# Leaving *Too Many* Children Behind

A Demographer's View on the Neglect of America's Youngest Children

**Harold L. Hodgkinson**

Institute for Educational Leadership

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*with the support of*

**Rockefeller Brothers Fund**
**Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation**
**Caroline and Sigmund Schott Foundation**

# *Preface*

This report represents a different venture for me, in that the demographics of the first five years of life were relatively new territory. With the project completed, the importance of quality child care has increased greatly in my outlook, both in terms of increased equity for individuals and a more productive nation. Our current efforts to promote a common "finish line" through high stakes tests is meaningless when the runners start the race from such widely differing positions. I hope this paper will contribute to the general understanding of the crucial importance of the first five years of life.

I hold complete responsibility for errors of fact or interpretation in the work. However, a number of outstanding reviewers helped to improve the quality of the publication, and it is a pleasure to acknowledge their contribution: Ed Zigler, Matia Finn-Stevenson, Annette Rickel, Gerald Tirozzi, Michael Usdan, Lisa Klein, Helen Blank, Joan Lombardi, Karen Schulman, Karabelle Pizzigati, Judy Wurtzel, and Sharon Lynn Kagan. Financial support was gratefully received from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, and the Caroline and Sigmund Schott Foundation. The Institute for Educational Leadership did its usual excellent job in producing the publication and wants to acknowledge J.P. Morgan Chase Foundation, Lockheed Martin Corporation, MetLife Foundation, and Procter & Gamble Fund for their generous general support that helps make this and other IEL activities possible.

Harold Hodgkinson
Washington, DC
April 2003

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FELLOW CITIZENS, WHY DO YOU TURN
AND SCRAPE EVERY STONE TO GATHER
WEALTH, AND TAKE SO LITTLE CARE OF
YOUR CHILDREN, TO WHOM ONE DAY
YOU MUST RELINQUISH IT ALL?

Socrates

Long before children knock on the kindergarten door—during the crucial period from birth to age five when humans learn more than during any other five-year period—forces have already been put in place that encourage some children to "shine" and fulfill their potential in school and life while other forces stunt the growth and development of children who have just as much potential. The cost to the nation in terms of talent unfulfilled and lives of promise wasted is enormous. Certainly, efforts to even the playing field from kindergarten onward are useful, but they have to begin by dealing with the deficits created in many children from birth to age five.

No common structure exists in the United States to serve all children *before* their fifth birthday, although this is the most vulnerable period in terms of the forces that can hinder or promote social, psychological, and intellectual development. Waiting until kindergarten to control these forces *is simply too late* because, at that point, they are thrust into a huge system of 15,000 school districts, 95,000 schools, over 2 million teachers, and robust structures of accreditation and quality control. A formal preschool structure is essential if we are to ensure that all children in the nation have the opportunity to fulfill their potential and truly succeed.

Using demographic data on those children captured in Census 2000—what we call the "Children's Class of 2000"—this paper examines forces like poverty and family instability and how they work to prevent equality of opportunity in school and in life. It presents some of the programs and techniques that effectively reduce the effects of these forces and concludes with recommendations for increasing the nation's concern for improving the quality of infant and child care and making high quality programs available for *all* infants and young children throughout the nation, as is done in virtually every other developed nation. I hope the reader will come to some understanding of why, in the wealthiest nation in the world, we invest such a pitifully small percentage of our resources *and our concern* in the early years of the people who will obviously inherit the nation—our youngest children.

# *II. Who Gets Born Every Year? The Children's Class of 2000*[1]

In an average year, about 3.9 million women in the United States give birth. If we look at our "class" of almost 4 million births, we find that white females give birth to 60.8 children per 1,000 women of childbearing age; black women give birth to 62.9 children per 1,000; and Hispanic women produce 84 babies per 1,000 females of childbearing age. (Note how the population becomes more diverse ethnically through time even without immigration.) By state, Utah wins the birth game by producing 93 babies per 1,000 females of childbearing age while Maine, Vermont, and New Hampshire each produce only 50 babies. By family income, the poorest families with income under $10,000 per year produce 73 births per 1,000 females while those who earn over $75,000 produce only 50 babies.

Now, we have introduced our first, and most pervasive, inhibiting force in the lives of our "class"—poverty. Poverty is a universal handicap, affecting one-third of our "class" overall; but it is by no means the only factor affecting the future of our nation's youngest citizens. The list also includes such factors as infant and child health, household income, transience, and quality of day care. So what do the demographics say about the lives—and chances—of our Children's Class of 2000?

## A. Families Into Which They Are Born

In 1999, 33% of births were to unmarried parents: 26% of white births, 68% of black births, 42% of Hispanic births, 58% of Native American births, and 5% of Asian births. This percentage is up overall from 26% in 1990. Today, due to a large increase in the number of mothers who have *never* married, the number of births to divorced and unmarried women is almost the same. For every racial/ethnic group, the child in our "class" who is being raised by a single mother is *two to three times* as likely to be raised in poverty as a child being raised by both parents.

In general, about 7% of babies have low birth weight; however, for infants born to black mothers, the proportion is 13%. That demographic has remained unchanged since 1990. Even well-educated, middle-class, black mothers produce more low birth-weight babies than the norm for all groups. Low birth weight can produce serious defects of the central nervous and immune systems, certainly qualifying as an inhibiting factor for normal, healthy infant growth. Here is *another* negative force affecting children from birth, especially black children.

About 12% of our "class" are born to teenage mothers: 10% of white births, 20% of black and Native American births, 16% of Hispanic births, and 5% of Asian births. This percentage is unchanged since 1990. Children of single or teenage mothers are subject to *multiple risks with many combinations.* Having a teen mother almost guarantees that a child will be raised in poverty; and, because the mother may not have finished high school, it is unlikely that she will read to her child, especially in infancy. It is also more likely that the language spoken in the home will not be English.

