

## **The Child Care Crisis: Implications for the Growth and Development of the Nation's Children**

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*The child care issue in the U.S. has reached crisis proportions. This article begins by describing the extent and nature of the problem. The 1990 Child Care and Development Act is a step, albeit an imperfect one, toward solving the problem. Several guidelines for developing an effective child care system are articulated. One approach, the School of the 21st Century, is described and preliminary evidence of its effectiveness is presented. Concluding reflections are offered on overcoming barriers in order to establish quality day care services.*

### **Introduction**

During the past several years we have witnessed increasingly more attention paid to the child care issue, with business leaders and policymakers, among others, recognizing the fact that an increasing number of children are in child care. Despite the recent interest in child care, and resultant legislation—the 1990 Child Care and Development Act—we have not instituted, as a nation, any meaningful solution to the problem with which parents struggle on a daily basis: ensuring good quality, affordable child care.

The child care issue is hardly new. It has been a major concern for over a quarter of a century and has become increasingly problematic, reaching crisis proportions. At the heart of the issue is our placing millions of the nation's young children at developmental risk because we are letting them grow up in child care environments that are inadequate and fail to provide a level of quality that promotes healthy development and learning.

The need for good quality child care was recognized in 1970, when, during

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the White House Conference on Children, it was identified as the number one priority for the nation to address. With the trend toward greater participation of women in the labor force accelerating at that time, Congress passed the Child Development Act in 1971. It called for the creation of a national network with fees calibrated to income. This would have created, in effect, a child care system that we could then have refined and enlarged as changing needs would have warranted. At that time, however, public recognition of the problem was limited and the opposition to any form of out-of-home care enormous, leading the way to presidential veto of the bill. Further legislative attempts to address various aspects of the child care problem, including increased demand for facilities and regulations to ensure basic standards to govern child care environments, also failed, until 1990 when \$750 million was appropriated in the Child Care and Development Act. Although, as will be explained later in the article, the legislation meets only a fraction of the need; it is a beginning and is indicative of the fact that demographic changes of the past two decades have been so striking that they became increasingly harder for policymakers to ignore.

### **The Problem of Providing Child Care**

#### *The Scope of the Problem*

No where has change been more dramatic than in the area of work and family life. These two contexts—the world of work and the family—have become increasingly interdependent, with aspects of one affecting the functioning of the other. This interdependence was brought about by the increase in women's participation in the out-of-home work force. This has affected virtually every family with children, as well as the business community, but still no social supports exist to facilitate work and family life, with stress, guilt, and loss of productivity resulting as parents try to juggle both work and family responsibilities.

Many women with school-age children have traditionally worked out of the home, albeit part time or in occupations that matched children's school schedule, and although there has been an increase in the number of women with school-age children who are working—it is now noted that 75% of these mothers are working, up from 65% in 1989 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1992)—the increase in women's participation in the labor force has been especially striking among women with younger children. In 1950, only 11.9% of mothers with children under age 6 were working; in 1981, the figure rose to 48.9% and in 1992, it rose to 58% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1992). The return to work of mothers with infants under age one is an even more recent and dramatic phenomenon: a decade ago, only 31% of these mothers were working full time out of the home; today,

the figure has increased to 54%. It is projected that 93% of working women of child-bearing age will become pregnant, so the number of women returning to work while their children are very young will increase during this decade, creating yet more need for child care (Hofferth, 1992).

Although women's participation in the labor force has been a major factor in the increased demand for child care, there have been other contributing factors, one of these being the increase in the number of single-parent families. Approximately 25% of children are raised in families headed by a single parent. Such families are not homogeneous, but are generally characterized by female heads of household, the presence of children under age five and poverty. This characterization of single parent families is particularly evident among minorities: 50% of all poor black children live in a single-parent family headed by the mother (National Center for Children in Poverty, 1994).

In addition to the growing number of single-parent families, ours has become an increasingly mobile and scattered society. Many families no longer live near their kin and working parents with children cannot depend on the support and assistance of relatives who at one time could be counted on to help out with child care.

