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CHANGING *schools*

Early childhood education: *Quality counts*

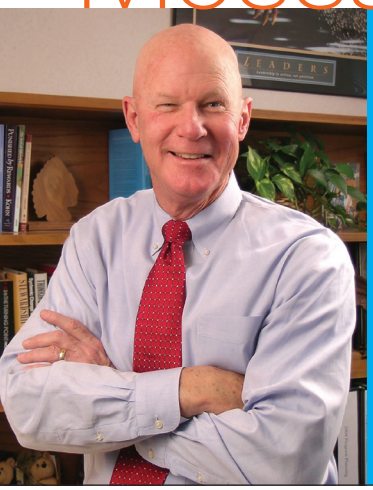
Leadership and policy for success

Breaking down the benefits of early childhood education

Preschool and the Common Core

McREL
Non-profit education research and development

Message from the CEO



Universal preschool access for every child in America. It's a lofty goal, announced by President Obama at the State of the Union address earlier this year and included in the Administration's 2014 budget priorities.

Policymakers and practitioners are more focused than ever on the importance of preschool, even as we debate its long-term benefits. Proponents of expanding access to early childhood education (ECE) programs point to findings from studies such as the HighScope Perry Preschool Study in Michigan, the Carolina Abecedarian Project in North Carolina, and the Chicago Longitudinal Study in Illinois as evidence of the long-term educational and societal benefits of investing in early childhood education. Critics claim flaws, overestimations, and shortcomings in those same studies, and point to findings from other studies that indicate the early academic benefits of preschool seem to fade within a few years.

Will giving more young children access to ECE programs lead to higher levels of student success? Not necessarily. It depends on program quality and access. Increasing access and improving quality are the basis for the administration's proposed Preschool for All program.

In support of the president's plan, the White House website cites an estimate from the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development that just 30 percent of U.S. four-year-olds are enrolled in *high-quality* programs that prepare those children with the skills they need for kindergarten. There is good news, however, as commitment to high-quality early childhood education programs gains momentum at the federal, state, and local levels. In fact, eligibility for federal Early Learning Challenge grants requires that states have quality rating systems in place.

What does it take to ensure high-quality early childhood programs? In this issue of *Changing Schools*, we review research and policies on effective early childhood education, and explore the importance of students' developing "self-regulation" skills at an early age. We take a look at the role of leadership in improving the quality of Head Start programs in Phoenix. We provide insights on keeping preschool playful while also preparing preschoolers for the increased academic standards they'll encounter in kindergarten and elementary school. We wrap things up with lessons learned at the preschool level about engaging parents.

By improving quality and creating connections between preschool and elementary school (and beyond), we can ensure that early childhood education is not just universal but universally beneficial.

To learn more about how McREL can help your school, district, or agency design, develop, implement, and evaluate high-quality early childhood education programs, visit www.mcrel.org.

CONTENTS

Breaking down the benefits of early childhood education

By Kirsten Miller

Imagine that you've just been offered a position as an airline pilot. You arrive at the airport for your first day on the job, but there's a problem: Though you know what planes look like, understand their general function, and have maybe even flown in one a time or two, you have no idea how to fly one yourself.

For some children, entering school on the first day of kindergarten is a lot like that. School preparedness can vary significantly from child to child, and at-risk students, such as children living in poverty, may be less prepared to succeed in school than their more-advantaged peers.

The benefits of quality early childhood education are well-documented. So what exactly are they, and what do program administrators need to think about in order to implement high-quality programs?

Program quality

According to the National Education Association (NEA) (2010), a high-quality early childhood education program should include the following five components.

- It provides a well-rounded curriculum that supports all areas of development.
- It appropriately assesses children for the purposes of guiding instruction, enhancing student learning, and identifying concerns.
- It addresses child health, nutrition, and family needs as part of a comprehensive service network.
- It provides small class sizes and low teacher-child ratios.
- It employs well-educated, adequately paid teachers (NEA, 2010, p. 1)

It sounds intuitive, and the research supports it: Program quality matters. A seminal study of childcare led by researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill found that high-quality childcare programs positively affected children's skills in language and math as well as behavior—all of which the authors link to school readiness (Peisner-Feinberg et al., 1999).