Another "new family" concerns the role of grandparents. Four million children of all ages now live with one or more grandparents, and one million children of all ages are the sole responsibility of their grandparents. An estimated 100,000 of our Children's Class of 2000 will be living with their grandparents alone. A number of factors have created this group, such as parents who are in jail, in drug rehabilitation centers, or those who simply are not capable of raising their children. The problems of raising young children when you are 65 years old are severe—yet, for many grandparents there is no alternative.

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[1] *To ensure consistency, all data in this "class" section are from the* Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2001, *the national data book of the federal government.*

The *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2002,* indicates the following family types and percentages that are raising children under 18 years old: 46% of married couples; 43% of unmarried couples; 60% of single women; 22% of gay couples; and 34% of lesbian couples. Several of these categories are new for the Census (e.g., unmarried, gay, and lesbian couples), and little is known about how many children are being raised by each type. However, many teachers report an increase in the number of children being raised by same-sex parents. Nothing is known about the success of these households in raising their children—the categories are too new to have longitudinal data. In addition, a "new family" area that will be in the Children's Class of 2000 is that of children from foreign countries who are adopted by U.S. citizens. The U.S. leads the world in the number of international adoptions, now about 20,000 each year.

This brief review of the different household conditions into which our "class" has been born shows that about one-third of them have been highly favored simply because of the family circumstances of their birth. They have done nothing to merit having the cards stacked in their favor, but they are. Another third (especially those in family situations associated with increased poverty), through no fault of their own, have the cards stacked against them. It is true that some of the "bottom third" children will have the resiliency and stamina to become successful in school and life, and some in the "favored third" will not do well, but these are exceptions. Given these *birth conditions*, the notion of waiting *five years* to begin equalizing opportunity when our "Children's Class of 2000" knocks on the kindergarten door seems like an absurdity.

## B. The Deaths of Children

There is one group of casualties, a surprisingly large group in fact, who will never even get to the kindergarten door. Infant mortality for babies under the age of 1 was 681 deaths per 100,000 in 1998. The mortality rate drops to 31 deaths per 100,000 for children ages 1 to 4; and it drops further to 16 deaths for every 100,000 children ages 5 to 14. In the first year of life, the white infant death rate is 571 per 100,000 while the rate for black infants is an amazing 1,363 per 100,000—twice the infant death rate for all groups (i.e., 681 per 100,000). The large number of low birth-weight, black babies is a contributing factor, but that fact by itself cannot explain this very high death rate for black infants. Of our full "class," 27,240 don't survive their first birthday.

Even more disturbing is a study by Child Trends (reported in *The Washington Post* in December 2002) showing that the homicide rates for Americans ages 15 to 19 was 9 per 100,000 in 2000, *exactly the same rate as for infants under age 1!* Youth homicides have been decreasing for a decade and infant homicides have been increasing for 30 years. On the day of their birth, infants are *10 times* more likely to be murdered than on any other day. Babies are more likely to be killed by the mother in the first week. After the first week, the perpetrator is usually a male, often the father or stepfather. Boy babies are murdered more often than girls, usually as a consequence of shaken baby syndrome.

Why is so much visibility given to teen homicides and so little known about the killing of our most vulnerable—children under 1 year of age? One speculation is that an individual who kills or abducts a teenager is a threat to the larger society (i.e., they could hurt *us*) while the act of killing or abducting a baby raises darker issues that are often left hidden. While teen deaths are front-page news, *invisibility* surrounds the data on infanticide.

If we look at the deaths of all children from birth to age four in 1998, we find that of the 33,622 infants and toddlers who died, 2,689 died in accidents and 721 were murdered—the two leading causes of death within that age group. Again, showing the extreme vulnerability of black, male children, their murder rate was 31.3 per 100,000 while the rate for white, male children was 8.4 per 100,000.

If we look at accidental deaths in childhood, we find a strong link to poverty. Virtually all households that have children but not telephones are in poverty-stricken and isolated areas. In Oklahoma, 15% of children have no phone at home and in New Mexico 17% are without phones. An accident can easily become a fatality if you can't dial 911 and get help. Again, household income data tell you almost everything about who will die before they can enter kindergarten. Our Children's Class of 2000 has lost thousands of members without any national concern or outcry. A majority of these 33,622 deaths could have been prevented.

## C. Population *Concentration:* States and Diversity

Census 2000 reports 19,176,000 children under age five living in the United States; however, because Hispanics are not a "race" but an ethnic group, they are usually double-counted as whites in the total. The actual number of children in our preschool total is 15.4 million. *One-third* of them live in only four states: California (2.5 million), Florida (0.9 million), New York (1.2 million), and Texas (1.6 million). These states also represent the future in terms of ethnic diversity. The total population of California is 32.4% Hispanic (not a race, an ethnic group), 10.9% Asian, 6.7% black, 1% American Indian, 16.8% "other," and 4.7% "mixed"—for a total "nonwhite" population of 72.5%. If you add Hispanic to white, the "white" population goes to 59.5%, but that is misleading.

In a little over a decade, the total number of children in the nation under age five will show no ethnic group with a *majority* of children. The same will be true of *all* Americans before the year 2045. (The term "minority majority" makes little sense, as there are very few things to which all "minorities" would agree.) The most diverse group in the United States is our youngest children, and they will make the nation more diverse as they age. Almost 9 million young people ages 5 to 17 speak a language other than English in their home and 2.6 million of them have difficulty speaking English. For our Children's Class of 2000, we could estimate that almost one-half million are being raised in families that speak no English at home, and that at least 125,000 will need special attention in preschool and kindergarten to learn to speak and read English.

## D. Population *Transience:* Enemy of Community

Of the 281 million people who live in the United States, 43 million move each year—the highest known migration level of any nation. Each year, 22% of our 15.4 million children under age five move to a different house: 14% within the same county, 4% within the same state but to a different county, and 4% to a different state. Low-income young children move more often than their middle-income peers. (See *Inequality at the Starting Gate* (Lee and Burkam, 2002), a new book from the Economic Policy Institute.)

