

The politics of policy making for children

Julia E. Koppich

In December 1992, 25 people gathered in a conference room in Sacramento, California. Each individual attending the meeting represented a different children's advocacy group. Some were concerned particularly about preschoolers and child care arrangements; for others, professional interests revolved around children's health issues. Still others focused their efforts on child nutrition or elementary education programs.

These people met in Sacramento as members of a state-appointed task force to design the implementation strategy for a new law which all of their organizations had supported in its formative stages. The statute authorized additional funding to provide free milk for young children, from preschool age through grade three.

Once past the initial introductions and expressions of pleasure at being part of this collaborative activity, the group got down to the business at hand, or at least tried to settle into its task. What quickly became apparent, however, was that each task force member represented not only a different organization, but a different organizational agenda.

Organizational interests would shape task force discussions. In other words, individual organizations' conceptions of the parameters of the task, the boundaries within which it might be accomplished, and the particular role individual organizations might play framed the ensuing conversation about how the expanded free milk program would be implemented.

The individuals gathered around the Sacramento conference table were attending the meeting to accomplish the same public purpose, to insure that the milk reached the children. Yet this seemingly simple, straightforward undertaking quickly became enmeshed in interest-group politics and issues of turf protection. Who would be 'in charge'? What group might gain precedence in this activity? Who, ultimately, might claim credit if the program was successful?

The example cited above illustrates a fundamental challenge in the task of policy making for children. Bringing together representatives of various interest groups, even different groups with ostensibly the same interest, namely, developing and implementing a new program for children, causes the conventions of interest group politics to become standard operating procedure. Organizational interests tend to eclipse larger policy concerns. Yet the example of the California milk program does not even begin to approach the complexity of the far larger task of crafting comprehensive, coordinated public policy for children and their families. This bold undertaking, spanning numerous traditional policy boundaries, has come to travel under the umbrella of developing integrated, or coordinated, children's services.

The topic of integrated children's services has come to occupy an increasingly prominent place on the political and public policy agenda. The reason seems relatively straightforward: 'Report cards' for children and families, whether examined from national, state, or local levels, reveal a steady decline in the life situations for many of the USA's young people. Moreover, a growing body of research points to the conclusion that

conventional policy making for children, which typically results in fractionated governance – multiple programs in multiple agencies – and unconnected funding streams – targeted dollars for specific programs – may be exacerbating rather than alleviating the problem. Thus, added emphasis is being placed in policy-making circles on the need for a comprehensive children's policy which brings together the now disparate elements of fragmented efforts.

Consonant with increased policy talk about comprehensive children's policy and integrated services, the number of children's advocacy groups is burgeoning. Some of these groups promote broad-based, encompassing agendas designed to lead to broad-scale policy for children and families. Most groups, however, work within long-established categories, targeting their activities to particular areas of children's policy, such as health, child care, foster care, or juvenile justice. Resulting policies typically mirror the fragmented and categorical nature of interest-group activities.

In addition to the growing band of children's advocacy groups, conventional education interest groups, particularly teacher unions and administrator and school board associations, continue to occupy their usual, and often influential, places on the policy-making scene. Yet these organizations, too, increasingly have become part of the children's policy-making mix with the spiraling recognition that children's ability to succeed in school is highly dependent on a complex web of family and environmental circumstances that shape children's lives.

This chapter is a preliminary exploration of the politics of policy making for children. It represents an effort, in other words, to begin to 'unpack' the political dynamics surrounding the development of children's policy. As such, it is an examination of the recent past, the present, and prospects for the future.

While this chapter aims to explore dimensions of the politics of children's policy, it also promotes a particular point of view. The chapter advances the argument that the development of integrated children's policy is necessary, but that the creation of such policy requires a conscious shift away from traditional, and conventionally incremental, interest-group approaches to policy development.

The chapter begins by offering a working rationale for the development of a comprehensive children's policy, then proceeds to a review of the recent history of efforts to initiate programs for children and families. It then places the discussion in context by briefly exploring the politics of children's policy in one state, California. The chapter concludes by asserting that, in order to open the policy doors for broad-based integrated services for children, the current political paradigm must be fundamentally altered.

The context for policy change

Multiple factors shape children's lives. These include level of family income, status of physical and mental health, existence of family support systems, availability of quality education, opportunities for healthful recreation, and racial and ethnic background.