The economy is another important factor contributing to changes in family life and the associated need for child care. The median annual income of families has declined over the past twenty years so that more families today are dependent on dual incomes. This was pointed out in a report published by the Joint Economic Committee in 1986, which documented a 3.1% drop in family income between 1973 and 1984, even though the figures had taken into account the salary brought in by both parents (Economic Policy Institute, 1986). This issue was again emphasized in a more recent report, which indicated that 71% of mothers are working solely because they need to supplement the family's income (Women's Bureau, 1994). Among single parents, the need to work is even more acute (National Commission on Children, 1990), evidencing the fact that in both dual-worker and single-parent families, mothers are working primarily out of economic necessity.

### *Understanding the Problem*

Despite the fact that an increasing number of families depend on out of home care for children, child care continues to be regarded as a problem that parents need to resolve on an individual basis, with no meaningful support available from either the public sector or from the business community. However, with so many mothers working full time and a huge discrepancy between the supply and demand for quality child care facilities (Committee for Economic Development [CED], 1993; Willer, 1992), it is evident that the problem is

national in scope and must be addressed as such. In attempting to resolve the problem, it is important at the outset to define its various constituent units and ascertain what barriers exist that may prevent our reaching a solution.

*Recognizing that a problem exists.* Public awareness of the child care as a problem, for example, is prerequisite to any national action; no society acts until it has a sense of the immediacy and magnitude of a problem (Zigler & Finn, 1981). Much progress has been made in this regard in recent years. As we noted earlier, a child care system would have been created and in place had it not been for a 1971 veto by Nixon. In analyzing the events surrounding the veto, Nelson (1982) notes that the need for child care was not regarded as universal and there were many who were staunch in their opposition to any form of out-of-home care, failing to recognize that the majority of mothers who are working have no choice in the matter—they have to work to keep the family off welfare.

This state of affairs is changing and continued media presentations of the problems families face is helping increase the recognition that child care is a problem of national scope (Blau & Hotz, 1992). This is evident not only in the passage of the 1990 Child Care and Development Act, but also in the passage of the Family Leave Act, which provides parents with the opportunity to take a brief leave of absence from work to care for a newborn or sick child or other family members requiring care. Not only at the federal level, but in many states as well, laws have been enacted to enable parents to take at least a few weeks (generally 12–16) off to care for their newborn or sick children (Finn-Stevenson & Trczinski, 1991).

*The cost of child care.* Besides public awareness that a problem exists, there is need to educate the public about the various associated issues, one of these being the high cost of care. This is a major concern for parents, many of whom choose a facility solely on the basis of cost. This point is made by Hofferth and Wissoker (1992), who found that parents not only choose child care on the basis of cost, but also that they switch facilities when tuition increases. Given market differences among various regions, it has been difficult to ascertain the actual cost of care. In a national child care staffing study (Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1990), it was found that, generally, the amount spent on operating child care centers has remained about the same since the 1970s but that the percentage of the cost paid for by public funds has decreased substantially, leaving parents to assume a greater share of the cost. Parents pay anywhere from \$1500 to \$10,000 a year for child care, depending on quality, staff background, and the age of the child. It is estimated that full-time child care for preschoolers costs on average upward of \$3500 a year and that, for infants, the average annual cost exceeds \$6000 (Helburn et al., 1995; Willer, 1992; Whitebook et al., 1990). For low income families, for whom child care costs take up a greater portion of their

budget than is true among more affluent families, the high cost of child care presents acute problems, so it is not surprising that parents make decisions on facilities on the basis of how much they cost.

*Quality of care.* When parents select a child care setting, they are paying for an environment where a significant portion of the child rearing will occur. With children spending their entire day, every day, in child care, this environment affects the child's course of development. If the quality of the environment falls below a certain level, the child's optimal development will be compromised.

Standards of quality and their expression in state licensing codes governing the operation of child care facilities are attempts to objectively define this threshold and represent a very basic minimum to ensure the well being of children. But even this minimum is often not addressed in the regulations in some states and there are no consistent standards of quality to which all states must adhere. In states where standards are considered good, the average quality of centers seem to be good as well (Helburn et al., 1995), but this is of little comfort given the fact that the standards in many states leave much to be desired.