This high level of transience makes it extremely difficult to provide services for a rapidly changing clientele. Eighty percent of the people who live in Pennsylvania were born there, making education and health care easier to provide since the client group is very stable. But in Florida, only 30% of the residents were born in the state. Large numbers of teachers may start and end the year with 24 students, but 22 of those 24 are different from the students they welcomed the first day of school. The same could be true for daycare centers. A daycare center in Pennsylvania will be a more stable place in terms of child and staff turnover than a similar center in Florida. Transience is a reality we cannot afford to ignore.

# *III. Work, Infant and Child Care, and Preschool*

In every developed nation, a majority of women are in the workforce. For our Children's Class of 2000, 75% are children who have at least one parent who works full time; 90% live in two-income households; 47% live with a single working mom; and a smaller percentage lives with single dads, 70% of whom work full time. The increasing number and percent of working mothers is generating a significant need for infant and child care for preschool children. One reason for this increase is the federal requirement that low-income mothers must work to receive anti-poverty funds. Of the 3.8 million three-year-olds in 1999, 30% were taken care of by their parents alone, 25% by relatives, and 45% by "center-based programs" including daycare centers, Head Start programs, preschools, pre-kindergartens, and nursery schools. Included in this group of preschools are 105,564 licensed child care center providers and 304,700 licensed family child care providers. (Remember that "preschool" is a *time frame and not a program.*) Some of these child care centers are located in public schools.

There is no quality control for child care, so *we don't know whether these programs are damaging children* in terms of physical, social, and intellectual development. No other developed nation would allow such an uneven hodgepodge of programs for children birth to age five. The nation *truly* is at risk.

### A. Child and Infant Care and Poverty

About one-third of our black and Hispanic children are being raised in poverty while 10% of non-Hispanic whites live in poverty. However, the largest *number* of poor children are white while the highest *percentage* of poor children are black and Hispanic. Of the 14 million children ages birth to 18 living in poverty in 2000, 9 million were white and 4 million were black. Four million Hispanics were living in poverty, but were included in both white and black totals, as Hispanics are not a "race." Regardless of race, the children in married couple families are much less likely to be poor (about 8%) while 29% of white children and 52% of black and Hispanic children who live with a single mother are likely to be poor. Almost half of these single mothers are working, usually at very low-wage jobs.

Some federal programs provide assistance for child care for low-income families. The federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) provides money to the states to fund child care assistance for low-income working families and families striving to get off welfare. In FY 2002, federal funding for the CCDBG was $4.817 billion. In addition, states are allowed to use federal funds from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant—the welfare program—to help pay for child care assistance. In FY 2001, states spent approximately $3.65 billion of their TANF funds on child care. Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) funds also can be used to support a wide variety of social services including child care assistance. In FY 2002, federal funding for the SSBG was $1.7 billion of which it is estimated 5–10% was spent on child care nationally.

But even Head Start, the most documented success story in the field, has seldom been able to reach even half of eligible children. In 2000, 858,000 children were enrolled in Head Start at an average cost of $5,951 per child. They were taken care of by 180,000 paid staff and 1.2 million volunteers. In FY 2001, funding for the program was $6.2 billion and the program served 905,000 children, including 55,000 infants and toddlers in Early Head Start. The average cost per child was $6,633. Programs employed 195,000 paid staff and relied on 1.35 million volunteers.

## B. Very Young Children at Risk—A Summary

It is important to stress that many children in our "class" have been at risk of not achieving their full potential *from the day of their birth,* if not in utero. Figure 1 contains a list of risk factors for children that are associated with poor adult outcomes. Race is not included in this list; but, it does matter. However, the most important criterion of all, without question, is *poverty.* Most of the factors listed are related to poverty, and *all* poor children, regardless of their race/ethnicity, are at risk of not fulfilling their potential.

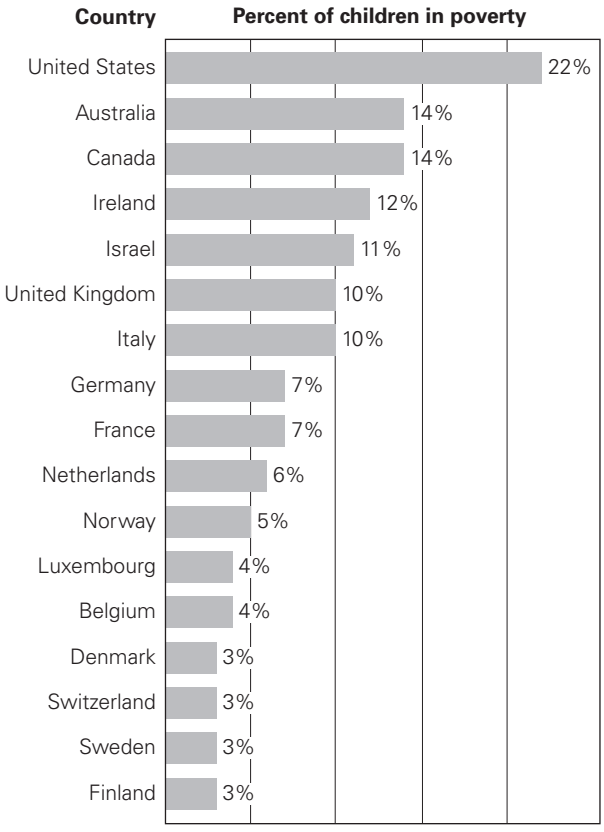
The Luxembourg Income Study of 1995 (see Figure 2) showed that although the United States is the richest nation in per capita wealth, we had the highest discrepancy relative to youth poverty rates of any of the advanced industrial democratic states (28) included the study. In 2000, 16.9% of all children in the United States were poor, while only 9.7% of people over age 65 and only 11.8% of all Americans lived in poverty. The second poorest age group in the United States in 2000—after 18- to 24-year-olds at 17.3%—was our youngest citizens, at 16.9%.

It is also important to recognize that while poverty is only one of the risks that many children are exposed to, it magnifies all other risk factors. For example, one of every six children in our Children's Class of 2000 lives with at least one parent who was born *outside the United States.* These immigrant children are much more likely to be poor, to have problems with English, to have health-risk factors, and to have educational development issues. Another frequent multiple risk combination is seen in those children who are black, male, and poor; they are more likely to be enrolled in special education programs.

