If early childhood policy is to be integrative, then it must take care not to replicate the divisions that now plague early childhood. In particular, any early childhood program established by a state should

encompass both child care during the working day and early childhood education; neither half-day preschool programs nor low-quality, custodial child-care programs are adequate. It is equally important to support a variety of institutions providing such programs, rather than school districts alone. Formula-based mechanisms for allocating funds to school districts are therefore inappropriate; a better approach would be to develop grants to a variety of public and private agencies, to provide a range of child-care programs designed to meet the varying needs of parents—for family day care as well as center-based care, for after-school care, sick-child care, care for handicapped children and those whose parents have unusual schedules, as well as the more familiar kinds of child-care centers. It would also be wise to develop legislation permitting a broad variety of programs for different populations. The “California model” of many specific programs for different purposes and populations generates administrative difficulties at both the state and local levels and inevitably leads to differences in funding levels, regulations, and eligibility that divide rather than consolidate the early childhood community.

VI. Hopes for Children

The current “movement” for early childhood programs is still rather weak. Federal legislation has repeatedly stalled in the 1970s and 1980s; the state programs enacted so far are small and tentative, and some of them have been enacted without much public support. In many states the constituencies that would normally support early childhood programs—children’s advocates, women’s groups, educators concerned about preparation for school, and early childhood advocates—have not yet organized themselves behind such programs. Even though the *idea* of extending schooling downward is an old one and the *reality* of child care is with us, a basic uncertainty remains about whether government should support young children.

One response, of course, is that government is already involved: the subsidies to early childhood programs through Head Start, through the welfare system, through tax credits at both federal and state levels, and through a variety of smaller programs are larger than most citizens recognize—but assistance is also uncoordinated, poorly planned, and often ineffective. Another response is the counsel of prevention: the failure to spend money on adequate programs for young children will generate costs for government later—in remedial education programs, in the justice system, and in lost opportunities that can be prevented for less money. Ben Franklin’s adage about an ounce of prevention

remains popular, even if governments often seem less able to fund prevention than remediation.

A more straightforward response is simply that times have changed. The old model of the self-sufficient family, in which parents (and especially mothers) reared their children without outside help, has been coming apart ever since the family farm and family-based craft work began to disappear in the eighteenth century. The rise of maternal employment in the past few decades has merely continued a trend under way for a much longer time. Family practices and child-rearing patterns have changed; the issue is whether citizens and their governments will recognize and support these changes fully. As a parallel example, the funding of the public schools 150 years ago recognized that parents could no longer educate their children, as they did earlier on the family farm and in apprenticeship systems. The time may have come to extend this sharing of responsibilities for children to earlier ages.

If we took John Dewey's precept seriously—"What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all its children"—then it would be relatively clear what to do. Increasingly, parents need arrangements for children during working hours. They worry about the quality and the affordability of care, and—while parents disagree about the importance of cognitive and noncognitive goals in programs for young children—few of them would subordinate one to the other. Parents—all parents—have high aspirations for their little children; they want them to experience success and develop confidence outside the home, to grow up competent and healthy, to get a good education, and to avoid being kept from the mainstream of American life because of poor schooling.

It is not hard to see what is good for young children. The accumulated experiences of early childhood programs, the research on program effects and quality, the broad areas of consensus among parents and those professionals who have thought the hardest about young children all provide the materials for knitting together the divisions in the arena of early childhood programs. Then it will be possible to make good on our rhetoric about children as "our most precious natural resources" rather than leaving that rhetoric as evidence of broken promises.

Appendix A

Data Sources

In tables 1–3, dollar figures are updated to 1988 (third quarter) dollars by using (1) the implicit price deflator for state and local compensation for all salary figures, and (2) the implicit price deflator for state and local government purchases for total child-care costs.

