

Ready to Learn: Family Philanthropy Supports Early Learning and Literacy

By Elaine Gast Fawcett

For families that engage in philanthropy, a focus for giving is often around helping other families. Naturally, families that have done well in their own lives care deeply about those that don't have access to the same resources or opportunities. In this spirit, more families than ever are drawn to helping their community's youngest children get an early start on succeeding in school. The issues of early childhood care, school readiness, and reading have attracted a lot of attention among family funders, and a number have come forward with innovative approaches for giving.

Why are early childhood care, learning and literacy so important? How are family foundations and funds supporting programs that help kids show up to school ready to learn and ready to read?

This issue of *Passages* highlights some of the latest research on early childhood development and education, and profiles several family foundations and communities working for change in this area. It discusses quality child care and learning, and offers tips for getting involved in funding and resources to learn more.

Today we know more than ever about how young children develop and how important it is to support their learning from an early age. Brain research says that the first five years of life are critical and set the stage for the way a child learns, uses language, solves problems, processes emotions, and, in general, operates in the world.

We cannot afford to postpone investing in children until they become adults, nor can we wait until they reach school—a time when it may be too late to intervene.

—James Heckman, Ph.D., Nobel Laureate in Economics

What studies are showing is that too many kids—mostly from vulnerable, low-income families—aren't getting their cognitive needs, much less their emotional ones, met at this early age. As a result, they are showing up to kindergarten behind the curve.

Fast-forward a few years: It's harder than ever to catch up.



At the beginning of fourth grade, every child takes a reading test administered by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a standardized test showing what America's students know. Reading scores across the nation show that an alarming number of kids aren't reading up to par.

According to research, about three-quarters of third graders who fail to read well will struggle throughout their school careers. They will be far less likely to:

- Graduate from high school
- Develop skills needed to succeed in today's knowledge-based workforce
- Find jobs with decent wages
- Become informed, effective citizens
- Be eligible to serve in the military, and
- Steer clear of the juvenile justice system.

To change this trend, several family foundations and communities have engaged in strategies to create positive change for parents and their children. Some of these approaches include:

- I. Growing a network of funders
- II. Providing access to quality early child care programs
- III. Forming public/private alliances
- IV. Helping parents and caregivers cope
- V. Supporting policy reform for early learning success
- VI. Determining what *quality* means when it comes to child care

Whether you already fund programs that address early childhood learning and literacy, or are thinking of doing so, this report will spark your thinking on the many strategies out there to prepare young children for success.

Why all the fuss about third grade?

Because kids who read on grade level by the end of third grade are dramatically more likely to stay in school—and succeed in school.

Please note that the foundations profiled here provide just a few good examples of approaches to supporting early childhood learning and care. To find more family funders doing work in this area, read NCFP's August and September 2010 editions of *Family Giving News*, www.ncfp.org.

I. GROWING A NETWORK OF FUNDERS TO HELP KIDS READ BY THE END OF THIRD GRADE: THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

According to a KIDS COUNT special report released by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in April 2010, only one-third of all American children can read at grade level by the fourth grade. For low-income Latino, Black, and American Indian children, the numbers are much worse—with nearly 90% scoring below what is considered proficient.

The report, titled *Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters*, highlights how the ability to read is central to a child's success in school, in his or her life-long earning potential, and the ability to contribute to the nation's economy and its security.

The statistics in the report are startling: 6.6 million low-income children in the birth-to-eight age group are at increased risk of failing to graduate from high school on time because they won't be able to read by the end of third grade.

"Until third grade, children are learning to read. After third grade, they are also reading to learn. When kids are not reading by fourth grade, they almost certainly get on a glide path to poverty,"

said Ralph Smith, executive vice president of the Casey Foundation. “Poor reading test scores are profoundly disappointing to all of us who see school success and high school graduation as beacons in the battle against intergenerational poverty.”

In order for kids to read on grade level, studies show, they must show up to school ready to succeed. According to the Casey report, this means they will have gained the appropriate cognitive, social, emotional and physical development they need. It also means they will have access to high-quality learning experiences—beginning at birth and continuing into school—in order to sustain learning and not lose ground.

For many children, this isn’t the reality.