School readiness

A study of a universal pre-kindergarten program in Oklahoma found that "well-designed universal pre-K program[s] can produce impressive improvements in school readiness" (Gormley, 2007, p. 9). Oklahoma offers voluntary pre-K program for all four-year-olds in the state. The program is public school-based and requires all lead teachers to hold a college degree and a certification in early childhood; in addition, teachers receive the same salaries as other public school teachers in the state (Gormley, 2007)—a minimum of $31,600/year (Oklahoma State Department of Education, n.d.), versus the median national preschool teacher salary of $25,700/year (United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.). The study examined the effects of the program in Tulsa, which is the state's largest school district and has a diverse student population, allowing the researchers to estimate impacts on subgroups as well as on the student population as a whole. Overall, the students participating in the study had a 52 percent gain in pre-reading skills, a 27 percent gain in pre-writing skills (i.e., spelling), and a 21 percent gain in pre-mathematics skills (Gormley, 2007). Disaggregated results by subgroup found particularly strong gains for Hispanic students, with a 79 percent gain in pre-reading skills, a 39 percent gain in pre-writing skills, and a 54 percent gain in pre-mathematics skills (Gormley, 2007). Benefits were also higher for economically disadvantaged students, as measured by free- and reduced-price lunch (Gormley, 2007).

Benefits strongest for at-risk children

As suggested by the Tulsa study, the benefits of early childhood education seem to be strongest for at-risk children. An evaluation of the impacts of the Early Head Start program identified five demographic

risk factors for families participating in Early Head Start (in addition to low income, which is a participation requirement): single-parent household, receiving public assistance, being neither employed nor in school or job training, being a teenage parent, and lacking a high school diploma or GED (Love et al., 2002, p. 9). The evaluation documented wide-ranging benefits to both children and their families, including positive impacts on cognitive, language, and social-emotional development (Love et al., 2002). The effects of participation weren't limited to the students: The evaluation also reported positive impacts on parenting, including employment levels and father involvement(Love et al., 2002). The higher the risk level, as measured by the five demographic risk factors, the greater the outcome: Effects were strongest for families who had at least three of the five risk factors measured (Love et al., 2002).

Impacts over time

Some research suggests that quality early childhood education creates a short-term bounce in academic outcomes that diminishes over time—often referred to as the "fadeout effect." Interestingly, for students who participate in high-quality programs, the fadeout effect may be temporary. Results from the HighScope Perry program, a two-year early childhood program for at-risk three- and four-year-olds in Ypsilanti, Michigan, indicated an initial bump in participant IQ scores, which seemed to level off within a few years (Schweinhart & McGee, 2011). But when students reached the age of 14, their scores shot back up—and more of them graduated high school, as compared to the control group (Schweinhart & McGee, 2011). Similar effects, including increased graduation and college attendance rates and lower levels of incarceration, have been found for the Head Start program (Garces, Thomas, & Currie, 2002).

Parting thoughts

Research strongly supports the benefits of early childhood education programs, and these benefits can be wide-ranging—all the way from increased school readiness to higher graduation rates and rates of employment. But it's also clear that not all early childhood programs are created equal, and that, for programs to make an impact, they need to be thoughtfully designed and implemented and staffed by high-quality professionals. When they are, the impact on children and the world around them is not only substantial, but quantifiable: Researchers for the HighScope Perry program, for example, determined that the program's initial per-pupil investment of $15,166 returned $244,812 per student in increased income and decreased special education, welfare, and incarceration costs (Schweinhart & McGee, 2011). For students, their families, and their communities, early childhood education may be one of the best investments we can make.

Kirsten Miller is a lead consultant at McREL, where she writes, edits, and supports the publication of a variety of McREL's materials. Contact her at **303.632.5632** or **kmiller@mcrel.org**.

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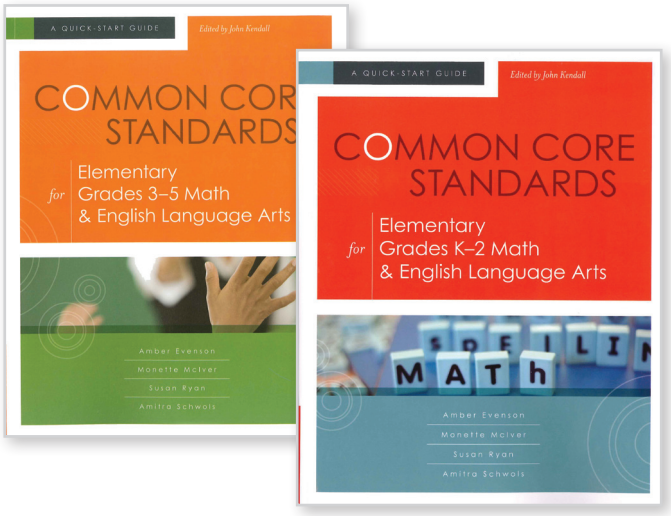

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- How the standards connect across and within strands, domains, and grade levels
- How to develop lesson plans and activities aligned to the standards

PLUS each guide contains 6 free sample lessons

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- Understanding CCSS assessment
- Formative assessment in the classroom
- Planning CCSS lessons
- Keeping kindergarten playful in the CCSS classroom
- Preparing preschoolers for the CCSS using developmentally appropriate practice
- English-language learners and the CCSS