While life for most children in the USA is healthy, happy, and productive, many children in this land of plenty face desperate existences. Today 20% of this nation's children live in poverty (Kirst and McLaughlin 1990), and the income gap between the richest families and the poorest continues to widen.

The largest segment of the population living in poverty in the USA is children; 40% of the nation's poor are young people under the age of 18 (Hodgkinson 1989). While some children fare well in low-income households, studies have shown that children from

poverty backgrounds have a greater likelihood of succumbing to illness in infancy and early childhood, of becoming pregnant during the teenage years, and of dropping out of school (Kirst and McLaughlin 1990).

Poverty in America continues in large measure to be a function of race, gender, and family status. While one-fifth of children overall live in poverty, nearly half of the nation's black children (43.1%) are poor and more than a third (39%) of Hispanic children live in poverty.

Family structure greatly impacts on children's lives. The so-called traditional American family, with a stay-at-home Mom serving as the children's prime caregiver and a go-to-work breadwinner Dad is fast disappearing. In fact, only one-third of American families fit this once typical family profile. Increasing numbers of children live with just one parent, and large numbers live with a mother who has never married. While many single mothers are able to provide adequately for their children, the majority of children who reside in female-headed households live in poverty.

Nearly half of US children (46%) live in homes in which both parents or the only parent is working (Kirst and McLaughlin 1990). Yet even being employed is no shield against poverty. Four million Americans, most of whom work in the low-end service economy at minimum-wage jobs, remain eligible for poverty benefits (Hodgkinson 1989).

A combination of changing economic circumstances, which require large numbers of women to work, plus increased numbers of women who choose to work outside the home, has, perhaps permanently, altered the family, the fundamental structure for caring for children. No new social structure has yet taken its place.

Medical issues, too, are a concern to children and families. Medical care in the USA for those who can afford it is the best in the world. But 37 million Americans, including 12 million children, have no health insurance. One in four pregnant women in the USA receives no prenatal care (Hodgkinson 1989).

In addition, increasing numbers of preschoolers are not immunized against once deadly diseases, threatening a return of the very illnesses once thought to be eliminated in the USA. The percentage of fully immunized children is less than half the proportion in the UK, Canada, Spain, France, Sweden, and Israel (Hodgkinson 1989).

Other needs of children and families could easily be detailed. Increasing numbers of youth find themselves on the wrong side of the law. Reports of child abuse are on the rise. Many children are homeless.

What has become abundantly clear to professionals who deal with young people on a daily basis is that children have multiple needs. Many are not only poor *or* in fragile health *or* lacking sufficient family support. Children's problems often are severe and almost always are interdependent.

The locus of responsibility for children traditionally has been the family. But government, too, has assumed a responsibility for children. This governmental responsibility does not supersede the authority of the family, but serves as an important, sometimes crucial link in a complex family support system.

The next section of this paper describes the nature of governmental assistance to children and families during the 1960s, arguably the most intense period of efforts at broad-scale social reform in the USA since the Great Depression.

Into the 1960s: the categorization of care

Beginning in the mid-1960s, the federal government enacted a series of new programs designed to address the problems of the nation's poor, including children living in poverty. Many of these new policy thrusts were part of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society Program and the accompanying War on Poverty. New programs in education, health, welfare, manpower training, and urban development were authorized and established. Poverty was used as the benchmark for federal financial assistance.

This broad expanse of policy initiatives was the product of a new national attitude, fostered by President John Kennedy and enlarged by President Johnson. Congress in 1964 and 1965 expressed the national purpose in bold and concrete terms – to outlaw racial discrimination, improve educational opportunity at every level, eradicate poverty, assure the provision of health care, and create jobs for the unemployed (Sundquist 1968).

This was a new national agenda. In effect, the federal government crafted social goals for the nation through the creation of new federally funded programs. These new policy initiatives also laid the foundation for a new conceptual premise, namely that the purpose of government was not simply to insure against economic loss, as had been the thrust of New Deal programs, but to promote social as well as economic gain (Anton 1989).