The Casey Foundation has been a leader in a national movement of funders to make reading by the end of third grade a priority. A network of funders interested in supporting kids ages zero to eight, with a goal of having them read by the end of third grade, is growing rapidly. So far, about five dozen funders representing more than 25 states are involved.

“We’re in the initial phases of convening the network, figuring out ways to align and possibly co-invest, and creating a fund to support this group of foundations working together,” said Jessy Donaldson, Program Officer for the Grade-Level Reading Grant at the Casey Foundation.

Those participating in the network run the gamut from large national private foundations to small family foundations, as well as some community foundations and corporate funds. A growing number of family foundations, including the David & Lucile Packard Foundation and the Irene E. & George A. Davis Foundation, are helping to lead the charge.

In support of this network and information sharing, there are monthly funder webinars to give updates and provide information on issues critical to getting children to read on grade level by the end of third grade. If you are interested in participating or would like to know more, contact Jessy Donaldson at JDonaldson@aecf.org.

The data tell us that if reading proficiency in our schools does not dramatically improve, the prospects for these children, for their future and for our economy, are dire... We believe everyone has a role to play in helping children meet this goal—families, schools, and every segment of our community.

*—Steve and John Davis,
Trustees, The Irene E. and
George A. Davis Foundation, in
“Reading Success by 4th Grade:
A Blueprint for Springfield”*

II. PROVIDING ACCESS TO QUALITY EARLY CHILD CARE PROGRAMS: THE IRENE E. AND GEORGE A. DAVIS FOUNDATION

In her lifetime, Irene Davis was passionate about young people and education. Her grandsons, trustees John and Steve Davis, have made this passion the driving force behind the Irene E. and George A. Davis Foundation’s work.

About 10 years ago, the family decided to become more proactive in a specific area of education. They called in researchers and experts and held a series of community conversations, which eventually helped them shape an initiative they called Cherish Every Child. What started out broad, Cherish Every Child has now refocused its grantmaking and convening work to help children, from birth to age five, enter kindergarten ready to succeed. The initiative is focused on the family’s hometown: Springfield, Massachusetts.

“Our trustees were stunned by statistics that said two-thirds of Springfield’s children cannot read proficiently by the third grade, and how hard it is to catch up in later years,” said Sally Fuller, project director of Cherish Every Child. Because the Davis family for years ran a successful saw manufacturing company, this issue hit close to home. They wondered, what would happen to companies like their own if the future pool of potential employees couldn’t read or do math?

Seeing the importance of reading proficiency, they brought the field together—literacy experts, public school reading directors, early childhood groups, higher education, family child care experts, and more. They also brought the community together—the library, the public television station—“basically, anyone who would work with us who cares about early literacy,” said Fuller.

Born out of this work, the foundation produced *Reading Success by 4th Grade: A Blueprint for Springfield*, which sets a community-wide goal: that 80% of third graders in Springfield will achieve reading proficiency by the year 2016. To reach this goal, the foundation has made a long-term commitment—not just to grantmaking, but also to convening, collaborating, sharing information and raising awareness. Working with a local television station, daily newspaper, and weekly Spanish-language newspaper, they’ve begun a public engagement campaign to get the word out.

“We as a foundation are still learning what’s the best strategy for our long-term commitment. We are looking at research and best practices. We want to know what really works,” said Fuller.

One strategy so far has been focused on providing access to high quality early childhood education. To do this, the foundation has supported early childhood centers in becoming accredited and helping early childhood teachers gain access to higher education.

The key to future economic prosperity and social well-being lies in the care and education of our youngest children.

—*Stephanie Blank, Trustee,
Arthur M. Blank
Family Foundation*

According to Fuller, kids must be in high quality settings—meaning those that are accredited by private accrediting bodies, such as the National Association for Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

Accreditation is different than basic licensing, which all states require, shifting the focus from meeting the most minimum standards (which is all it takes to get a license) to providing higher levels of care. All child care centers must be licensed; accreditation is completely voluntary.

There are a few national accrediting entities in existence, and NAEYC is one of the most common.¹ They set 10 standards that all programs—including child care centers, preschools and kindergartens—should provide to nurture the learning and development of young children. The standards are focused primarily on the learning and development of children, but also on teaching staff, family and community partnerships, and leadership and administration.

Within the past decade, there’s been a push toward another more consumer-focused approach called a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), which is sometimes linked to the NAEYC standards. This is a method to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early care and learning centers that families consider for their children.