FIGURE 1. Risk Factors for Young Children

- Poverty
- Infant and child mortality
- Low birth weight
- Single parents
- Teen mothers
- Mothers who use alcohol, tobacco, or drugs
- Transience
- Child abuse and neglect
- Lack of quality day care
- Low wage jobs for parents
- Unemployed parents
- Lack of access to health and medical care
- Low parent education levels
- Poor nutrition
- Lack of contact with English as the primary language

FIGURE 2. Child Poverty in 17 Developed Countries



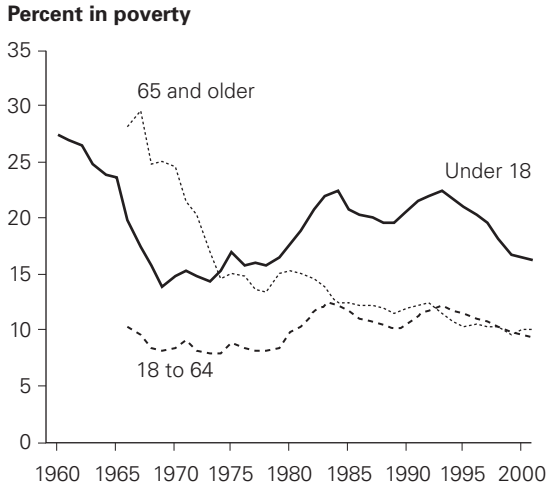

*Source:* Lee Rainwater and Timothy M. Smeeding, "Doing Poorly: The Real Income of American Children in a Comparative Perspective," Working Paper No. 127, Luxembourg Income Study (Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, Syracus, NY, 1995).

# *IV. Why So Little National Concern for our Youngest Children?*

Given the alarming data on young children at risk, why haven't alarm bells sounded? By ignoring our youngest citizens, aren't we, as a nation, eating our seed corn? Yet, the state of our nation's youngest poor remains an "invisible issue" today. Why?

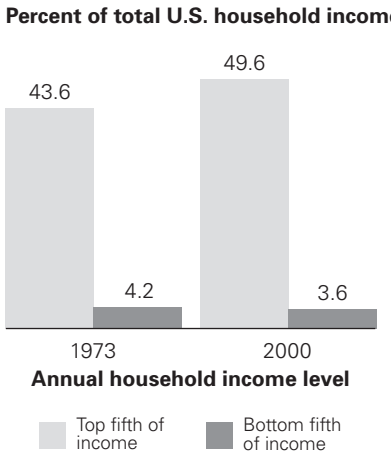
The foremost reason there is no national concern for the quality of life of our children is that most people have no regular contact with them. Of Census 2000's 105 million households, only 34 million had children under age 18.[2] These children do not vote, they do not work and generate income or taxes, so they don't have a voice. They are politically invisible. But people over 65 vote more often than anyone else. They bring their concerns to national attention. That may be why, over the last three decades, we have cut the rate of elderly poverty in half while the percentage of children in poverty has grown (see Figure 3) The percentage of seniors in poverty declined from 21.6% in 1971 to 10.1% in 2001; the percent of children in poverty rose from 15.3% in 1971 to 16.3% in 2001.

FIGURE 3. Poverty Rates by Age, 1959–2000




*Source:* U.S. Census Bureau, "Poverty Status of People by Age, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1959 to 2000" (*www.census.giv/hhes/poverty/histpov/hstpov3.html,* accessed March 29, 2002).

FIGURE 4. Total Income for Richest and Poorest Fifths of U.S. Households, 1973 and 2000




*Source:* U.S. Census Bureau, "Percent Distribution of Households, by Selected Characteristics Within Income Quintile and Top 5 Percent in 2000" (*http://ferret.bls.census.gov/macro/032001/hhinc/new06_000.htm,* accessed April 4, 2002).

## A. Increasing the Concern for Very Young Children

As this is being written in early 2003, it is clear that economic decline is affecting some people far more than others. Study after study has pointed out that there is an ever-growing gap between the people in the wealthy and poor ends of the economic divide (see Figure 4). Partly because of consistently declining state revenues, several states are unable to put up the state "match" dollars required for the Child Care and Development Block Grant funds from the federal government, thereby losing millions of dollars for child care. The kids that are getting hurt the most are those in "working poor" families whose income is just enough to make them ineligible for most state and federal poverty-based programs. There is little data on the impact on children of the millions of parents who are now unemployed. As the Children's Defense Fund found in September 2002, the number of poor children is increasing

[2] *A "household" has one or more residents unrelated by blood or marriage; a "family" has two or more people who are related by blood or marriage.*

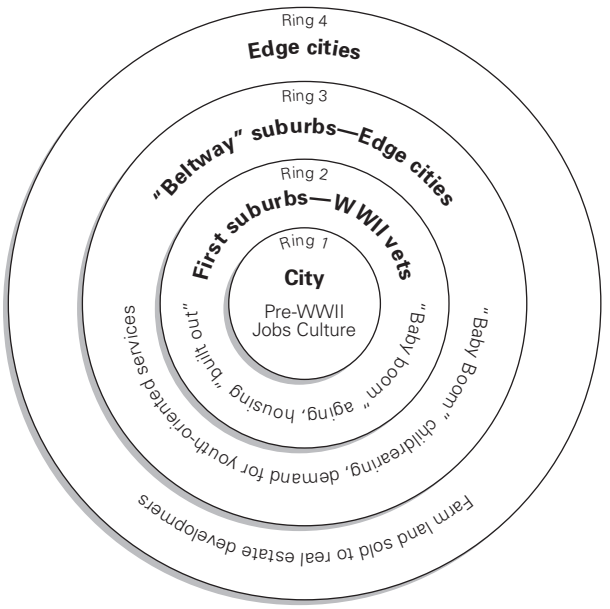
in most states while the dollars available for all child care, from infants and toddlers to pre-kindergarten, are not increasing proportionately.