Quality is a rather illusive term. In defining quality, developmental experts distinguish between a child care environment that is nurturant and one that is merely custodial. In a nurturant environment, where children are given opportunities for play and social interactions and where providers interact with children and attend to their individual needs, providers are often trained in child development and are able to provide developmentally appropriate care. This is an environment, in short, which is conducive to optimal development and learning. In a custodial setting, or poor quality environment, minimal attention is paid to the children, who are often left wandering aimlessly around the room or watching television. In such environments, there are often too many children for any one care giver to take care of and the children are placed in large groups, thus receiving little if any adult attention.

The research has shown that good quality child care is determined by several factors: group size, staff:child ratios appropriate for the age of the children, and providers and administrators who are trained in child development or a related field (Bredenkamp, 1987; Hayes, Palmer, & Zaslow, 1990; Helburn et al., 1995). In terms of provider training in particular, it was found that providers who are trained in child development are more likely than those not receiving such training to be sensitive and responsive to the individual needs of the children and knowledgeable about creating an environment that is conducive to optimal growth and development (Roup, Travers, Glantz, & Coelen, 1979). Stability of care—that is, care by the same providers over time—is also an important determinant of quality (Phillips, 1987), and this assumes more importance with infants and very young children who need to get to know and become familiar with

the routines of care givers. In facilities of poor quality, stability of care is nonexistent, with staff turnover being upwards of 40% and providers staying on the job for less than six months, then moving onto other jobs (Whitebook et al., 1990). Multiple changes in providers or in child care arrangements created by staff turnover have been found to have a negative effect on children, resulting in insecure attachment to the mother (Hayes et al., 1990).

Although we know the determinants of good quality care, the majority of children in the United States receive poor quality care whether they are in child care centers, in family day care homes, or in the care of relatives. Several national studies conducted during the past five years attest to this fact. In the first national study, known as the Child Care Staffing Study (Whitebook et al., 1990), it was found that in over half of the centers studied, the quality was poor, providers lacked training and were not adequately paid, and annual employee turnover was so high that it gave cause for concern, given infants' and young children's need for continuity of care. In a national study of children in family day care homes and the care of relatives, it was found that only 9% of such settings were rated as being of good quality, meaning that they offered care that was growth enhancing; 56% were rated as adequate/custodial, meaning that they were neither growth enhancing nor growth harming; and 35% were rated as inadequate, or growth harming. These findings present grave concerns since family day care and relative care are usually used by parents of infants and toddlers because of the belief that the home-like atmosphere is more conducive to children's development. In theory, family day care and relative care can be good options. However, the majority of family day care and relative care occurs "underground" with providers being isolated from the child care community and unknown to regulators. It has been estimated, for example, that 75% to 90% of family day care homes are unregulated. This estimate is confirmed by the National Family Day Care Study noted above, which found that only 12% of family day care homes are regulated and only 1% of care by relatives is regulated (Galinsky, Howes, Kontos, & Shinn, 1994).

In the most recent study on cost, quality, and child outcomes in child care centers, it was found that only 14% of centers could be regarded as providing good quality care. In the majority of centers in the study, it was found that the environment is poor to mediocre, with almost half of all infants and young children being in centers that are less than minimal in quality. Minimal quality was defined as follows: the children's basic health and safety needs are not met, there is little, if any, evidence of warmth and support provided by the adults to the children, nor of any learning experiences or opportunities for learning (Helburn et al., 1995).

*The availability and coordination of child care services.* The studies noted above on the quality of care also provided some information on supply and

demand issues. In the area of availability of care for preschool children, there seems to be some debate, with some arguing that a sufficient number of slots exists to accommodate the need. Others point out, however, that although the number of preschool child care slots has kept up with demand, what is generally available is either of poor quality or too expensive for most families and when taking this into account, it is evident that there is lack of good quality affordable child care for preschoolers. There are no disagreements on two other aspects of the availability of care: One, that the demand for care far exceeds supply for infant child care and school-age child care, and two, that the need for child care services will continue to increase into the next century not only because more mothers will be working, but also because the job market is expected to tighten over the next decade causing competition for workers. With child care paying only minimal wages, it is likely that providers will leave the field and opt for higher paying positions (CED, 1993).

*A nonsystem.* Another major problem associated with child care is the lack of a coherent child care system. What we have in place currently is a patchwork of services, some delivered by individuals out of their homes, others operated by nonprofit and for-profit groups in a variety of settings, including church basements (CED, 1993). Few of the services are of good quality, the majority are not, and given the lack of a system, we are unable to make any improvements with any assurance that they will be implemented and sustained.