¹ The other two well-known national accreditation associations are the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) and the National Afterschool Association (NAA).

It uses a “star” rating system and creates a framework for keeping centers accountable in maintaining their quality standards. So far, 23 states have adopted a statewide quality rating system.

Because accreditation can be an intense and expensive process, many early childhood centers opt out. This is where funders come in to help.

The Davis Foundation, like many others, believes that on a state level, accrediting programs is a powerful step in caring for kids. “Accreditation is just one piece, but it’s a critical piece,” said Fuller. “It gives parents more confidence that their child will be in a good setting, with good teachers and age-appropriate learning. It’s something we can all get our hands around.”

The Low-Down on Licensing

More than 11 million children under age 5 spend an average of 36 hours a week in some type of child care setting. Almost two-thirds of these children are in center-based care. Currently, about \$12 billion in government funds is spent on child care each year. But because licensing standards vary drastically across the nation, little is known about the quality of care that children are in.

Federal subsidy law requires that states have policies in place to protect the health and safety of children in child care. But these federal requirements are minimal and broad, and state licensure standards tend to be all over the map. Rules differ on who can obtain a license, what training they need to have, how many children they can care for, and what kind of environment they provide. Many states have weak regulations, or strong regulations with weak oversight.

In 2007, the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRRA) reviewed state child care center licensing regulations and oversight across the nation. Among their key findings:²

- Current state child care center regulation and oversight do little to protect the health and safety of children or to promote school success.
- Only 11 states require a comprehensive

background check (including a fingerprint check, or a check of child abuse or sex offender registries).

- Half the states conduct inspections only once a year or less frequently, and some states (like California) conduct inspections only once every five or ten years (less often than the requirements to inspect hair salons).
- The minimum education requirements for staff, ongoing training, and required age-appropriate activities for children vary greatly among the states, and overall are weak.
- Only 17 states require regular inspection reports and substantiated complaint reports to be posted on the Internet, so that parents can make informed choices among child care settings in their community.

With statistics like these, the issue of licensing is critical. “Before we even begin to think about accrediting programs and quality rating systems, we have to make sure all states are up to speed on their basic licensing requirements,” said Abby Cohen, child care law and policy consultant. “In a lot of states, we need to pour more money into creating a good licensing system for child care programs. Unfortunately, for funders, this isn’t a sexy topic.”

² Source: National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, www.naccrra.org/policy/state_licensing

III. RALLYING SECTORS AROUND SCHOOL READINESS: THE ARTHUR M. BLANK FAMILY FOUNDATION

The Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation is one foundation taking a prominent—and personal—leadership role in early education and school readiness. Blank Foundation trustee Stephanie Blank is a long-time champion of children and education, and has been working on the issue in a variety of roles over the last 15 years.

“As a parent of three children, I’ve seen firsthand how important the first five years are to a child’s healthy development,” said Blank, who believes that investing in early education is one of the best uses of both public and private dollars.³

Her latest role is to chair a new statewide coalition called Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS), which formed in April 2010. GEEARS is an independent group that brings funders, businesses, government leaders, child care providers, and parents together to make sure Georgia’s children get the best possible start. The Blank Family Foundation is one of the early supporters of this alliance.

GEEARS hopes that by 2020, Georgia will be a national leader ensuring that all children enter kindergarten ready to learn and are on a path to read to learn by third grade. To advance this goal, GEEARS will serve as a resource and advocate for high-quality, accessible, and affordable center- and home-based early care and learning, and will also address the social, emotional and physical issues that affect a child’s ability to learn.

Part of the GEEARS strategy will be to work with existing organizations to make it easy to invest in early education. This is the same spirit of collaboration that the Blank Foundation has embraced for years. “We recognize that our aspirations are bigger than our assets, and to get to outcomes, we can’t do it by ourselves,” said Blank Foundation president Penelope McPhee. “GEEARS creates a

focused approach in the community, so that our individual grants and initiatives add up to more than a sum of the parts.”

Georgia is one of only three states (including Massachusetts and Washington) with an education department devoted to the birth to age five population. This perhaps makes it easier to engage the government in public and private partnership. In Georgia, this early care and learning department is called Bright from the Start (<http://decal.ga.gov>). It coordinates and oversees a wide range of programs, including the nationally recognized Georgia Pre-K Program, a state lottery-funded program that pays for four-year-olds to attend a quality pre-K center.