This was a time of great national optimism, the 'anything was possible' decade in which citizens believed in the capacity of government to enact initiatives that were capable of engineering social justice (Kirst and Gifford 1990). (Of course, feelings of euphoria were destined to be relatively short-lived as the escalation of the war in VietNam in the late 1960s began to eclipse attention to domestic issues.) During this period the federal government launched a broad series of policy salvos which created or expanded a vast array of social programs. Among these were the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the most massive program of federal financial assistance to schools in the history of the nation. Title I of ESEA targeted special assistance directly to students living in poverty.

Programs for disadvantaged children and youth also were created under the Department of Labor and the Office of Economic Opportunity. These included Head Start, the Job Corps, Comprehensive Health Services, Medicaid, and the Women Infants and Children (WIC) program. Existing efforts in the areas of prenatal care, food stamps, and public housing projects were expanded as well (Kirst and Gifford 1990). These new federal initiatives were woven into the fabric of a program of large-scale social reform; in effect, the governmentally created and sanctioned expansion of what constituted human services and the redefinition of who was eligible to receive them.

Great Society programs of the 1960s were also employed as a means to achieve a new cooperative arrangement among levels of government. National grants to state agencies which disbursed funds to local communities created an intergovernmental link.

Dollars were distributed to states and local jurisdictions in the form of categorical grants. These were targeted funds for special programs and particular populations. Federal strings followed federal dollars. Specific conditions were to be met if the money was to continue to flow.

Social programs of the 1960s reinforced the separateness of existing policy categories. Programs were targeted to specific, defined problems. Dollars were linked to strategies designed to meet particularistic, identified needs. Constituencies began to develop around individual programs and policies. Interest groups formed to lobby for these constituencies.

As the 1960s gave way to the 1970s, a changing political landscape would intensify the fragmented nature of policy and the categorical approach to funding. Interest-group politics would intensify as well.

The 1970s and 1980s: from consolidation to retrenchment

The decade of the 1970s represented a period of consolidation and slow growth (Kirst and Gifford 1990). The Nixon administration did not choose to focus on policies for the disadvantaged. Instead, this was a period of what many proponents of broad-scale social policy change believed to be 'backsliding'. Advocates of change feared losing the gains they had made in the 1960s.

Federal efforts to aid the disadvantaged were not entirely lacking, however. Congress in 1973 enacted the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142). This new statute required that all physically and mentally handicapped children receive a 'free, appropriate public education'. Handicapped children in many communities had, to this time, been an invisible segment of the population, hidden away at home or in public or private institutions, often being denied even rudimentary education. P.L. 94-142 was hailed as an additional, and until now missing, component of achieving civil rights for a forgotten segment of the American populace.

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act also created another entitlement and another categorical program, this time for expanded special education services. The number of interest groups, often focused on particular aspects of education of the handicapped or on specific types of handicaps, began to mushroom.

During this period as well, some advocacy groups, frustrated by their inability to secure legislative relief, sought redress through the courts. The cause of bilingual education was advanced in this manner. The 1973 US Supreme Court decision in *Lau v. Nichols* made school districts responsible for assisting limited- and non-English-speaking students. Congress added Title VII to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to allocate funds through the states to local districts for bilingual instruction. Federal dollars, however, were more symbolic than vast.

Many states responded to the *Lau* decision by enacting new categorical aid programs aimed at bilingual and English-as-a-second-language instruction. As quickly as categorically funded bilingual education programs developed, advocates seeking to insure targeted dollars were indeed devoted to limited- and non-English-speaking students formed program-specific interest groups.

During the Nixon era, the federal government undertook some efforts to consolidate proliferating categorical grants. However, this move was resisted by the interest groups which had developed around particular categorical programs and feared that the elimination of targeted programs would become a governmental excuse for diminution of the service.

Programs such as Title I (now Chapter I) of ESEA, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, and bilingual education programs that resulted from the *Lau* decision had developed well-defined constituencies, and these constituencies had bred interest groups whose principal focus was preserving and protecting 'their' targeted programs. Each group confined public and political activities to the narrow programmatic sphere it had carved out for itself. Advocates' professional responsibility, as they saw it, was to protect the program, or set of programs, now embedded in policy. Interest groups' line of sight focused specifically on the categorical programs they now identified as 'their' policy domain and funding province. As a result, policies, programs, and dollars remained categorical.