### **Toward a Realistic Solution to the Child Care Problem**

#### *The 1990 Child Care and Development Act*

Attempts to create a more coherent child care structure have resulted in calls for both lesser and greater government involvement in child care. Some groups advocate limiting the role of government to tax credits for parents (these currently exist, but their value is diminished for poor families who are not earning enough to realize benefits associated with tax credits); other argue for increased government spending and involvement in such issues as the regulation of child care facilities. These and other views were represented in the hundreds of bills introduced in Congress in recent years, which culminated in the passage of the 1990 Child Care and Development Act. In keeping with the trend toward New Federalism evidenced over the past decade, the law makes funding available to the states in the form of block grants, leaving room for interpretation and allowing allocation decisions to be made at the state level. To some extent, this represents an opportunity since each state can respond more readily to its population's needs. However, in light of the nonuniform standards for child care that exist across the United States and the diversity of services within the existing

nonsystem, this legislation does not represent any gain in terms of establishing a comprehensive, accessible, quality system of child care and family support in this country; it merely provides some additional funds.

The greatest concern is that passage of the Child Care and Development Act of 1990 may be counterproductive because while Congress has viewed it as the solution to the child care problem in this country, it really only scratches the surface. The impact the Child Care and Development Act has had in terms of better meeting existing child care needs has been negligible and the majority of states continue to have insufficient funds to address even basic needs for child care subsidies (Blank, 1994). For example, the law targets 75% of the block grant funding to serve low income families. Prior to the enactment of the law, California was able to provide subsidies for the care of approximately 25% of the low income children in need of care. With funding from the Child Care and Development Act, estimates indicate that these programs serve approximately 30% of low income families. Although an increase, the funding still falls far short of meeting the needs of all low income families.

There is an additional problem with the law. Twenty-five percent of the funds appropriated were targeted to be spent by states on enhancing school-based early childhood programs and school-age child care. In states such as California and Pennsylvania where child care funds are administered by the Department of Education, schools have been able to access this money and implement services. However, in the majority of states child care is administered by social services departments and there have been difficulties creating appropriate linkages to the education department or the local school districts, so in many cases, schools are reporting that they have no access to support through the 25% set aside in Child Care and Development Block Grant.

### *Guiding Principles for a System to Support Families*

It is clear that while the 1990 Child Care and Development Act is a step in the right direction, it has not resulted in the establishment of a comprehensive child care system. Given the scope of the child care problem, we need not only a comprehensive system, but also a policy that is developed on the basis of what we know from child development research on the needs of children and the programs that can successfully meet these needs.

Toward this end, several guiding principles have been identified as necessary for developing an effective child care system (Zigler, 1987). First, the system must provide universal access to quality child care by subsidizing middle and lower income families with a sliding scale parental fee system, in addition to providing direct subsidies through federal, state, and/or local funding. Second, child care must promote the optimal development of children and should focus on all domains of development, including physical, social, emotional, and cogni-



tive. Third, child care must be predicated on a partnership between parents and providers. Successful programs, such as Head Start, have demonstrated that much of their success can be attributed to the active participation of parents in the services provided to their children (Zigler & Muenchow, 1992; Zigler & Valentine, 1979).

The fourth guiding principle underscores the crucial role providers have in the quality of care children receive, and calls for recognition and support of child care providers through training, the provision of benefits and pay upgrades. Fifth, based on the need to appreciate the heterogeneity of children and parents and their differing needs for child care and support, any child care policy must ensure a flexible system that is adjustable to the needs of families and available to families on a voluntary basis.

Finally, we must build a stable, reliable, good quality child care system that is integrated with the political economic structure of society and is tied to a recognized and easily accessible societal institution. The need for such a system is apparent given the lack of coherent structure in the current patchwork of child care and family support services in the United States.