## B. Changes in Where and How We Live—Census 2000

Census 2000 revealed some major changes in how we organize communities into metro areas of cities and their suburbs. About one-quarter of us live in small towns and rural areas, another quarter in big cities, and about half in suburbs, although suburban residence is increasing. In the 1990 Census, cities were home to minorities, immigrants, and poor people; inner-ring suburbs housed whites, older people, blue collar workers, those with few children and little diversity; and outer rings housed the Baby Boomers and their kids with high demand for youth services. The "edge cities" were places where no one ever went "downtown" and farmland was being sold to real-estate developers for future development (see Figure 5).

All that has changed now. Today, poverty, diversity, money, and education are spread through *all* rings of the metropolitan areas—city and suburbs. In many metro areas, a majority of black and Asian residents are living in the suburbs. Immigrants are joining their former countrymen in the suburbs. And downtown cities often are home to the wealthy who can afford to pay for the high-priced housing, entertainment, and security. (However, these people seldom have children who will attend public school.) After decades of decline, many big cities are growing. The clean distinctions of Census 1990 are replaced with the blurring of Census 2000. As we look for very young children at the greatest risk, we can no longer look only in inner cities, we must look *everywhere,* including wealthy suburbs and rural areas.

FIGURE 5. Population Movement from Metropolitan Areas as of 1990




*Note:* A majority of jobs have been created in the suburbs. Income of city workers steadily declined compared to that of suburban workers. The typical commute is from a suburban home to a suburban job. One quarter of commuters are going from a suburban home to a "downtown" job.

## C. Changes in "Race," Changes in People—Census 2000

Census 2000 has also changed our definition of who people are by race. For the first time in our history, Census 2000 allowed people to select as many racial categories as they needed to describe their racial background. As a self-proclaimed Cablinasian, Tiger Woods alone would require four categories to describe his background (CAucasian-BLack-INdian-ASIAN)! Although we have long recognized the vast differences contained *within* categories like "Asian" or "American Indian," we have assumed since the 1960s that a person who was "black" was *all black*. This assumption was probably necessary to pass the civil rights legislation of the Kennedy–Johnson era. Of the 7.9 million people who said they were "mixed race" in Census 2000, 3 million were children, the highest percentage for any age group.

Given that no two consecutive Censuses have used the same racial categories, it is time to recognize that race is not science. Knowledge of race, especially black and white, is still important politically, economically, and historically, but knowledge of nationality is more useful. The European immigrants of the 1900s are now thoroughly assimilated into the national culture. Only 15% of Europeans in the

United States today are Italians married to Italians, Germans to Germans, etc. Their great-grandchildren have lost almost all touch with the "old country" as *today's* immigrants from Asia and South/Central America are discovering with their own children and grandchildren. Blacks in the United States are not always "African American" for exactly the same reason. Haitians are a major component of the "black" population, yet they do not think of themselves as African. Race will continue to be more complex and blurred, as school leaders may have to provide for *64* racial combinations of existing U.S. Census categories to describe their students in return for federal funds!

### D. Changes in Population Age—Census 2000

We are also seeing a blurring of the traditional outlooks associated with *age.* In 1900, the average American was 21 years old and was expected to live to 47. In 2000, the average American was 37 and expected to live to 78. Census 2000 discovered that 59,000 of us were over 100 and 1.4 million of us were in our 90s. The Baby Boomers, 70 million strong and born between 1946 and 1964, will live into their 80s, and a third of them will live past 85! The onset of serious chronic disease is coming later in life, meaning that the Boomers should live their 60s and even early 70s in physical and fiscal independence. Even though most Boomers claim they will keep working after age 65—not only because hard economic times will demand it, but because they like to work and don't plan to give anything up—only time will tell.

Clearly, age 65 will not remain the economic, psychological, and geriatric watershed it has been in the past. Currently, about 13% of our citizens are over 65, but 70 million Boomers are poised on the edge. As they turn 60, then 65, their interest in youth and education may decrease. If they vote their self-interest, why would they support the expansion of Head Start and child care legislation to include all eligible children? The large concern about prescription drugs for the elderly, virtually the only health care issue with visibility in the months before the 2002 elections, makes clear the power of the vote and the lack of interest in the health care of those who don't vote—especially our youngest citizens.

## *V. Health Care, Nutrition, and Small Children*

According to the World Health Organization (June 20, 2000) the United States ranks 24th in life expectancy and 32nd in *variation in life expectancy*. The United States spends more on health care than any other nation (14% of our GDP), yet achieves very mixed results. The major issue is economic disparity. In the United States, the richest tenth of our citizens make about six times that of the poorest tenth—the widest income discrepancy of any of the 13 nations in the Luxembourg Income Study of 2000. So our wealthy citizens can buy some of the world's best health care, while the poorest get some of the worst—if any at all.

Census 2000 reported that the states varied greatly in the percentage of citizens with no health insurance—just under 25% in Texas and Arizona, 22% in California, and 21% in New Mexico compared with only 9% in Nebraska, Iowa, Minnesota, and Vermont. In September 2002, the Census reported an increase over 2001 in the number of Americans without health care. Among poor children, one in five had no health insurance, even though more of them were enrolled in Medicaid and their state's Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). More than one-third of Hispanic children lacked health insurance, the highest of any racial/ethnic group. Most other developed nations pay a higher tax rate for high quality, *across-the-board* health care for all citizens, especially the youngest.

The United States has implemented a large number of programs that combine health care and screening with nutrition, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), mentioned earlier, and Women, Infants and Children (WIC), a feeding and nutrition program often assessed by the General Accounting Office as one of the best-run programs in the federal government. Another program, Head Start, has become famous for its educational features as well as the groundbreaking idea that a comprehensive program including health, nutrition, education, parent involvement, and social services provided the most effective strategy in helping low-income kids to do well in school and life. While Head Start is still located within Health and Human Services, not in the Department of Education, many changes are being considered that may affect both the program and its location in the future.