The Carter administration in the late 1970s revised the Nixon strategy and attempted once again to strengthen the categorical programs. But these efforts generally failed in Congress not as a result of diminished legislative interest in the categorical approach, but

because few strong, politically viable links existed between legislators and the White House. In addition, there was a growing public perception that poverty, the foundation of many categorical entitlements, was fading as an urgent social issue (Kirst and Gifford 1990).

The 1980s, when Ronald Reagan assumed office, marked a period of retrenchment (Kirst and Gifford 1990). This was the era of limited government, particularly where domestic issues were concerned.

The Reagan administration attempted to consolidate a number of categorical programs, including many education categoricals, into block grants. Most of these efforts failed to win Congressional approval. Interest groups argued, largely successfully, to legislative policy makers that the Reagan administration's block grant proposals were simply a thinly veiled political ruse to enact wholesale domestic program cuts. White House-proffered budget cuts in numerous social policy areas added fuel to the interest groups' fire. Completing the 1980s, the policies of George Bush were more moderate, but reflected basically a Reaganesque policy stance and tone.

One result of the federal social policy thrust of the 1970s and 1980s was that interest groups circled the policy wagons. Few inter-interest coalitions were formed. Rather, the general stance of categorically based lobbies was to protect and defend established categorical programs. Political emphasis focused on securing incremental advances, or preventing backward slippage, for specific, defined programs.

How did this political and policy scenario, from the 1960s to the 1980s, play itself out in the states? For one perspective, we turn now to a brief review of social policy development in California.

Categorical precedence in the golden state

California's response to the Great Society programs of the 1960s was to develop and implement targeted services for children and their families. Categorical programs in the areas of health, child welfare, protective services, compensatory education, and alcohol and drug abuse prevention were widely promoted throughout the state (Smrekar 1988). Thus the categorical approach to funding at the federal level resulted in incremental, and fragmented, policy making at the state level throughout the 1960s.

California experienced boom economic times for much of the decade of the 1970s. The state's economy continued to expand, new Californians were added to the state's rolls, and even larger numbers of categorical programs in education, health, welfare, and juvenile justice became part of the budget and policy process. Then tax reform fever hit the state.

On June 6, 1978, California voters enacted the Jarvis-Gann Tax Limitation Initiative, popularly known as Proposition 13. A state constitutional amendment (Article XIII A of the California Constitution), Proposition 13 was the first major salvo in the California taxpayers' revolt. The measure limited property taxes to 1% of the 1975-76 assessed valuation and limited assessment increases to 2% a year. (Property can be reappraised upon the sale or transfer of ownership.) It also severely curtailed the taxing power of local government by prohibiting municipalities from enacting new property taxes. (The single modest exception is that jurisdictions can levy taxes on parcels - square feet of living space - if two-thirds of local voters approve.) State taxes could be increased only by a two-thirds vote of the state legislature. Proposition 13 effectively transformed California into a system in which the state would henceforth provide the bulk of financing for local governments (Goren and Kirst 1989).

Californians' appetite for tax reform was not satiated by Proposition 13. Just one year later, in 1979, the Gann spending limitation (Proposition 4) was enacted. The Gann limit restricts growth in state spending to the rate of increase of the state's population and the lower of either the United States Consumer Price Index (CPI) or California personal income. In other words, state spending growth is pegged to changes in population and inflation. The measure further requires that unexpended dollars be returned as rebates to taxpayers.

Proposition 13 had restricted local municipalities' ability to pay for social services. The Gann limit crippled the state's ability to fund new, and even many existing, programs. State-level interest-group politics were destined to intensify.

The 1980s marked a period of consolidation and realignment in California. With federal regulatory and fiscal influence reduced, and the state now the keeper of the vast majority of public resources, the state role assumed a new prominence in terms of both funding and delivery of children's services. California lawmakers created additional state-specific programs, performance standards, and guidelines which were then translated into local agency actions and decisions (Smrekar 1988). Funding remained categorical, programs targeted, and policy thrusts splintered. Shrinking budgets did not encourage inter-interest coalitions to form around comprehensive children's services. Quite to the contrary, advocacy groups did their best individually to define themselves for policy makers and thus grab 'their' share of a shrinking fiscal pie.

To be sure, many of the categorical programs, designed to assist children in need, produced beneficial effects. Some additional number of children received more, and likely, better care. However, categorical funding translated into a program-by-program, service-by-service, problem-by-problem policy approach which took little notice of a coherent vision of children and their lives. One primary result was that little attention was paid to these programs' collective impact on children (Smrekar 1988).