CCSS English Language Arts (ELA)

- Understanding the CCSS ELA standards
- Understanding lesson design in the ELA standards
- Critical practices (e.g., text complexity, vocabulary, argumentation, building knowledge through non-fiction, research and writing to sources, close reading)
- Instructional coaching for CCSS ELA instruction

CCSS Mathematics

- Understanding the CCSS mathematics standards
- Understanding instruction for CCSS mathematics
- Focus on mathematical practices
- Mathematical discourse
- Instructional coaching for CCSS math instruction
- Making math content relevant—applications and modeling
- Helping students who struggle with math

Content Areas

- Critical practices (e.g., text complexity and vocabulary in the content-area classroom, content-area research and writing)
- Teaching reading in the content areas
- Integrating reading and writing in science, social studies, history, and technical subjects

Leadership

- Leading the change to the CCSS at the district level
- Leading the change to the CCSS at the school level
- Using data to monitor CCSS implementation at the school level
- Curriculum for the CCSS

Q&A

Policy considerations for ensuring high-quality pre-K programs

Bipartisan interest in early childhood education (ECE) has escalated in recent years. Thirty-nine states have now implemented statewide pre-K programs, and 14 states are working to improve early learning program quality and access as part of the federal government's $133 million Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge program.

How can early childhood policy help translate this interest into real benefits for young children? McREL's **Chief Strategy Officer Jane Best** talks about what states should consider as they endeavor to provide high-quality pre-K programs.

Q

Why is so much attention being paid to early childhood education?

A

Jane: The role of early childhood has changed dramatically in recent years, with Race to the Top, Common Core, and dialogue on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act all contributing to heightened expectations and accountability at all levels of education. And research supports that shift; we have years of studies now that show the importance of preschool in determining lifelong success—if it's done right.

Q

What's the first step for states when expanding or creating high-quality early learning programs?

A

Jane: The first thing a state should do is review its existing ECE policies. What programs currently exist? Are local, state, and federal resources currently available for existing or new programs? States also need to take a hard look at the populations currently served by ECE programs and identify barriers to access. Are kids in your state prepared to enter kindergarten? What tools currently track and measure program success and improvement and who decides the criteria for high-quality programs?

Q

Who should be involved in the process of making ECE policy?

A

Jane: States should enlist early childhood experts in all the fields that provide services to young children and their families—including physical and mental health, special needs, early interventions, and family support services—to coordinate and collaborate with on ECE strategy.

One way to facilitate such coordinated governance is to establish an early childhood advisory council to provide recommendations on such things as ECE data systems, professional development needs, and early learning standards. Additionally, some states have created ECE program offices to promote coordinated governance.

Q

What role do standards and the Common Core play in preschool?

A

Jane: Well, states need to first review their existing standards and make sure they promote consistency among ECE programs and continuity between pre-K and elementary—which, for most states, means factoring in the Common Core. However, policymakers need to be careful here to make decisions based on ECE best practices that take into account children's learning processes and age-appropriate goals and assessments, and use data effectively.

Q

How can states ensure continuity between pre-K and elementary—and beyond?

A

Jane: While there is still some debate about the long-term academic effects of preschool, any gains made in preschool will be lost if elementary teachers don't recognize and support the progress their kids have already made. Elementary teachers therefore need to be trained in pre-K practices so that they can recognize these gains, foster progress, and help prevent the positive effects of pre-K from diminishing. On the flip side, ECE teachers also need training on age-appropriate, research-based best practices so that they can monitor children's development and recognize—and intervene if necessary—when they are struggling.

It's also important that both pre-K and elementary teachers and administrators have access to and understand the data that guide education reform. If they know why a certain standard or expectation is in place, they are more likely and willing to meet that standard.

Q

How can states use data effectively with ECE populations?

A

Jane: ECE is unique in that data are collected on multiple domains—not only academic performance but also physical and mental health, special needs, early interventions, and family support services. To provide young children and their families all of the academic and human services they need, coordinated longitudinal data systems can help organize and share data. These systems track variables over a period of time and show policymakers which of those variables play the greatest role in development and school readiness, have the greatest impact on program improvement, and provide ECE professionals with the tools and support they need.

Q

What tools are available for accurately assessing young children?

A

Jane: Evaluation and assessment are critical in ensuring programs are of high quality and that standards are aligned. But pre-K is unique in that we can't rely on written tests to measure student progress. States that applied for Early Learning Challenge grants were required to design and implement an age-appropriate assessment system—or a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS).