### **The School of the 21st Century**

This need for a coordinated, accessible child care and family support system led to the conceptualization of the School of the 21st Century program. The program calls for implementing a child care system within the already existing educational system, where possible, making use of available school buildings. The components of the School of the 21st Century include the following: all day (matching the length of parents' workday), year-round child care for children 3–5; before and after school and vacation care for school-age children up to age 12; parent education and support from birth to age 3, based on the Parents As Teachers home visitation program; information and referral; health and nutrition; and outreach to family day care providers. These components not only ensure a comprehensive array of services for children and families, but also make possible continuity of care and support for children to provide the foundation on which subsequent learning occurs.

The strength and ultimate potential of the School of the 21st Century stems from its comprehensive nature and integration with the education system. By eliminating the distinction between child care and education, the model embraces and actualizes the notion that learning begins at birth and occurs in all settings, not just within the classroom. This guarantees the necessary consistency and enrichment opportunities for children to realize their academic potential.

In a School of the 21st Century, the school is no longer seen as a building in which formal schooling is delivered during limited hours. Instead, the school becomes a place where formal schooling, child care, and family support occur

together. The formal school operates, for example, from eight in the morning to three in the afternoon, nine months of the year. However, the school building is open from six or seven in the morning to six in the evening, twelve months a year to provide core child care and family support services. Existing school and community programs, such as Head Start, other preschool or after-school services, programs serving children with special needs, and so forth become a part of the School of the 21st Century, which enables coordination of services, activities, and resource sharing.

### *Implementation Issues*

The School of the 21st Century has been implemented in over 400 schools in 13 states. Although schools in a variety of urban, rural, and suburban communities have successfully implemented the School of the 21st Century, there are several issues associated with implementing the program. One concerns who operates the program. Given that professional educators, principals, and teachers are already overburdened and working tirelessly to enhance or just maintain the quality of schools, it is not appropriate to expect them to take on the responsibility of operating child care and family support services. Also, most school personnel do not have the training or expertise required in working with young children and their families. Instead, in the School of the 21st Century, services are headed by a person with a degree and training in early childhood education. The day-to-day care of children in the program is handled by staff trained in early childhood, child development, or related field, with provisions made for ongoing staff development (Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy, 1992).

Another implementation issue concerns program funding. The ideal situation would call for the public to assume responsibility for supporting a system of child care, as is done for public education. However, in the current context, funding must be provided by parents, employers, taxpayers, or some combination thereof. Within this funding arrangement, it is important to acknowledge that, given the high cost of providing services of high quality, subsidies by all levels of government must be available, particularly for the working poor.

From a policy perspective, it is essential to approach the School of the 21st Century as an investment in human capital, not as a cost to be assessed in terms of present value. The long-term benefits school districts and society stand to realize by investing in this program are detailed in the Cornell consortium's analysis of several major early childhood education efforts. These studies reveal numerous benefits associated with early education, including improved grade retention rates, reduced use of special education and other special services, fewer graduates on welfare, increased rates of college attendance, and decreases in delinquency and social problems (Berrueta-Clement et al., 1984; Lazar & Darlington, 1982). In terms of costs and benefits, a conservative estimate indicates

that for approximately every dollar invested in high quality, developmentally appropriate preschool programs, a subsequent seven dollar savings will be realized (Barnett, 1992).

Currently, the school districts that have implemented School of the 21st Century programs finance the program in a variety of ways. Generally, schools need startup funds to support renovations and purchase of materials and the operation of the program for the first year, and the majority of schools have been able to secure startup funds from community foundations and corporations or from enabling legislation (in Kentucky and Connecticut). After the first year, programs can operate and even make a profit (which is put into the program to support various components and staff training) on the basis of parental fees for the child care services. These are based on a sliding scale schedule. In cases of low income children, arrangements for public subsidies must be made or, as some schools have done, a consortium of corporations in the area near the schools donate money to a scholarship fund that is used to offset tuition costs for needy families.

In Connecticut, legislation enacted in 1988 to implement three demonstration programs was broadened in 1989 and now includes 18 schools that operate Family Resource centers, an alternate name for Schools of the 21st Century. In Kentucky, the program is part of the School Reform Act of 1990, which provided funding for the development of Family Resource and Youth Services Centers, phasing these into school districts over a five year period.