The consequences were threefold: (1) underservice – too many children slipped through the social service cracks, (2) limited focus on prevention – the state adopted a triage approach to children's services, treating problems as episodic rather than continuous, and (3) service fragmentation – little or no interagency collaboration (Kirst 1989).

By the late 1980s, California boasted 169 different children- and youth-serving programs overseen by 37 separate entities located in seven different state-level departments. Separate, unconnected funding streams flowed to and from this complicated maze of children's services. State leadership in children's services scattered over politicians' special interest projects. And legions of lobbyists, representing a plethora of variously defined child-oriented groups, were to be found working the halls of the state capitol in Sacramento.

In November 1988 California voters struck again, narrowly enacting Proposition 98, a state constitutional amendment which guarantees to public education in kindergarten through community college (K-14) approximately 40% of the state's general fund revenues. In other words, before programs in policy areas other than public education would receive their financial allocations, 40% would 'come off the top' for schools.

Proposition 98 was passed in the wake of burgeoning school budget needs. Enrollments were climbing by more than 200,000 students per year. (By 1990, one out of every eight children in the USA would be enrolled in a California public school.) Many of the newcomers were immigrants with little or no facility with the English language. With the state unable to shake the recession, school revenues continued to decline. Frustrated Californians, seeing the dollars for education diminish, enacted yet another constitutional measure.

Advocates of Proposition 98 assured their supporters that the amendment would stabilize school funding and provide a steady and increasing stream of revenue for education. But Proposition 98 did not solve California's school budget crisis. In fact, even after Proposition 98 took effect, per pupil expenditures in the state, pegged to California's revenue intake, continued to decline.

Proposition 98 also did not, as promoters had promised, insulate schools from the pull and tug of state politics. Instead, the constitutional measure became the eye in a storm of controversy surrounding the financing of public services.

Those who had labored long and hard for the passage of Proposition 98 – principally the education interest groups – quickly became strict constructionists on the issue. Little policy-wiggle room was to be found. Two years after the enactment of Proposition 98, the first lawsuit was filed.

The state's largest teachers' union, the California Teachers Association (CTA), an affiliate of the National Education Association, sued over the state's efforts to partially fund preschool education out of Proposition 98 revenues. These dollars, the CTA agreed, were targeted to the kindergarten through community college education system. Preschool was not to be included. The CTA won the suit. The state would need to find a means other than earmarked Proposition 98 education dollars to fund preschool services.

In California, then, interest-group politics culminated in 'the mother of all categoricals', Proposition 98. While education interest groups' desire to secure adequate, or at least what they hoped would be relatively predictable, funding for one policy domain is on one level understandable, the situation sets in bold relief the dilemma inherent in developing coordinated, comprehensive policy for children and families. As long as politics as usual prevails, as long as the political system continues to reward fragmented policy and segmented funding, then status quo will be the order of the day.

Overcoming the politics of categorization and incrementalism

Policy formation is a political process. New legislation is proposed, new laws enacted, and new policies implemented on a daily basis. Some policies make news; most do not.

The policy system cannot handle every issue which seeks to call attention to itself. Thus, only a finite number of issues achieve political agenda status (Easton 1965, Cobb and Elder 1983); in other words, are considered for policy action. But of those issues that reach the political agenda, most are handled via routine political channels.

Generally, special interests capture policy via 'iron triangles' – interest-group representatives, minor government officials, and small groups of legislators that have a particular interest in the issue. Interest groups, in effect, control the policy process, and government acts to 'freeze' the status quo and retard innovation (Lowi 1969). Policy evolves by accretion, in a system of 'partisan mutual adjustment' (Lindblom 1977) as government agencies and interest groups adjust their behaviors to each others' intentions and relative power.

Self-interest plays a central role in policy formation (McFarland 1988). Groups of elites (organized special interests), in essence, co-opt special public policy arena which serve their particular organizational self-interests. Policy, then, is the product of the action of competing interest groups which vie for control and policy precedence in a continual political game of bargaining and compromise (Dahl 1956).

Resulting policy changes are incremental. Coalitions may form to enact policy, but even coalition policy generally is *incremental* and neither jars the status quo nor threatens the authority of established interest groups.