Our poverty indicators allow us to see its relationship with health and nutrition. The two most-used poverty measures are the Orshansky Formula, basically a "market basket" number describing the income needed to buy food for a family of a certain size, and the federal free or reduced-price lunch eligibility program used in schools. Other school meal programs like breakfast and snacks also link poverty with nutrition. Note again, that by not ensuring all our children benefit from Head Start-type programs, we are neglecting the large number of children who are very close to the poverty line.

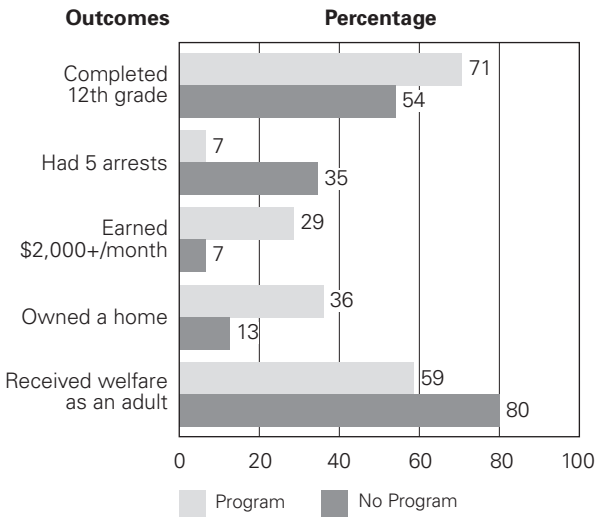
One of the major benefits of some preschool programs is that they allow screening for a variety of health-related problems early enough that there is still time to reduce their negative effects. (One out of every 12 kids in our "class" will be in special education programs when they are in public schools, most of them screened long before they enter kindergarten.) However, once one looks beyond Head Start programs, which served 905,235 children in 2001, and Early Start, a promising program for children under age three, and looks at the rest of child care programs, which enroll more than 4 million children from infant to age four, it is harder to guarantee that *all* programs screen for health and developmental risks equally well. The lack of standards and an integrated reporting system across all centers and family-based child care programs, even with the fine efforts of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, is a major roadblock to increasing quality and decreasing damage.

## A. Head Start: Half a Jewel in the Crown

In 2000, Head Start celebrated its 35th anniversary. The genius of the program is in large part the recognition that *a variety of factors interact in the lives of young children,* and that we must deal with this combination to promote healthy intellectual, social, and emotional development in all children. This seems obvious in 2002, but it was a radical idea in 1965. The four major components of the program are health, education, parental involvement, and social services. In addition, Head Start programs work to meet local community needs and provide training and technical assistance to service providers. Although the program was geared mainly for three- and four-year-olds, the 1994 reauthorization of Head Start, based on increasing evidence of the importance of the earliest years of life, created Early Head Start to serve pregnant women and mothers of infants and toddlers. Today, Early Head Start serves more than 55,000 children nationwide. There is early evidence of success, although only perhaps 5% of eligible children are currently being reached.

One of the reasons for Head Start's durability is a consistent pattern of assessment of results. Gerald Bracey (2003) summarized three major evaluation studies of early childhood programs. The first study represented the work of the High Scope Foundation in Ypsilanti, Michigan. Three- and four-year-olds from low-income households were randomly assigned to either a control group or to the Perry Preschool, which is not a Head Start program but has many similarities. At age 27, the Perry Preschool cohort showed remarkable differences from the control group in educational attainment, home owner-

FIGURE 6. High Scope/Perry Preschool Project: Major Findings at Age 27




Source: Gerald Bracey. "Investing in Preschool," *American School Board Journal* (January 2003, pp. 32–35).

ship, incarceration, and employment (see Figure 6). The second evaluation study involved the Chicago Child–Parent Center Program. When its preschoolers turned 21 in 2001, the assessment revealed results similar to the Perry Preschool study. In addition to providing evidence of the effectiveness of the preschool programs, both studies also pointed out that a dollar invested in preschool saved the taxpayer $7 in costs for later services such as jails and drug detoxification centers.

The third study, the Abecedarian Project, was conducted by researchers at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Low-income children in this study, identified at birth, received full-day care for at least 50 weeks a year. Some stayed in the program only until age 5, others until age 8. In addition to receiving high-quality educational intervention, the children were also given iron-rich formula and were assigned to service agencies if their development was slow. Some children also were admitted to other high-quality, child-development programs. Differences in treatment given to the children yielded variable results—nevertheless, the findings still emphasized the importance of high-quality child care programs beginning in infancy.

All three projects emphasized parent participation and the linkage of personal, cognitive, and social growth—factors all closely linked to Head Start. Some recent studies have downplayed the impact of Head Start on later school performance, but because Head Start is a poverty-based program, comparisons should be made with other poor children who have *not* been in a Head Start-like program. That has not always been the case with comparative studies.

Early Head Start may or may not provide a "kicker" that will improve Head Start's long-term impact. Overall, the evidence that high-quality education before the child's fifth birthday can yield lifetime benefits is undebatable. We know how to do it. Why don't we make such programs available to all? There are few federal programs in *any* agency that can support results like these, yet Head Start enrollment has usually hovered below 50% of those eligible. Thus, it is only half a jewel in the crown.

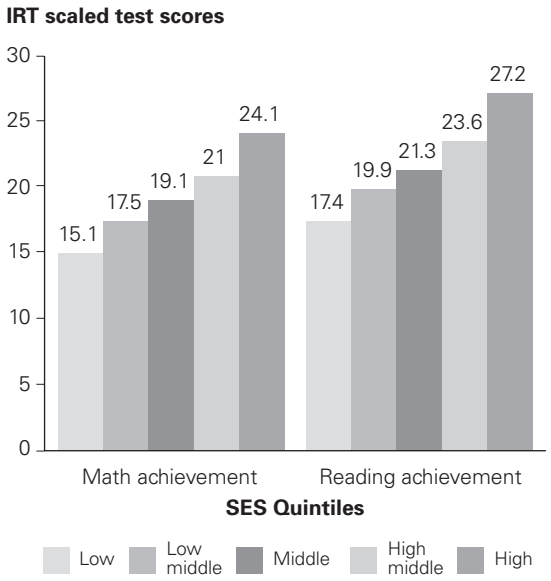
## B. New Knowledge

The new, aforementioned book from the Economic Policy Institute, *Inequality at the Starting Gate,* documents that recent attempts to close the "achievement gap" in all levels of schooling are happening much too late, that disadvantaged children start *kindergarten* with the same level of disadvantage one finds later in the educational system (see Figure 7, p. 15). The book supports the pressing national need to close the gap well before children start school, providing even more support for increasing Head Start funding and programs.