Bright from the Start maintains a list of licensed pre-K centers on its website. In 2010, Georgia funded 84,000 children as part of this program, and became the first state in the nation to serve more than one million children in a universal voluntary pre-K program.

GEEARS’ Strategies for School Readiness

The Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students has the goal that all children in Georgia are ready to learn by the year 2020. Here’s how they will do it:

- Improve the quality of child care, be it at centers or in homes;
- Increase parental involvement by providing parents with tools and resources to help their children learn;
- Improve public awareness by launching a statewide campaign emphasizing the importance of learning from birth to age five; and
- Become an advocate for quality, accessibility, and affordability of early childhood care and education.

³ “Make Early Education a Part of School Reform,” by Stephanie Blank. *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, August 9, 2010.

While a huge accomplishment, according to some, there's still work to be done. Only about half of Georgia's four-year-olds are enrolled in the Georgia Pre-K Program, and more than 7,000 children across the state are on the waiting list. GEEARS hopes to reverse this trend.

We have parents out there who don't realize how critical it is to talk and sing to their children when they are born. Words are a free resource, and the fact that there are children who aren't getting them just blows me away. Even if parents aren't literate themselves, they can still talk to their child about the sky, the trees, the grass.

—Sally Fuller, Project Director, Irene E. and George A. Davis Foundation

IV. HELPING PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS COPE: BELLA VISTA FOUNDATION

Like many foundations, the Bella Vista Foundation in the San Francisco Bay Area believes that, for children, school readiness starts at birth. What they do differently than most is focus their support directly on the parents and primary caregivers, funding programs that feed the parent-child relationship so that children have a better chance of developing in a healthy way.

“A baby's attachment to its primary caregiver is critical to setting up a healthy learning process,” said Mary Gregory, executive director of the foundation. “The initial communication between parent and child lays the groundwork for cognitive learning and healthy social and emotional development. If a parent is unresponsive to an infant, the infant doesn't get the feedback it needs to encourage its learning process, and it will stop trying to interact with its environment.”

Recognizing that parenting is demanding, particularly for those families whose lives are already full of stress, the Bella Vista Foundation supports programs that focus on parents' and caregivers' ability to cope with stress, in order to prevent depression. The founda-

tion hopes to reach as many mothers (and fathers and caregivers) as possible, as early as possible, who might benefit from learning techniques to handle stress, now and in the future. Techniques it has supported include mindfulness training during pregnancy; home visits; parenting groups; parenting education; infant massage; exercise and yoga classes for parents; and more.

“We are all about *preventing* depression, rather than treating it. There are a number of ways to involve people in the community and break their isolation. We encourage agencies to build community and support groups, particularly in low-income areas. We believe that depression can be mitigated, and even prevented, in this way,” said Gregory.

In addition, Bella Vista seeded the Raising a Reader program in four California counties as well as in Portland, Oregon. Raising a Reader is a national program offering local agencies an evidence-based early literacy and parent engagement program that has been proven to improve the reading readiness skills of children from birth to age five.

Raising a Reader circulates more than 100 quality children's books into mostly low-income child care centers, and other places where moms and babies go. A key part of the program is helping families develop, practice, and maintain the habit of sharing these books together, through what's been called ‘lap reading’ or ‘book cuddling.’ This builds an emotional bond between the child and caregiver.

“Rather than just delivering a kit of books and parading them in front of parents, this program builds enthusiasm for sharing in the reading experience,” said Gregory. “It lays the foundation for future learning.”

All foundations are small compared to the problems we face; however, if you are thinking of how to make your money effective, supporting kids, birth to age 8, is a great investment. If you can make improvements there, you're way ahead of the game.

—David Nee, Executive Director, William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund

V. SUPPORTING POLICY REFORM FOR EARLY LEARNING SUCCESS: THE WILLIAM CASPAR GRAUSTEIN MEMORIAL FUND

When the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund considered how to be effective in funding early childhood learning, the trustees relied on research and evaluation.