In all existing and future School of the 21st Century and Family Resource Centers sites, once the programs are implemented, operational costs are covered through parental fees for child care services on a sliding scale based on family income. In addition, arrangements for federal and state subsidies have to be made for low income families. Collaborating with Head Start programs, including special education children, and using Chapter One funds are among some of the ways that schools have been able to expand the scope and reach of the program once it is implemented. Several other schools have become Medicaid Case managers and this has enabled them to realize a profit that is then put into the operation of the program (Lubker, 1995).

An important aspect of the School of the 21st Century is that the programs are expected to respond to the individual needs of the communities in which they are implemented. Therefore, to a certain extent, implementation varies by site depending on existing services and resources. Individually, some of the services included may already exist in some form in school districts. Many schools, for example, sponsor school-age child care programs and child care programs for preschool children are available, albeit in inadequate supply, in most communities. Therefore, it is not necessary for all school districts to initiate a whole new set of services. Rather, the program can be fashioned to implement needed services and serve as the hub to coordinate new services with preexisting ser-

vices. The goal for implementation is to maximize resources, ensure quality programming, and provide parents with the broadest possible selection of services to meet their individual needs. A prerequisite to planning the implementation is a needs assessment and organizational audit that establishes areas of priorities and provides direction for implementation (Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy, 1992; Miller, 1993).

Although there are differences in the way the School of the 21st Century approach is implemented in each site, in order to facilitate replication, all existing and future Schools of the 21st Century must adhere to the guiding principles described above and share the common goal of providing good quality, developmentally appropriate care that is accessible to all families who want and/or need the services. Certain variables, such as program quality, staff training, and the level of commitment of all school district personnel, affect the performance of the School of the 21st Century (Finn-Stevenson, Ward, & Raver, 1990). Therefore, school districts interested in implementing the model are required to follow implementation guidelines developed by the Yale Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy. In addition, district personnel, ranging from superintendents to child care staff, are required to receive training on implementing and operating the program.

Even though the School of the 21st Century has been successfully implemented in a variety of sites, there has been some opposition to the development of these programs. Opponents have argued, for example, that the school is not a suitable place for young children since schools may provide an academically oriented program that could be inappropriate for young children (National Black Child Development Institute, 1988). Studies indicate that "highly academic environments have little benefit for children's academic skills, may dampen creative expression, and may create some anxiety" (Hirsh-Pasek, 1991). However, the potential for such an academic orientation exists not only in school-based settings, but also in other child care and early intervention settings (Marx & Seligson, 1988; Mitchell, 1988). School-based programs such as the School of the 21st Century can prevent this problem by stressing the need for a developmentally appropriate curriculum (e.g., child-directed and based on cooperative play experiences), hiring staff with backgrounds in child development and early childhood education, and ensuring ongoing staff training.

Others have argued that schools do not have the space for school-based child care and family support services. While this may be true in some districts, accommodations such as modular buildings are being made by school districts committed to implementing the program. In addition, many school boards are taking child care needs into consideration as they develop long-term plans for space allocation. In the Province of Ontario in Canada, a law requires each school district that is building a new school to make provisions for child care services, and this policy is being adopted by many schools in this country.

Also, turf issues have arisen concerning the School of the 21st Century. Child care providers fear that schools will eventually take over the child care business. Of course, the likelihood of this happening is negligible since school-based child care programs like the School of the 21st Century operate on parental fees for service and are voluntary. In addition, one of the goals for the program is for the school district to serve as the hub of service coordination and to optimize resources, not duplicate services. The idea is to offer parents the broadest range of good quality services possible, including school-based, as well as an array of community options, such as family and center day care. In communities where the School of the 21st Century has been implemented and in operation for several years, we have not found that community-based good quality child care is driven out of business.

Finally, there appears to be such a demand for child care services that school-based programs cannot possibly replace that which already exists; rather, they will provide another option for parents. Many parents who have trouble finding child care are grateful for the school-based programs available in their community. Needs assessments and national surveys further indicate that many parents would like to see their schools offer such programs.

### *Evaluation*

To understand how the School of the 21st Century is operating in school districts and what effects the program is having on children, families, and school districts, the Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy has been evaluating the program in several sites since 1989. While the Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy is not an unbiased party with respect to the program, efforts have been made to design an objective evaluation that has been reviewed by several nationally prominent experts in child care and evaluation.