QRIS is asystematic approach to measuring classroom quality and student progress. It can come in different forms, but it must include five components: a definition of quality standards; a process for monitoring standards; a process for supporting quality improvement; provision of financial incentives; and the dissemination of information about program quality and steps taken to improve or maintain it. QRIS ratings are based mostly on observation of the learning environment and determining whether policies that promote quality are in place. States, districts, or schools can customize their QRIS to meet specific needs of their programs.

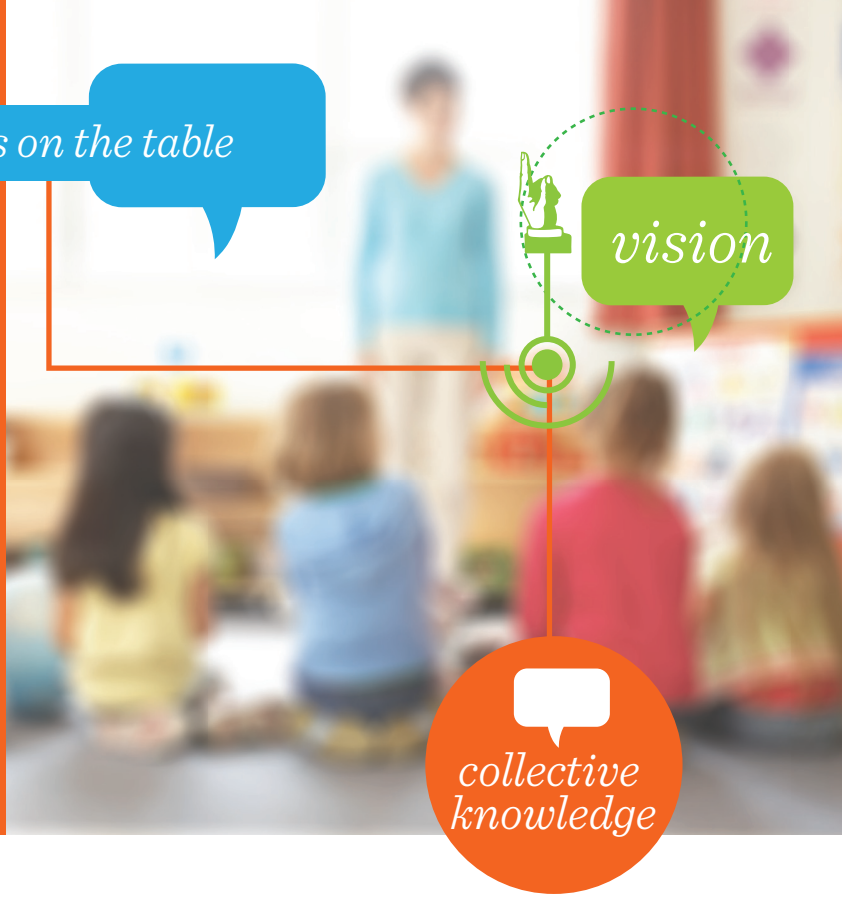
Q

The Obama administration promotes universal preschool. Do you think that will happen and what would that mean for states?

A

Jane: Many agree on the merits of universal preschool, but the controversy often centers on public financing. This is especially the case during this time of sequestration, when there is decreased federal support for early childhood education. Also, many are wondering how new universal preschool initiatives will impact K–12 curriculum, standards, and testing. That said, there is desire to have continuity across the country so that all kids, no matter what state they reside, come into school ready to learn and be successful.

Dr. Jane Best is the chief strategy officer at McREL, where she is responsible for strategic planning, government relations, and institutional development. She can be reached at **jbest@mcrel.org** or **303.632.5535**.



Sharing leadership helps one Head Start program meet rising expectations

By Heather Hein

In the past decade, no level of education has been left behind when it comes to higher expectations and increased accountability—including preschool. As awareness of the importance of high-quality preschool programs has grown, so too has the demand for high-quality administrators leading those programs.

This is particularly true in Phoenix, Arizona, where the city works in partnership with 10 delegate agencies to manage the Head Start program. The city's Human Services department has served as the Head Start grantee for the past 48 years and, because it has no direct involvement in the public school system, it has for much of that history delegated the educational component of Head Start to centers run by seven school districts and three non-profit organizations.

With multiple entities running the same program, said Patricia Nightingale, deputy director of Human Services for the City of Phoenix, leadership is "that much more important" in dealing with conflict and getting everyone on the same page—which has been a challenge for the city over the years. Previously, Nightingale said, the department saw its role as directing the delegates rather than working with them.

However, that all changed six years ago, with a new Human Services director who believed that leadership should be shared and that the quality of Head Start programs would increase with the input of center directors. The director began implementing shared leadership concepts and, though he has since left the program, the relationship between Human Services and site directors improved to the point where the group decided to bring in an outside consultant to help them finish what they and the former director had started.