Table 1

National Day Care Study (NDCS) figures come from Craig Coelen et al. (1978) and are based on a national probability sample of day-care centers. The NAEYC salary survey was published in *Young Children* 40 (November 1984): 14; the survey reports responses to a questionnaire and is probably severely biased, and it is surprising that the averages are close to the NDCS averages. Current Population Survey figures are available through the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and are reported in the NAEYC's "In Whose Hands? A Demographic Fact Sheet on Child Care Providers." Census figures come from the 1980 census, *Earnings by Occupation and Industry*, table 1, p. 139; these are figures for child-care workers, except private household workers. The Title XX salaries were reported in *Day Care and Child Development Reports*, February 1, 1982. The salaries for the Perry Preschool are taken from W. Steven Barnett, *The Perry Preschool and Its Long-Term Effects: A Benefit-Cost Analysis*, High/Scope Early Childhood Policy Series, no. 2, 1985. Figures for California publicly subsidized child care come from *The Cost of State-subsidized Child Care in California* (Berkeley, Calif.: MPR Associates, September 1986). The various salaries from California, Minnesota, and Michigan were taken from leaflets available from the Child Care Employment Project, Oakland, California; these surveys all use methods intended to survey a random sample of child-care workers. New York State figures come from Caroline Zinsser, *Day Care's Unfair Burden: How Low Wages Subsidize a Public Service* (New York: Center for Public Advocacy Research, 1986). Public school teacher salaries come from *The Condition of Education*, National Center for Education Statistics, 1985 ed. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1985).

Table 3

Costs for the Perry Preschool and the NDCS come from the sources cited for table 1. Head Start costs are reported in Helen Blank, "Early Childhood and the Public Schools: An Essential Partnership," *Young Children* 40, May 1985. Data for various California programs come from figures made available by Jack Hailey, California Senate Office of Research; and from the California Legislative Analyst, "A Report on the Child Care Reimbursement System," July 1985. Public school spending comes again from *The Condition of Education*, 1985.

Appendix B
Options and Alternative Costs

Outline of Costs

Ratios:
RA 1:20
RB 1:15

- RC 1:10
- RD 1:6
- Teacher salaries:
 - SA: \$ 7,300 (minimum wage)
 - SB: \$14,000 (current average child-care teacher)
 - SC: \$20,750 (average of child-care and elementary teachers)
 - SD: \$27,500 (average elementary school teacher)
- Other personnel costs:
 - AA: none; paid by school district
 - AB: \$400
 - AC: \$800 (nonpersonnel costs of publicly funded centers, National Day Care Study)
- Space costs:
 - SpA: none; paid by school district or church
 - SpB: \$225 per year, rest donated
 - SpC: \$450 per year
- Materials:
 - MA: none; borrowed from school district or donated
 - MB: \$140
 - MC: \$280
- Other:
 - OA: none
 - OB: \$118
 - OC: \$235

Annual Costs per Child under Alternative Assumptions

Ratios	Salaries (\$)		
	SB	SC	SD
1:20	1,583	1,921	2,258
1:15	1,816	2,266	2,716
1:10	2,283	2,958	3,633
1:6	3,216	4,341	5,466

Low-moderate costs (with substantial donations):	
(RC, SB, AB, SpB, MB, OB)	\$2,283
Low-moderate costs with teacher salaries increased to SC:	\$2,958
High-moderate costs (without substantial donations):	
(RC, SB, AC, SpC, MC, OC)	\$3,165
High-moderate costs with teacher salaries increased to SC:	\$3,840
High-moderate costs with readers salaries increased to SD:	
(RC, SD, AC, SpC, MC, OC)	\$4,515
High costs: (RD, SD, AC, SpC, MC, OC)	\$6,348

Appendix C Policy Choices

1. Who Shall Be Served

Age groups:

4-year-olds

3–4-year-olds

Toddlers and infants up to 2 years old

Target groups:

Low-income children

Educationally “at-risk” children

Limited English-speaking children

All children

2. Program Duration/Hours of Operation

Morning or half-day preschool (2–3 hours)

Full school day (5–6 hours)

Full working day (8–10 hours)

Morning preschool plus after-school program

3. Funding Level, Services Provided, and Funding Sources

Level:

Spending per child ranges between \$1,000 and \$6,000

Services provided:

Basic care/instruction only

Transportation

Health screening

Health care

Psychological screening

Counseling

Parent education

Social services/information to parents

Capital outlay funds

Resource and referral agencies

Revenue sources:

State revenues only

State revenues plus required local revenues

State revenues plus parent fees

4. Funding Mechanisms

Expand existing programs

Expand tax credits

Project funding via proposals:

- School districts only eligible
- School districts eligible, with subcontracts allowed
- Districts and community-based organizations eligible

Formula funding to school districts:

- Existing school aid formula
- New aid formula specifically for early childhood

Formula funding to districts, towns, cities, or counties

Voucher mechanisms:

- Vouchers to parents, unrestricted
- Vouchers to parents, restricted to programs of specified quality
- Vouchers administered by programs (vendor payments)

California model (various funding mechanisms for different programs)

Single funding mechanism allowing various local options

5. State Administrative Agency

State department of education (perhaps with a new office of early childhood education)

State department of education, with an interagency coordinating council

State welfare agency

State agency that licenses child care, or that currently administers Head Start

State office for children

New state agency

6. Local Administrative Agency (if any)

School districts

Counties

Towns and cities

Special-purpose service delivery areas

Resource and referral agencies

7. Quality Control

Adult/child ratios

Teacher and aide salary levels

Teacher certification and preparation

Licensing requirements

Technical assistance

Teacher certification and preparation

- Early childhood training required

- Elementary teaching credential acceptable or required

- Credentials (certificates, A.A. degrees, and CDA)

- Bachelor's degree required

Accreditation by private agencies

Notes

In preparing this article, presentations at the conferences of the National Conference of State Legislatures and the Education Commission of the States were helpful as were comments from Helen Blank, Linda Bond, William Chance, Susan Fuhrman, Terry Gnezda, Jack Hailey, Lynn Kagen, Al Kahn, Sheila Kamerman, Fern Marx, Lorraine McDonnell, Hannah Meadors, Ann Mitchell, Gwen Morgan, Janice Mulnar, Deborah Phillips, Bella Rosenberg, June Sale, Tom Schultz, Larry Schweinhart, Sheldon White, and Marcy Whitebook.

1. The only real exception is California, which has an impressive array of programs for a variety of early childhood programs funded from state and local revenues. New York has also funded early childhood programs since 1966. Prior to 1984, no other state spent more than \$3 million of its own funds for early childhood programs (Schweinhart 1985).

2. Information on the political forces behind the recent programs comes from Morado (1985), Grubb (1985), Marx and Seligson (1988), the conference of the Education Commission of the States, the National Conference of State Legislators, and personal communications from William Chance, Lynn Kagan, and Terry Gnezda.

3. On the Perry Preschool, see Berrueta-Clement et al. (1984); for other studies, see the Consortium for Longitudinal Studies (1983) and Lazar and Darlington (1982). For a recent review of Head Start effects, see McKey et al. (1985).

4. For example, in Texas many superintendents felt that the required pre-kindergarten programs would be underenrolled because working mothers would find it impossible to have their children attend a half-day program; see Grubb (1985), chap. 8.

5. This conclusion is based on unpublished data collected by the Children's Defense Fund comparing 1985 and 1986.

6. Good information on the differences between the schools and early childhood comes from two position statements of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, one on "Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Programs for 4- and 5-Year-Olds" (1986a) and one on "Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8" (1986b).

7. School-district-based programs more often require a bachelor's degree of their teachers and tend to pay them more because they often use a school-teacher salary scale, but no other differences seem to emerge. Instead, because of the great variety of Head Start programs, all among-group differences are small compared to within-group differences according to Esther Kresh, Administration for Children, Youth, and Families.

8. Information on the Children's Centers comes from Grubb and Lazerson (1977), updated by conversations with Jack Hailey and June Sale.

9. The National Day Care Study reported that 64 percent provided hearing, speech, and vision exams, 32 percent provided physical and dental exams, 50 percent psychological testing, 86 percent counseling for children, 55 percent counseling for family problems, 32 percent transportation, 45 percent information about food stamps, and 52 percent information about community services. These supplemental services were most common in nonprofit centers

rather than for-profit centers and more common in federally supported programs.

10. Many of the salary surveys in table 1 were undertaken to document salary levels and turnover, once providers in an area decided that working conditions had reached a crisis level. See also Whitebook (1986) and other materials from the Child Care Employee Project, Oakland, California.

11. For more detailed discussion of the options, see Grubb (1988*b*) and Schweinhart and Koshel (1986).

12. A number of the bills recently introduced before Congress expand or modify the federal credit. For a review and critique of these bills, see Marr (1988).

13. A good example of this approach is the ABC bill, which allows a wide variety of early childhood programs to be funded and then requires states to formulate their own policies. This federal-state division of labor could then be replicated at the state-local level. In addition, the Welfare Reform Act of 1988 requires the state to devise welfare-to-work programs and, as part of that effort, to establish mechanisms for providing child care to workfare participants.

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