The conventional political picture, then, is represented by a system in which a set of organized self-interests determine the course of political action and the shape of policy outcomes. Pluralism, policy making by bargaining among competing interest groups seeking to advance their own aims, dominates. Policy is the summed product of these competing interests. Organizational preservation, rather than client interest, becomes paramount. Incremental change, or no change at all, is the result.

This description of the political scene is perhaps somewhat overstated, or at least unduly cynical. To be sure, many interest groups represent clients who need a strong voice to speak for them in legislative halls and executive branch offices. Advocates are often passionate and sincere about those whom they represent. Moreover, the policies and programs which are the result of advocacy efforts might have been slower to emerge, or might never have emerged at all, if not for the political pressure exerted on behalf of specific groups or individuals. Whether the nation's public school systems would have opened their doors to handicapped children or initiated programs to meet the needs of limited- and non-English-speaking pupils in the absence of legislative and judicial action cannot be known. What is indisputable is that programs for these populations of students resulted largely from the actions of advocates.

However, fragmented policy, which is the natural result of interest-group bargaining within the political system, has a self-reinforcing quality. Strong particularistic constituencies and tightly bounded interest groups become protective of 'their' policy turf. They come to view often narrowly conceived policy domains as objects of near-personal property. They lobby aggressively to maintain the policy boundaries within which they are comfortable operating. And they come to see any action that threatens established political territory or sovereignty as an attack on their purpose and mission.

The political system rewards this behavior. The group that shouts the loudest, distinguishes itself most clearly from the interest group pack (or, alternatively, strikes the quickest bargain with its lobbying compatriots), and defines its demands in the most politically palatable increments is likely to reap the greatest benefits. There simply are few incentives for groups to coalesce around broad-based issues because the political system typically rewards fragmentation and categorization.

Recall again the California scenario. Much attention was paid to developing and enacting policy for children and families beginning in the 1960s. Myriad highly specialized interest groups divided up the fiscal and policy pie into categorical component parts. A wealth of policy and a wide array of programs resulted. While those programs represent substantial interest-group trophies, the segmented approach to social policy has, arguably at least, only marginally benefited those individuals whom it was designed to assist.

Changing the policy focus by changing the political paradigm

As long as fragmentation is rewarded, the status quo will prevail. Creating coordinated, comprehensive, integrated policy for children requires breaking the mold of political convention, changing the current political paradigm, and dramatically altering the rules of the political game. More specifically, such a change entails revamping the system of political rewards and incentives so that it accrues to interest groups' material advantage to cooperate rather than compete, to merge their efforts rather than to maintain separateness. A system which offers fiscal incentives for decategorizing dollars and focuses on achieving results, rather than simply on providing services, would significantly advance the cause of integrated services.

California has begun down the path toward such a system. The state still has a considerable distance to travel, and the road to coordination is likely to be laced with political landmines. Nonetheless, steps the state has taken, and is currently contemplating, are both significant and instructive.

California, in January 1992, enacted the Healthy Support Services for Children Act (Senate Bill 620). Commonly called Healthy Start, the program provided an initial \$20 million state appropriation for competitive planning and operational grants to establish locally based systems of integrated children's services. The Act targets those children generally assumed to be in greatest need – those whose families receive Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) support, those who are limited-English-proficient, and children who are eligible for schools' free or reduced meals.

S.B. 620 money can be used to assist schools and social service agencies collaboratively to provide a wide range of services, depending on local need. Such services can include general health care, immunizations, vision and hearing testing, family support and counseling, drug and alcohol abuse treatment and prevention, and prenatal care. Emphasis here is on interagency collaboration. Agencies combine programmatic efforts toward the goal of creating a seamless web of services for children and families.

All, however, has not been political smooth sailing for Healthy Start. As it made its way through the legislative process, the bill encountered little or no organized opposition. Children's advocacy groups applauded the proposed statute and lobbied actively for its passage. Education interest groups, however, were considerably more restrained.

The majority of the state's education interest groups greeted the proposed measure with an air of resigned acquiescence. On the one hand, they feared additional responsibilities would be heaped on schools' already overflowing plate of obligations. On the other hand, education interests were concerned that as the state's fiscal situation became increasingly grim, the relative 'security' of funding they believed schools had achieved with Proposition 98 could be threatened by a Healthy Start-type approach to program and policy.