“Our trustees knew we couldn’t entirely expect to cure the ills of the system by working within the system of K-12. To make real changes, we needed to focus on early care,” said David Nee, executive director of the fund. And so they did. In the ’90s, the fund made a \$5 million, five-year commitment to a community engagement initiative called Children First. In 2001, this segued into what is now the Discovery Initiative, which continued and expanded the fund’s commitment to community and parent engagement, focusing on children birth through age eight.

The Discovery Initiative aims to create an early childhood system where Connecticut children of all races and income levels are ready for school by age five, and successful learners by age nine. The Fund collaborates with communities, statewide partners and government agencies to make this happen—supporting community change and policy reform.

“Advocacy and policy can be like curse words to some people. In this foundation, it has been accepted from the jump that we would need to be doing this kind of work,” said Nee. “We know we’re not big enough to solve these problems on our own; we need to work with state and local government. It can be hair-hurting at times, but it’s really necessary,” he said.

As they started making Discovery grants, trustees recognized the importance of getting better alignment between community engagement and policy work. They wanted to help build the

collective capacity of key advocacy groups working on early care issues—rather than the capacity of single organizations.

Now in its ninth year of a 14-year initiative, Discovery offers grants and capacity building to 53 communities and six statewide partners. The fund’s willingness to stick with the work and build meaningful partnerships over a number of years is one key to its success.

“Real change takes time and requires a long-term commitment on behalf of foundations,” said Nee. “One, two, or three year grants are just a tease compared to what these organizations are up against. With at least a five-year commitment, you can really get somewhere and share learning in the communities,” he said.

The push to get kids reading by the third grade is great, but the way we get there matters. It’s not about sitting two-year-olds down at a desk with a pencil, or using flashcards with infants. Early child care and education is really different, and needs to be age appropriate. Kids need care in addition to education—but unfortunately, in our society, the word care doesn’t bring respect or resources. The word education does.

—Abby Cohen, Independent Child Care Law and Policy Consultant

VI. WHAT IS QUALITY CHILD CARE AND LEARNING?

Talk to anyone in the arena of early child care and learning, and the word quality will undoubtedly come up. But what does quality mean? There doesn't seem to be a definition that everyone agrees on.

Like others, the McKnight Foundation in Minnesota is deeply engaged in the push for early reading success. The foundation announced in 2009 that it would invest in a new education and learning goal to increase how many students in the Twin Cities were reading by the end of third grade. For now, the foundation is taking measured steps to find out, through evaluation, what quality means when it comes to early childhood learning and literacy.

“Quality literacy instruction is difficult to define, because there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach,” said Bonnie Houck, program director of the McKnight Foundation and a former state reading specialist, educator, and literacy coach. “To meet individual needs, we need to employ a variety of strategies. Concentrating on one silver bullet would be ineffective, because it oversimplifies the complexities of the learning process.”

“We can measure how many children are prepared for kindergarten, and how many pass a fourth-grade reading test,” she continued. “But what connects those dots? Along that development continuum, we need a system to constantly monitor and improve children's progress.” The McKnight Foundation hopes to help create a research-based, pre-K to grade three model that can demonstrate improved reading skills by the end of grade three.

Other foundations see quality from the standpoint of teachers. They are looking at helping pre-school teachers and child care workers gain access to higher education, professional development, and higher salaries. “There are currently no standards for preparing early childhood education instructors,” said Sandra Treacy, executive director of the W. Clement and Jessie V. Stone Foundation.

The Stone Foundation supported research conducted by expert Marcy Whitebook that addresses effective preparation for teachers.⁴ “The research found that a quality child care center is one where the adults are learning too. You can't just babysit kids—you have to be responsive to their emotional and social and cognitive needs.”

With little standards and varying requirements for pre-school and early child care workers, they are paid less, and as a result, often less qualified, than K-12 teachers. “Having a great teacher in the classroom is the number one thing for kids,” said Penelope McPhee, president of the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation. “We need to increase professional development opportunities and salaries for early childhood workers, or we won't get the outcomes we want for children.”

And that is the children whose parents can afford to send them to pre-school or daycare. One of the challenges is that quality early education can cost as much as college; however, there are not the same subsidies out there to give tots a good start.

“College kids have access to quite a few alternatives for education—scholarships, loans, grants. But that doesn't exist for pre-school. Families that send their kids to pre-school are also not at the height of their income-producing years. There's a financial disconnect for families,” said McPhee.