Sharing a vision and agreeing on how to get there

Nightingale and Human Services established a leadership development grant and chose McREL as the service provider based on its focus on shared leadership and data-driven decision making. In the fall of 2011, Lead Consultant Craig Christopher began working with the Head Start leadership team on a three-year project aimed at improving their leadership skills.

Step one was creating a shared vision for the group, which helped give them a sense of purpose and direction. Without one, Christopher said, you end up with "a scattered response to demands." The vision included defining what "purposeful community" means to them; establishing working agreements; and ensuring that resources are directed toward collective goals for every child through sustainable partnerships.

> "There wasn't a sense of 'we're all in this together.' Agencies were more focused on themselves. Now they see themselves as united."

The team spent a good deal of time establishing structures and processes for working together. According to Christopher, things as simple as meeting agendas, getting them out to participants in advance, and assigning responsibilities for roles during meetings are critical to supporting a group's purpose—yet are often overlooked. Nightingale said the most significant work they did in this area was

to establish norms of collaboration on how to operate, which helped to address the issues they had with absenteeism and disagreements about decisions.

For example, one issue the group had was too many "parking lot discussions." People on the team wouldn't speak up at meetings but would then go out of the room and have side conversations about what they were thinking or what they weren't happy about. The norm "putting ideas on the table" helped the group agree to speak up, knowing that they weren't all going to agree but that they would be respectful of each other's ideas. Also, "presuming positive intentions" was a norm that helped group members to understand that even if they had different opinions, they all had the best intentions. "We all care deeply about the children we serve," said Nightingale, "so even if we disagree with how we get there, we're all looking out for the kids in the end."

The norms of collaboration were particularly important, Christopher said, because one of the group's biggest challenges was a lack of collaborative effort between the grantee and the delegate agencies. "There wasn't a sense of 'we're all in this together.' Agencies were more focused on themselves," he said. "Now they see themselves as united."

Christopher introduced the concepts of purposeful community and shared leadership—both of which have strengthened the team members' ability to support each other. "In this day and age, no matter where you are on the pre-K–12 spectrum, expectations, demands, and accountability are extremely high," he said. "To expect one person at each site to take on that entire load is daunting and can be paralyzing."

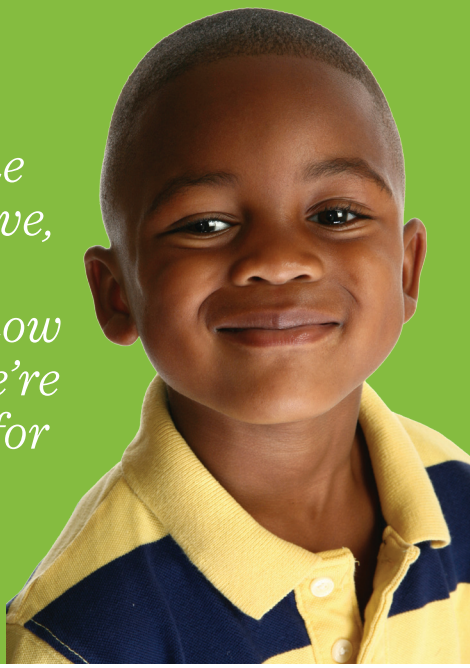
The first year went better and faster than Nightingale expected, which she attributes to the fact that the group was "mentally ready" for the work. Several of the leadership team members had been Head Start students themselves, Christopher pointed out, and then became Head Start parents and eventually Head Start staff. "They are truly invested in the children there," he said. While the demographics of Phoenix have changed immensely over the years, the directors identify greatly with the city, the neighborhoods, and the schools.

Taking it to the sites

At the end of the first year, the team started to realize that to make an impact on child outcomes, they would need to take what they were learning to the site level. Because each delegate agency is unique, Nightingale said, they arranged for Christopher to conduct site visits 2–3 times a year in the second year of work.

The group continued to work on elements of shared leadership and purposeful community and dug deeper into data-driven decision making. Head Start amasses data three times a year on what students know and are able to do—but centers don't always know what to do with it. Christopher helped center directors understand

"We all care deeply about the children we serve, so even if we disagree with how we get there, we're all looking out for the kids in the end."



and organize the data so that they could identify areas needing improvement. For example, the data revealed some inconsistency in how students are assessed across sites and within sites; as a result, the directors are now providing more training for teachers and setting standards and expectations for inter-rater reliability. "The data are now really informing their decision making," said Christopher, and he predicts that the result will be "some nice growth for children."