The state's largest education interest group – the California Teachers Association – in fact initially voiced its opposition to Healthy Start. This position, if it had remained unchanged, had the potential dramatically to alter the fate of the bill. CTA each year contributes millions of dollars to legislative campaign coffers, and thus wields enormous political influence in the state. In the end, CTA was moved from an oppose to a neutral stance. But neither CTA nor the other education interest groups actively campaigned for the bill's passage.

Healthy Start is now on the books in California. Funded collaboratives involving school districts and social service agencies are working their way through the often wrenching process of coordinating programs and developing interprofessional teams. Of particular significance is the fact that the statute has been refunded twice. Despite California's dire fiscal straits (the state experienced an \$11 billion budget shortfall in 1992–93, and must close an \$8 billion budget gap in 1993–94), the legislature appropriated \$14 million for Healthy Start's second year of operation and has tentatively approved \$19 million for the third year.

It is too early to judge the relative success of the Healthy Start program. A formal state-supported evaluation is currently underway. To be sure, Healthy Start legislation, by itself, is unlikely to shatter state policy boundaries. Nothing in the statute speaks to pooling existing categories of funds at their source, state government. Moreover, the law delineates no set of specified, desired, comprehensive outcomes for children. Yet it is important to view Healthy Start in context, as a first step in a more comprehensive state

policy strategy. That strategy, which has the endorsement of a range of policy and special-interest organizations, focuses clearly on flexible funding and client outcomes.

The California School Boards Association, California State Association of Counties, and the League of California Cities joined forces in 1992 to address the need for coordinated services for children and families. The organizations jointly sponsored a series of 'summits' around the state to discuss relevant policy coordination issues and to 'develop a whole new vision for children's services' (California School Boards Association *et al.* 1992). The resulting plan strongly recommends increased flexibility in the use of categorical funds, allowing the 'blending' of funding streams, and moving toward an outcome-based system of program assessment.

In a similar vein, a report by the Washington, DC-based Center for the Study of Social Policy asserts that California's service system must 'become outcome-oriented, not process-driven, . . . and must lessen the categorical restrictions in funding and program operation' (Center for the Study of Social Policy 1993). Interestingly, that report was commissioned and paid for by a set of California philanthropic foundations which have made integrated children's services among their funding priorities.

A February 1993 status report on integrated services by the state's Assembly Office of Research targets the categorical nature of service delivery programs and the segmented approach to funding. Acknowledging that developing a comprehensive system of integrated services requires 'the technical expertise of a CPA, the dexterity of a juggler, the creativity of an artist, the patience of Job, and the faith of the truly committed' (DeLapp 1993), the report comes down firmly on the side of pooled funding and decategorized programs toward a goal of a more holistic, integrated system. Finally, the state's non-partisan office of the Legislative Analyst also has taken up the twin policy cudgels of decategorized funding and client-based program results, asserting that the restrictive nature of program funding must be altered and greater attention devoted to outcomes of government social service programs (Hill 1993).

These reports and recommendations may find policy voice in a measure now before the legislature. A.B. 1741 (Bates) would establish the Youth Pilot Program. The program, designed to fund comprehensive, integrated services for high-risk children and families, would allow designated counties (i.e., those that are selected to participate in the pilot program) to transfer into a combined child and family services fund using dollars currently appropriated for various categorical services, such as health care, foster care, and drug and alcohol abuse prevention. The measure would also allow local school districts to transfer funds for purposes such as recreation or juvenile justice to the county child and family services fund.

The county would develop a plan for use of the newly blended funds and would be required to evaluate the effectiveness of coordinated programs on the basis of a set of annual performance outcomes for the children and families who receive the services. At the time of writing, the bill has passed the Assembly and moved on to the policy committee in the Senate.

California's emergent focus on pooled funding streams and program outcomes offers the potential for changing the political paradigm, for concentrating political energy on comprehensive rather than fragmented policy, by changing the system of political rewards and incentives *vis-à-vis* children's policy. California, to be sure, has embarked on a monumental political undertaking. Yet this is also the type of political challenge that must be considered and embraced more widely. Changing the political paradigm for the development of social policy calls for no less dramatic a shift than altering the way politics is done in this nation. But unless we are able to succeed in this, we surely will fail to meet

the more critical human challenge of developing and implementing social policies that actually work for children and families.

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