The result? Many young children, particularly those from low-income or single, working parent homes, end up staying with a relative or a neighbor (sometimes called ‘kith and kin care’) rather than entering into any kind of daycare or early learning situation.

“How do we also make sure all *those* children are having a quality experience?” said Abby Cohen, child care law and policy consultant. “If more than half the kids are not in structured child care or pre-K centers, we also need to look at quality in these other places. It requires a different approach, though. We can't exactly go

⁴ For more information, read *Preparing Teachers of Young Children* by Marcy Whitebook, University of Berkeley Center for Child Care Employment.

around rating grandmothers one or five stars. But that doesn't mean grandmothers and other caregivers don't want to learn to take care of their children better. We need to help all caregivers do a better job.”

All states must offer parents a choice of care, including centers, regulated family child care providers and exempt care providers (family, friend and neighbor care). Illinois is one state that does this well, giving low-income, working families more access to quality, affordable child

care. Families are required to cost-share on a sliding scale based on family size, income, and number of children in care.

As the movement toward quality child care and learning continues, Cohen offers funders this piece of advice:

“Think of quality as a big umbrella. Quality rating is powerful but it isn't everything. And there are people in the field who think it's everything. It's important to have a bigger perspective when you fund in early childhood.”

Tips for Getting Involved in Early Learning and Literacy Funding

Thinking of joining the growing number of foundations investing in early childhood learning and literacy? Here are some tips from your colleagues for how to get involved:⁵

- **Learn more about best practices in quality early education and early literacy.** Learn more about your state's licensing standards, accreditation programs and quality rating systems, and investigate subsidies for family child care providers.
- **Identify and consult with experts** who have been doing work in this area, both nationally and statewide. Find out what's happening in your state and community. Be knowledgeable about research in the field, and consider supporting that research.
- **Talk to other funders near you that support early childhood development and reading.** Ask them how they got into it, what they are funding, and what they have learned. Identify who is supporting what, and where the gaps are.
- **Support comprehensive early learning programs and services** that have the capacity to help your foundation or fund reach the outcomes it seeks. Consider programs that begin at birth and provide services to both parents and children.
- **In this economy, many long-standing critical programs are shutting their doors.** Consider helping them stay open.
- **Collaborate with funders, community partners, and local and state governments.** To make real change in this work, it's critical to collaborate and leverage dollars.
- **Share information about effective projects and programs and replicate them.** Consider convening members of your community and other funders to share information and resources.
- **If it's right for your foundation, get involved in policy and advocacy.** Know the law on education and public policy, and advocate for continued support for programs that work. Help build and sustain high-quality early education systems for entire communities.
- **Be in it for the long-term.** To make a difference in this work, consider funding commitments of five years or more.
- **Don't forget: As a funder, you can give more than grants.** Convene others and share what you know, or find out what they know. Consider funding capacity building and technical assistance.

⁵ Some of the above tips adapted from *Discussion Guide: Ensuring Success for Young Children: Early Childhood Literacy*, Association of Small Foundations, November 2008. www.smallfoundations.org

RESOURCES: LEARN MORE ABOUT THE EARLY CHILDHOOD LANDSCAPE

Online Resource Centers

Achieving Reading Proficiency by the End of Third Grade

<http://datacenter.kidscount.org/reports/ResourceCenter.aspx>

A Resource Guide that accompanies the 2010 KIDS COUNT Special Report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. It provides a carefully vetted list of programs that support the grade-level reading recommendations outlined in *Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters*. Donors and their staff can also find information on their own state by visiting the **Kids Count Data Center**: <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/reports/readingmatters.aspx>

Funder Collaborations and Coalitions

In recent years, a number of funders have come together to collaborate and form various coalitions or networks—either nationally, regionally or statewide. Here are some examples:

Bay Area Early Childhood Funders

(San Francisco Bay Area)

<http://www.4children.org>

The Early Childhood Funders (ECF) are an informal affiliation of foundations, donors, and corporations with a common interest in funding projects that support young children and their families. The group meets 3–4 times per year to broaden knowledge of the early childhood field and to share insights, grantmaking opportunities and resources.