In the second year, Christopher also began modeling for the team how to apply what they had learned about structures and processes, shared leadership, and purposeful community to their individual center goals. For example, he modeled how a professional learning community can address goals for school readiness. Going forward, they will continue cementing the structures and processes in place so that the sites themselves can sustain the work that's been done. The group is also planning to use its data to focus on effective instructional strategies and interventions.

Despite challenges brought on by sequestration and budget cuts, Nightingale said they are committed to better outcomes for everyone. She now sees more "collective knowledge coming together" and directors communicating and collaborating better than ever.

"Fifteen years ago, Head Start was like babysitting. Kids played, they napped, and played some more," she said. "But now, people are starting to believe that the concepts in a high-quality K-12 program—concepts about management, professionalism, data-driven decision making—should be the same at the preschool level. We shouldn't be any different."

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Using developmentally appropriate practice with the Common Core for young children

By Carrie Germeroth

A classroom full of five- and six-year-olds marching, strutting, and prancing to music may not look like a place where serious learning is occurring—but it definitely looks like a place where children are engaged in an activity appropriate for their age. **Could it be both?**

Yes, if the teacher is using developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), an instructional approach based on research on how young children develop and learn. DAP includes activities that meet children where they are in terms of stage of development, both as individuals and as part of a group (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], n.d.).

The dancing kindergarten class, on closer inspection, could be learning vocabulary of movement. Perhaps they will write sentences afterward on their favorite way to move and why—or do another meaningful project that meets the Common Core language standard that states students should be able to "distinguish shades of meaning among verbs that describe the same general action (e.g., walk, march, strut, prance) by acting out the meanings."

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) present the "what" of education but not the "how." They are intended to elevate the quality of instruction, provide teachers and parents with a common understanding of student expectations, and ensure all students are college- and career-ready. While most educators agree that these goals are commendable, the attainment of the latter depends entirely on how the standards are implemented—at any grade level.

The issue of implementation is particularly thorny for the early childhood community (birth–age 8), as educators try to balance preparing young children for the increased rigor to come while staying true to what research says is more important for young children: time for play, the arts, and developing communication and executive function skills.

DAP helps educators maintain that balance. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) provides guidance to educators of young children on developmentally appropriate practice (and offers a number of resources on their website: www.naeyc.org/). NAEYC provides three core considerations (see below) which should inform, whenever possible, the instructional decisions that early childhood teachers make.

DAP should be the approach for meeting curriculum goals, embedding assessment in appropriate activities, and meeting the CCSS. To illustrate how DAP can be used to implement the CCSS, consider the example of the instructional strategy of Buddy Reading on the next page.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice: 3 Core Considerations

1

KNOWING ABOUT CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING.
We must know what the typical development of children is in each domain. This knowledge should be based on research to help teachers decide what is most appropriate to help children grow and learn.

2

KNOWING WHAT IS INDIVIDUALLY APPROPRIATE.
Children must be considered as individuals first. Care and education decisions should be made by authentically assessing children's learning through activities such as play or interactions with peers and the environment. Instructional decisions are also made by being responsive to the interests and development of each child.

3

KNOWING WHAT IS CULTURALLY IMPORTANT.
Children must also be considered within their cultural values, expectations, and families. These factors influence children's learning and help teachers make more meaningful and responsive instructional decisions.

Source: Adapted from NAEYC; retrieved from http://www.naeyc.org/dap/3-core-considerations

Instructional Strategy: Buddy Reading

CCSS English language arts standards addressed:

RL .K.2, 5, 10	RF.K.1.a., 4
RI.K.2, 10	SL .K.1.a

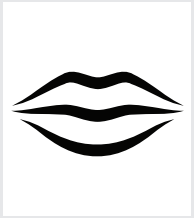
What is it?

Children are paired together and "read" books to one another. First, one reads and the other listens, then they switch roles. They use mediator cards (lips and ear) to remind them of their roles. After they read, they discuss their books. Initially, children label the pictures and later retell the story.

In a developmentally appropriate way, teachers can address several reading foundation skills as well as socio-emotional skills such as self-regulation and cooperative learning. Buddy Reading fosters expressive and receptive oral language skills while conversing with peers, book handling, print awareness, and positive social interactions with peers. Buddy Reading can be scaffolded to children's individual developmental levels, interests, and cultures, making it developmentally appropriate.

Step 1
Children pick books from tubs that are categorized and labeled. The teacher hands mediator cards (lips and ears) to pairs of children.

Step 2
The child labels pictures or retells the story when it's his or her turn to "read." The teacher gives a signal, and the children switch roles. The children talk about what they liked about the story.



Step 3
Children put books away in proper tub.