By comparing kindergarteners from the richest fifth to those from the poorest fifth they found that kindergarten children from the poorest fifth came from families that:

- Owned just 38 books compared to 108 in the top fifth
- Read to their children much less often: 63% versus 93% were read to three or more times a week

FIGURE 7. Math and Reading Achievement by Social and Economic Status (SES) at the Beginning of Kindergarten




*Source:* Lee, V. and D. Burkam. *Inequality at the Starting Gate.* (Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute, 2002), p. 18.

- Were much less likely to have taken their children to a museum, public library, a play, or to have them participate in dance, art, music, or crafts classes
- Spent the most hours a week watching television (18 hours versus 11 hours)
- Had only one parent (48% versus 10%)
- Had moved around more (48% of lowest fifth had lived in at least three different homes *by the time their children entered kindergarten*, while 80% of the kids from the richest fifth had lived in only one or two homes).

While the findings are not entirely new, they support the view that the first years of life are the most important in terms of cognitive and social/emotional development. These findings should help to build support for the notion that *every child eligible for Head Start should be enrolled in a program.* The longer we wait to repair these deficits, the more we will pay and the less satisfying the results will be. In 1996, The National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE Commentaries, 1996) asked the question, "Where is it written that education begins with the kindergarten experience? Schools must be actively involved in working with parents and their young children in the formative preschool years—envisioning programs between birth and age five as *educational components*, not as an appendage to the school's responsibility."

It is important to mention that some gains can be made even if the work doesn't start until kindergarten. In October 2002, Jerry Weast, Superintendent of Schools for Montgomery County, Maryland, announced the results of a two-year study of 16,000 students in an all-day kindergarten program compared to students in half-day kindergarten programs (reported in *The Washington Post* on October 1, 2002). The full-day kindergarten program offered a longer school day, smaller class sizes, revised curriculum, and additional teacher training. The results showed major gains—mostly in early reading skills—for students at all economic levels. Low-income students in full-day kindergarten showed the most improvement and the gap between income groups diminished. The gap between white and Asian student achievement compared to black and Hispanic student achievement also narrowed consistently. Only those with poor English skills failed to improve. Furthermore, this study thoroughly refuted the argument that middle-class students' achievement will decline if they are in school with low-income children. Of course, gains might have been even stronger if combined with a good preschool program. Quality child care programs, kindergarten, and first grade should work together.

## C. Transition from Child/Day Care to Kindergarten

Many books have been written about the transition from secondary school to college, and the College Board has worked for decades to make this transition more successful for students. However, it now appears that the *most* crucial educational transition is at the other end of the age range. Just as there are prerequisites for college admission, there are prerequisite *learnings* and skills that are essential for good performance in kindergarten, including the children's social, emotional, and academic development and

the parents' involvement in the education of their children. Putting your young child on the school bus for the first time can be just as intense a family adjustment as putting them in the dorm at college and driving away. It is also clear from many studies that if a child does not do well in kindergarten, it becomes less and less likely that he or she will catch up later. National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data suggests that 34% of fourth graders cannot read at even the "basic" level (reported in *Education Week's* "Quality Counts—2001" issue, January 11, 2001). Repairing this damage in fourth grade will be far more expensive and risky than guaranteeing good prereading skills in preschool and good beginning reading skills in kindergarten for *every child.*

And just as we are beginning to calibrate secondary school curricula with the college freshman year, preschool content and instruction must be linked with that in the kindergarten. We have known for some time that preschool children were capable of learning a wide variety of content. Current problems include content variation in the center-based programs that are providing preschool for most of the low-income kids who are not enrolled in Head Start programs, plus the inevitable variation in training among the 50,000 Head Start teaching staff. The latter problem stems in part from the fact that states do not require higher teacher credentials because they are not willing to pay for them. This is an issue throughout the early childhood system.

An additional problem involves the heavy preoccupation with reading and math readiness skills and abilities in the early years of schooling. While these skills are obviously important, factors that are less focused on academics, such as self-confidence, resilience, caring, emotional development, and supportive family members may be just as important. This is the theme of a recent publication, *Set for Success* (The Kauffman Early Education Exchange, 2002). Given the national preoccupation with "high-stakes testing" as the *only* measure of student, school, district, state, and perhaps national educational success, and the constant testing of those areas that are most easily measured, such as reading and math subskills, a preschool program that has also emphasized social/emotional development may be seen as "soft" or "afraid to face facts."

Although it seems overdone, elementary schools right down to kindergarten in a few cases are being assessed by student scores on NAEP, Iowa Test of Basic Skills, IQ, or the state achievement tests. (One of the hidden agendas here is that educational success will be defined by the student's ability to take standardized multiple-choice tests.) Half of the elementary schools in Fairfax County, Virginia, are evaluating their kindergartners using an 11-page report card, assessing language, reading, writing, math, science, social studies, health, movement, art, and music as well as social and emotional development. Rather than checkmarks for "sometimes," "usually," and "consistently," parents are encountering terms such as "pre-early emergent," "early emergent," "emergent," and "novice." Some parents may have a hard time grasping these assessment results. They will need some help to understand the difference between seeing an "A" on their child's report card and looking at a child's stage of development, regardless of the advantage of getting a better feeling of what students are *really* learning. Unless parents are prepared for this change, the desirable shift to see learning as growth, using a *variety* of clinical and statistical measures, may not catch on.