Early Childhood Funders' Collaborative

(National)

A Partner of Grantmakers for Children, Youth & Families

<http://www.gcyf.org/partners>

The Early Childhood Funders' Collaborative (ECFC) is an affiliation of individuals who serve as staff at foundations or corporate giving programs that have substantial grantmaking portfolios in early childhood care and education. ECFC was formed by grantmakers to provide opportunities for networking, information sharing and strategic grantmaking.

Early Education for All (Massachusetts)

www.strategiesforchildren.org

The Early Education for All Campaign, led by Strategies for Children in Boston, is a coalition of leaders from business, early childhood, labor, religion, health care, education and philanthropy, working in partnership with parents, grassroots leaders, and state policymakers to ensure that all children have access to high-quality early education and care.

The School Readiness Funders Coalition (Minnesota)

<http://www.readyforschoolmn.com>

In Minnesota, a group of family and private foundations and donor funds formed this coalition to develop a comprehensive plan to improve the state's current early childhood education system. In March 2010, they released *The Agenda to Achieve Learning Readiness by 2020*. Also in **Minnesota, the Minnesota Early Childhood Funders Network** (out of the Minnesota Council on Foundations) represents 20 funders that share a commitment to supporting young children and their families. www.mcf.org

Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS) (Georgia)

www.geears.com

This is a new philanthropic partnership founded to help Georgia become a national leader in ensuring that children enter kindergarten ready to learn and on a path to “read to learn” by third grade. The coalition, chaired by Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation trustee Stephanie Blank, will offer stra-

tegric assistance to existing providers, funders and other key stakeholders in early learning and care.

Grantmakers for Education (National)

www.edfunders.org

Grantmakers for Education is a membership organization for private and public philanthropies that support improved education outcomes for students from early childhood through higher education. The Out of School Time (OST) Funders Network, affiliated with Grantmakers for Education, shares practices and builds knowledge among funders interested in supporting after-school activities.

The Kansas Coalition for School Readiness (Kansas)

<http://www.kansasschoolreadiness.org>

The Kansas Coalition for School Readiness works to protect and strengthen the state's long-standing commitment to early childhood programs, such as Early Head Start, Smart Start, and Parents As Teachers. The Coalition is a partnership of early learning educators, business leaders, child advocates, parents, law enforcement officials, military leaders, and other citizens who have come together to support investments in early childhood education so that Kansas children will be better prepared for success in school and beyond.

National Organizations and Initiatives

BUILD Strong Foundations for Our Youngest Children

www.buildinitiative.org

BUILD helps state leaders prepare young children age birth to five to succeed by helping their families access high quality early learning, family and parenting support, early intervention for children with special needs and comprehensive health, mental health and nutritional services. BUILD assists states in planning and implementing a comprehensive early childhood "system of

systems" that crosses policy domains and helps ensure that families get the services they need.

National Head Start Association

<http://www.nhsa.org>

Created in 1965, Head Start is the most successful, longest-running, national school readiness program in the United States. It provides comprehensive education, health, nutrition, and parent involvement services to low-income children and their families. Nearly 25 million pre-school aged children have benefited from Head Start. In 1995, the Early Head Start program was established to serve children from birth to three years of age in recognition of the mounting evidence that the earliest years matter a great deal to children's growth and development.

National Association of Education for the Young Child (NAEYC)

www.naeyc.org

This association is dedicated to improving the well-being of all young children, with particular focus on the quality of educational and developmental services for all children from birth through age 8. Founded in 1926, NAEYC is the world's largest organization working on behalf of young children with nearly 90,000 members, a national network of over 300 local, state, and regional Affiliates, and a growing global alliance.

National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies

<http://www.naccrra.org>

NACCRRA's mission is to promote national policies and partnerships to advance the development and learning of all children and to provide vision, leadership, and support to community Child Care Resource & Referral.

National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center

<http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov>

The National Child Care Information and

Technical Assistance Center (NCCIC), a service of the Office of Child Care of the US Department of Health and Human Services, is a national clearinghouse and technical assistance center.

National Center for Family Literacy

<http://www.famlit.org>

NCFL's mission is to create a literate nation by leveraging the power of the family. National and international experts look to NCFL as the leading resource in family learning and literacy.

Parents As Teachers

www.parentsasteachers.org

Parents As Teachers aims to provide the information, support, and encouragement parents need to help their children develop optimally during the crucial early years of life.