Want to learn how to implement Buddy Reading?
http://www.mcrel.org/early-childhood

Teaching to the whole child

DAP is also about understanding the developmental or learning trajectory of children. It is not enough to only understand the grade currently being taught; teachers must know what precedes learning and what comes next to apply appropriate practices. Learning trajectories have three components (see below). Research shows that when teachers understand learning trajectories and how to use them to inform instruction, they are more effective at questioning, analyzing, and providing activities that further children's development than teachers who are unaware of the development process (Clements & Samara, 2009).

Components of Learning Trajectories

- Must include a learning goal (aka: target, benchmark, expectation)
- Developmental path along which children develop to reach that goal
- Set of activities matched to each of the levels of thinking in that path that help children develop the next higher level of thinking

Source: Clements & Samara (2009)

Finally, it is important for educators to not ignore the other domains of learning necessary for school readiness. DAP recognizes that all areas of development and learning are important and interrelated. The CCSS do not address, for example, social-emotional skills, which many educators consider critical for learning. When kindergarten teachers have been asked to identify important skills for children to have as they enter school, they tend to focus on social and emotional aspects of school readiness like curiosity, enthusiasm, and turn-taking rather than more academic skills like knowledge of numbers and letters (Dockett & Perry, 2003; Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2001). It is essential as educators of young children, that we apply developmentally appropriate instructional practices for the whole child, not just for success in English language arts and mathematics, the two domains that the Common Core currently emphasizes.

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Increasing the odds of student success through self-regulation

By Kirsten Miller

It's a rare teacher who doesn't have a student or two who has difficulty staying focused and on task in the classroom. Though it can be tempting to chalk this up to something as simple as a short attention span, the real reason may be a little more complex—namely, that these students have never learned the self-regulatory strategies needed to succeed in school.

What is self-regulation? According to Zumbrunn, Tadlock, and Roberts (2011), "self-regulated learning is a process that assists students in managing their thoughts, behaviors, and emotions in order to successfully navigate their learning experiences" (p. 4). Though students' ability to self-regulate certainly can impact their behavior, self-regulation is about more than just playing well with others. Self-regulation impacts students' ability to set academic goals, willingness to persist through challenges, and their ability to sustain their efforts over time (Baumeister, Schmeichel, & Vohs, 2007)—all of which can affect their ability to succeed in school. In a national survey, a representative sample of kindergarten teachers noted that the following skills (all tied to self-regulation) are critical to school readiness:

- Communicate needs, wants, and thoughts verbally
- Sustain attention and be enthusiastic and curious in new activities
- Inhibit impulsivity and follow directions
- Take turns and be sensitive to other children's feelings (Blair, 2003, p. 1)

Given the need to focus on standards, instruction, assessment, and a host of other responsibilities, teaching self-regulation strategies might come in low on teachers' priority lists. But a lack of self-regulation can begin to adversely impact student success as early as preschool. Preschool expulsion rates have become a national issue; the rate of expulsion in state-funded pre-K programs, for example, is three time higher than national expulsion rates in kindergarten through 12th grade (Gillam, 2008). And though we don't know whether preschool expulsions are directly linked to later schooling issues, we do know that an ability to self-regulate can positively impact students' later academic success. Self-regulatory skills in preschoolers, for instance, can predict their later SAT scores (Shoda, Mischel, & Peake, 1990) and reading and mathematics achievement (Blair & Razza, 2007).

Fostering self-regulation in early childhood

The early childhood years provide a prime window for impacting children's self-regulatory skills. Self-regulatory skills can be reinforced during children's everyday activities (Florez, 2011), particularly through play (Germeroth & Day-Hess, in press). As Germeroth and Day-Hess note, most preschool curricula focus on broad content themes that can be developed into more specific play themes tailored to children's interests (for example, playing "ocean," "aquarium," or "underwater explorers" during a "Wind and Water" theme).

During play, preschoolers can have fun and use their imaginations, but also have a chance to practice following rules, which is a critical part of the ability to self-regulate (Germeroth & Day-Hess, in press). Germeroth and Day-Hess recommend that make-believe play include the following characteristics to support self-regulation:

- Create an imaginary situation
- Take on and act out roles
- Follow a set of rules determined by specific roles

Fostering self-regulation in later school years

Though influencing children's self-regulation skills may be easier in the early childhood years, all is not lost in the later grades. As children continue to develop their ability to self-regulate, the scaffolding provided by teachers should gradually be withdrawn, allowing students to practice and apply self-regulation with fewer supports from the teacher. In the early elementary years, games are one way to encourage students to play by the rules, persist through difficulties, and develop resilience when they lose (Germeroth & Day-Hess, in press).