Results of the evaluation are, as yet, preliminary; nevertheless, they indicate that the program is working and parents are satisfied with the convenience, location, and quality of the program. For example, in one school district, 67% of the 221 surveyed who use the school-age services and 72% of the 141 surveyed who use the preschool child care report using the program for convenience and quality. More than 19% of these school-age program parents and 41% of these preschool parents reported enrolling their children because the program is operated by the school district (Finn-Stevenson & Linkins, 1992). Preliminary analyses further indicate that the School of the 21st Century may be associated with overall academic gains as well.

There appear to be other benefits associated with the program. In one district, where the program has been in operation since 1988, an advisory committee comprised of school principals, district officials, teachers, 21st Century staff, and PTA members oversees the operation of the program. Efforts are made

to ensure that the School of the 21st Century services are not simply “added on” to the school, but rather fully integrated with overall district operations so that the program is now a necessary and expected ingredient of the school system (Finn-Stevenson & Linkins, 1992; Finn-Stevenson et al., 1990).

Even more impressive has been the program’s impact on children’s educational achievement. Children in 21st Century schools have significantly higher achievement scores than do the children in demographically matched control schools that do not have 21st Century services. Within 21st Century schools, children who receive 21st Century services evidence higher achievement than the children in the same schools not receiving the services (Finn-Stevenson & Chung, 1995).

These evaluation results are preliminary, but they suggest that 21st Century services have a positive impact on children, that it is possible for schools to successfully implement child care and family support services in the public schools, and that parents favor such endeavors. Our results also indicate that child care and family support services can become an integral part of the school and the school can serve as the hub for the delivery and coordination of a system of services for children and families.

Through the process of evaluating several 21st Century schools, we have also been able to identify some problems school districts incur as they implement the program. For instance, successful implementation (defined as implementing at least five of the core components and coordinating them within the existing school system) is dependent on the extent to which the superintendent, principals, and teachers are committed to the program. In the districts where this multilevel commitment has not been present, the implementation process has been difficult and complicated. For example, turf issues have arisen over identifying suitable space within the schools for the school-based child care programs.

Another implementation problem concerns the issue of staffing. Surveys of School of the 21st Century staff indicate that, as for any child care program, hiring staff trained specifically in the area of child development or early childhood education can be difficult. To address this issue, the school districts provide training, either on-site or through local community colleges, to their staff and implement “career ladders,” which encourage staff to acquire additional training.

To date, the efforts to implement Schools of the 21st Century are proving successful and constitute a good start for developing the program on a wider scale. Although much of the implementation can be characterized as emerging at the grassroots level, many states are paying serious attention to broader state- and nationwide child care problems. For example, through funding under the A+ program, Hawaii is providing before- and after-school programs in every school. Also, as noted earlier, both Connecticut and Kentucky have funded the implementation of 21st Century Schools in the form of Family Resource Centers. Legislative efforts like these, coupled with local level initiatives, are fueling the

momentum in this country to develop a comprehensive strategy to address the needs of families (Tirozzi, 1995). Many other school reform initiatives have also included the School of the 21st Century, thus expanding its scope and underscoring the educational value inherent in the program. One example, is the link with 21st Century schools, developed by Edward Zigler and the School Development Program, developed by James Comer. The linked initiative, known as CoZi (for Comer/Zigler) Community School, has been successfully implemented in several school districts (Finn-Stevenson & Stern, 1995). A similar collaboration is being planned between the 21st Century schools and Robert Slavin's Success for All program.

Given the current political-economic climate, it is clear that developing and implementing a comprehensive child care system may need to be regarded as a state rather than a federal responsibility. Such a stance would not be without precedent since child care, like education, is not mentioned in the Constitution. Therefore, as with public education, child care could be perceived as a state and local responsibility. Of course, in this scheme, the federal government would still have a role to play, namely to subsidize the cost of care for low income children and children with developmental disabilities.

The School of the 21st Century represents the fruit of more than a quarter of a century of thought on this matter. To meet the changing needs of families in this country adequately, education reform must be concerned with both the early childhood years and nonclassroom settings children experience. High quality child care must be institutionalized and available to every child requiring substitute care. The future of this country and our ability to compete in the world depend in great part upon the degree to which American children achieve their potential within the education system. The School of the 21st Century and programs like it represent viable strategies for creating a comprehensive system that enables the education system to support children and families better.

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