

Editor's Note

Valerie Norville
Editorial Director

As state board members and all parents can attest, learning does not begin in kindergarten. Because pre-K learning experiences diverge widely across a variety of settings, some children enter unprepared, are already behind their peers in knowledge and skills, and tend not to catch up in later years. A recent review of decades of early education studies concludes that programs for children under age 5 can have long-lasting impact: They significantly decrease special education placement and grade retention and increase high school graduation rates.¹

It isn't easy to grapple with inequitable access and uneven quality in early education. Yet for all children to have a strong start, there is work to do.

This edition of the *Standard* explores many dimensions of early education. First, a bit of history. A large cast of people who have been the leading lights in this field convened to participate in a NASBE task force on early childhood education. In 1988, the task force published "Right from the Start," which Senator Ted Kennedy called "thoughtful and groundbreaking." Lori Connors-Tadros and Madelyn Gardner place the task force report in the context of its day and fast forward to how the policy conversation advanced over the subsequent 30 years.

Foundation for Child Development's Sara Vecchiotti explains why it is time to focus on workforce preparation, qualifications, and compensation, and she outlines the role that state boards of education can—and have the authority to—play.

W. Steven Barnett and Richard Kasmin detail the experience of 11 states that sought to expand access to state-funded prekindergarten by incorporating it in school funding formulas. Surprisingly,

the conversion to this funding model has not always increased the cost to the state.

Aaron Loewenberg explores the reasons why the transition to kindergarten is a key inflection point in a child's life. He relates the experiences of four states whose state boards, state education agencies, and legislatures acted to improve the transition process and ensure that each child is ready to embark on their K-12 journey.

Luisiana Meléndez and Patricia Chamberlain paint a picture of efforts in Illinois to help its growing population of dual language learners. State legislation in 2008 made three- to five-year-olds enrolled in preschool classrooms funded by the Illinois State Board of Education eligible to receive language support services. It takes strong interagency collaboration to advance culturally and linguistically appropriate practices for the youngest learners, they conclude.

Philip Sirinides and Missy Coffey describe the disconnect between determined state efforts to build early childhood integrated data systems and the lagging efforts to employ that data in decision making. They cite technical and analytical obstacles but find the biggest problem is states' lack of a coherent strategy to connect analytics with policy and operations. As they advocate lifelong learning, state boards can also model it in a commitment to organizational learning on how to leverage early childhood data.

The Erikson Institute's Aisha Ray rounds out the issue in a rich Q&A on increasing the cultural and linguistic competence of early childhood educators. ■

¹Dana Charles McCoy et al., "Impact of Early Childhood Education on Medium-and Long-Term Educational Outcomes," *Educational Researcher* 46, no. 8 (2017): 474–87.

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