Games to support self-regulation should:

- Have mandatory rules and norms
- Offer practice for academic content while still being motivated socially
- Not reinforce guessing and trial and error
- Not focus on winning if winning is due to chance
- Require behaviors that are planned and monitored during play
  (Germeroth & Day-Hess, in press)

In the later elementary, middle, and high school years, students' peer groups become increasingly important and influential. By using well-designed collaborative learning strategies, teachers can kill two birds with one stone, supporting students' learning while at the same time fostering self-regulation (Webb & Palinscar, 1996).

Collaborative learning "support[s] self-regulation because peers model and discuss their own learning and motivation strategies, which are then distributed across the group for individuals to pick up and modify to suit their own needs" (Duckworth, Akerman, MacGregor, Salter, & Vorhaus, 2009, p. 29). Group work allows students to learn "to set goals and plan ahead, identify or even develop new learning strategies, carry out and reflect on the success of their plan and strategy, and if necessary, modify these strategies" (Germeroth & Day-Hess, in press). During group work, students demonstrate higher levels of persistence and self-efficacy and better problem-solving skills during challenging tasks (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1998).

The good news is that self-regulation isn't an inherent skill; it's not something that students either have or don't. Though teaching students how to self-regulate may seem daunting, weaving these strategies and supports throughout regular classroom instruction can have long-lasting impacts on students.

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What early childhood teaches us about parent engagement

By Crystal Day-Hess

Anyone working with students, of any age, knows that all of the hard work that goes into supporting students is more beneficial and more likely to show lasting effects when families take an active role in their children's education and development. The challenging part for educators is devising situations, communication, or activities that *engage*, not just involve families (Halgunseth & Peterson, 2009)—a strength of many early childhood programs.

What can we learn from the world of early childhood to engage parents at the K–12 levels?

Listen—find out what they want, need, and can contribute

To truly engage families, we need to listen to them. What do they want to know more about and how do they want to learn it? What ideas do they have in terms of their children's education? What and how can they contribute (not just time or physical or financial resources)? Early childhood programs often get the answers to these, and many other questions, by conducting home visits with families, and continuing this type of two-way communication consistently throughout the year.

A way to get this information in K–12 grades is to develop and conduct a needs and assets inventory with families at the beginning of the school year—and use it! By finding out what parents want and need and what they view as their strengths, you can be in a prime position to develop useful and relevant opportunities to engage them, using both school/program and family resources to their fullest extent. Keep in mind that it's imperative to take families' cultural background into consideration when developing such opportunities. Offering communications to families in their home languages, for example, not only allows families to stay apprised of what's happening in their children's schools and what their children are learning, but it also sends the message that they're valued members of the school community.

Communicate—provide them with information and updates, and allow them to do the same

In the pre-K setting, families and teachers communicate with each other in one form or another on a regular basis, and not just when something has gone wrong or only during parent-teacher conferences. Face-to-face communication is always important, but given the busy schedules of many families and teachers, many early childhood teachers have developed creative ways to maintain this communication.

For example, a relatively low-cost, low-time way to keep families in the loop is to take photos of what students are doing throughout the day or week and post them to a secure photo sharing site that families can access. Also, teachers can provide brief prompts for parents to ask students to expand on what they learned that day or week. In addition to the more traditional printed or e-mailed newsletters, classroom blogs are an easy way to keep families informed and engaged. While teachers of children in the early grades may need to write the bulk of the blog, they can also have students write blog posts on a weekly or monthly basis—which has the extra "bonus" of getting children to reflect on what they've been learning and doing. A blog also provides a quick, easy way for families to comment and ask questions about what's going on in the classroom.

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Collaborate—work with families to develop strong school/program-family partnerships

In many ways, the success of early childhood programs depends on the collaborative relationships they form with families. When families see that their feedback and ideas are valued and incorporated into their children's education, they feel empowered and confident as advocates for their children. One key way to foster this type of relationship is allowing families to participate in decision making and planning for their children. In most early childhood programs, families and teachers work together to create learning plans for all students, revisiting and revising them across the year.

Pre-K teachers acknowledge that families are their children's first teachers. Teachers often give parents information to create and sustain learning activities at home, helping to create a home environment that values learning. Many early childhood centers also offer classes or information sessions for parents about child development and parenting, to reinforce that teachers and families are on the same page. As children get older, teachers can offer occasional meetings for families about upcoming events or host an open house or event (e.g., an art show, music showcase, play, student presentations) where families can see what students are learning and doing.

Resources for parent engagement

U.S. Department of Education – Parent and Family Engagement
http://www.ed.gov/parent-and-family-engagement

Administration for Children and Families
https://www.childwelfare.gov/famcentered/casework/engagement.cfm

CA Family Engagement Framework
http://www.wested.org/online_pubs/cpei/family-engagement-framework.pdf

Harvard Family Research Project
http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement

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