Raising A Reader

<http://www.raisingareader.org>

The mission is to foster healthy brain development, parent-child bonding and early literacy skills critical for school success by engaging parents in a routine of daily "book cuddling" with their children from birth to age five.

Zero to Three Foundation

www.zerotothree.org

ZERO TO THREE is a national, nonprofit organization that informs, trains, and supports professionals, policymakers, and parents in their efforts to improve the lives of infants and toddlers. Its mission is to promote the health and development of infants and toddlers.

Research Institutions and Experts

Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University

<http://developingchild.harvard.edu>

Drawing on the full breadth of intellectual resources available across Harvard University's schools and affiliated hospitals, the Center on

the Developing Child generates, translates, and applies knowledge in the service of improving life outcomes for children in the United States and throughout the world.

National Institute for Early Education Research

www.nieer.org

The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) conducts and communicates research to support high quality, effective, early childhood education for all young children. Such education enhances their physical, cognitive, and social development, and subsequent success in school and later life.

The Heckman Equation

<http://www.heckmanequation.org>

This website promotes the work of Nobel Laureate James Heckman, who illustrates the economic gains from investments in early childhood development.

Books, Reports and Newsletters Recommended by Funders

Natacha Blain, Policy Director. *Policy Spotlight*, a weekly newsletter highlighting policy issues on children, youth and families. Silver Spring: Grantmakers for Children, Youth & Families. <http://www.gcyf.org>

Cohen, Deborah L, Editor. *Casey Connects*. Baltimore: Annie E. Casey Foundation, January 2010. <http://www.aecf.org>

Fiester, Leila. *Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters: A KIDS COUNT Special Report*. Baltimore: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010.

Galinsky, Ellen. *Mind in the Making: The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010.

Goffin, Stacie G. and Valora Washington. *Ready or Not: Leadership Choices in Early Care and Education*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2007.

Shokoff, Jack and D.A. Phillips, Editors. *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2000.

Whitebook, Marcy, et. al. *Preparing Teachers of Young Children: The Current State of Knowledge, and a Blueprint for the Future*. University of Berkeley: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, 2009. <http://www.irle.berkeley.edu/cscce>

© 2011 National Center for Family Philanthropy

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: For more than 10 years, Elaine Gast Fawcett has served as a writer and consultant for foundations, grantmaking associations, socially conscious businesses and individuals. A published author of six books for grantmakers, Elaine has educated foundations on governance, grantmaking, strategies and more, and was formerly a writer and coordinator for Family Foundation Services at the Council on Foundations. She is the president of Four Winds Writing, Inc., a communications and grantmaking consulting firm based out of San Francisco, and works with clients nationwide.

Susan C. Price, Editor

All rights reserved. No part of this essay may be reproduced or distributed in any form without the prior written permission of the National Center for Family Philanthropy. The information in this paper should not be taken as qualified legal advice. Please consult your legal advisor for

questions about specific legal issues discussed in this essay. The information presented is subject to change, and is not a substitute for expert legal, tax, or other professional advice. This information may not be relied upon for the purposes of avoiding penalties that may be imposed under the Internal Revenue Service.

SPECIAL THANKS

The National Center for Family Philanthropy thanks the Annie E. Casey Foundation for their support of this issue of *Passages* and for several other aspects of our work in helping the field learn more about early childhood education.

WE WELCOME YOUR COMMENTS.

The National Center for Family Philanthropy, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization, is the only nonprofit resource dedicated exclusively to giving families and those who work with them. If you have comments, questions or suggestions for a future edition of *Passages*, contact: susan@ncfp.org.

1101 CONNECTICUT AVE. NW, SUITE 220, WASHINGTON, DC 20036 TEL: 202.293.3424 WEB: WWW.NCFP.ORG



NATIONAL CENTER
FAMILY
PHILANTHROPY

**PLEASE SUPPORT THE NATIONAL CENTER
AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PASSAGES SERIES!**

We offer special thanks to Friends of the Family, our annual contributors who make it possible for the National Center to produce important content for the field. For information about becoming a Friend, contact Maureen Esposito at 202.293.3424 or maureen@ncfp.org.

For organizations serving donors, foundations and advisors, we offer exclusive *Passages* sponsorship opportunities that allow your organization to align itself with topical content that is relevant to your services, products, or expertise. For more information, contact Paul Ust at paul@ncfp.org.