Scholars have said for decades that any assessment should improve both teaching and learning. Most of the current testing does neither. We are eliminating a number of assessments of students because they are not easily counted. This will become a crucial issue in assessing the progress of youngsters under age 6. There is simply no "Dow Jones" in education! A test is simply a snapshot of what is really a motion picture. It is clear that the number of high school dropouts is increasing, especially in states that demand a "high stakes" test for high school graduation (Amrein and Berliner, 2003). Students who are forced to repeat a grade because of a state test are significantly more likely to drop out. What will happen to them? Why not increase the resources available to young students who show early problems to maximize the chance of their succeeding?

### D. New Program Developments

Some interesting developments in linking preschool to elementary school include Georgia's state lottery-funded *universal* preschool throughout the state—not just for low-income youth. (While Head Start is limited to children in poverty, Georgia and other states have discovered that many children who don't do well in kindergarten are not in poverty.) Although limited to four-year-olds only (for one year), the program has shown real promise. Other states are beginning to see the advantage of preschool for all, particularly since mothers of the majority of school kids work outside the home. Longitudinal studies in Georgia show great parent satisfaction with the program, although parents see the preschool as academic in nature. Research shows that a child-centered preschool approach is much more effective in producing academic work later on.

Although it's not new, the Schools of the 21st Century (developed by Ed Zigler, of Yale University and one of the founders of Head Start) is one of the most successful models for putting together all of the factors we've discussed that contribute to the positive academic, emotional, and social development of young children. Those factors would have to include:

- school-based programs
- strong links between early childhood and schools
- strong parental support and involvement
- universal access
- focus on children's physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development
- strong staff training and development
- serving working families.

The program is now offered in over 1,400 schools in a wide variety of communities across the nation. Although the core components mentioned above are always present, the program is flexible enough to maximize the program's success in the unique "fingerprint" of each community setting.

Schools of the 21st Century is a year-round service center, providing what today's families need. Open from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m., the program offers high-quality preschool programs, before- and after-school programs for school-age kids, and even health services and guidance for parents, from third trimester of pregnancy until the child is three years old and enters preschool. Because the program is usually housed in public schools, the "transition" issues often disappear, as preschool and school become the same place. (Of course the school principal and the 21st Century School coordinator have to be able to work together.) Because all children are able to attend, the income segregation of schools with *all* low-income or all middle-income children can be avoided. (Income segregation in a school can be worse than racial segregation, as can be seen in Title I "pull-out" programs when all the poor students stand up and leave to go to special classes.)

## *VI. Conclusion: The United States Gets an "F"*

Decades of research have proven that humans learns more in the first five years of life than during any other five-year period. It is also clear that children living in poverty tend to not do well in school or life and often perpetuate the poverty cycle. We also know how to reduce the development gap between low-income kids and the rest, and it must start well before children knock on the kindergarten door. Middle-income parents usually have the opportunity to enroll their children in the best preschool programs at ages three and four. Some parents stay up all night to hold a place for their child at one of the highly regarded preschools or even offer large donations to secure a spot. But the *low-*

*income kids who need preschool the most are the least likely to be enrolled.* To enroll them all, we would have to double Head Start funding, programs, and openings. Head Start currently serves only three out of five preschool-aged children (i.e., three- and four-year-olds) in poverty, and Early Head Start reaches only 5% of poor infants and toddlers. Many more low-income children just above the poverty line are not even eligible for Head Start and lack access to state-funded pre-kindergarten programs. But if Georgia can provide pre-K for every one of its three- and four-year-olds, why can't every state?

This author has two grandchildren in Paris, both of whom attended school at ages three and four (as do all children in France). Their teachers all had master's degrees and were paid the same as elementary teachers. As education reporter John Merrow (2002) pointed out, the same could be said for England, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Greece, Spain, Germany, but not for the United States.

### A. Why Is It So Difficult for Us, Yet Easy for Other Developed Nations?

Here are a few reasons:

1. A higher percentage of our youth are living in poverty than any developed nation.
2. Other nations tend to have a centralized ministry of education. We have a "crazy quilt" of 15,000 local school boards; uncountable county, city, and state education agencies including chief state school officers and state boards of education; and the federal government, which contributes only about 7% of education funding but lately has been issuing orders with no funds to get the jobs done. A centralized ministry is *not* a solution for us.
3. Even when programs are successful, like Schools of the 21st Century, there is no "scale-up" procedure to get from their 1,400 schools to the nation's 54,000 elementary schools. It would be equally difficult to "scale-up" 49 states to adopt Georgia's universal preschool program. In France, it could be done with the stroke of a pen, but here in the United States, we probably would not like being ordered around like that.
4. Only one household in four has a child in public school. For the rest of the population, the preschool issue has no direct effect on their lives.
5. With 43 million of us moving each year, it gets difficult to sustain a local or even a state campaign for universal preschool, although it would be easier in Pennsylvania than in Florida, given Pennsylvania's less mobile population.
6. The biggest issue is the reluctance of Americans to feel any responsibility for the children of the poor—those who cannot afford to send their kids to preschool, thus sharply reducing their chances of going to college as well. Yet, to paraphrase *A Nation at Risk* (U.S. Department of Education, 1983), if we discovered a plot that would reduce the learning potential of one-fifth of our youth, we would consider it an act of war. The reality is that it actually happens every year, *at birth.*
7. There is no "silver bullet" that will immediately eliminate all the effects of poverty on a young child. Yet, we know that early health care; nutrition; parental involvement; and skilled teachers—working in small classes from a preschool curriculum that combines prereading and math with social and emotional development—can actually reduce the achievement gap, in school and life, between low- and middle-income young people. It's complex; it takes time and resources.
8. As young people decline as a percentage of all Americans, we will have no "throw-away" kids. *All* these kids need to do well since they comprise the (smaller) workforce that will provide retirement benefits for 70 million Baby Boomers! Although a majority of Baby Boomers are white, the workforce that provides their retirement benefits will be made up of today's and tomorrow's children and will have no racial/ethnic majority group.

9. Although we do not know how to reduce poverty (it just seems to *happen*) there is an abundance of research on how to successfully reduce the *effects* of poverty on our youngest children. We simply don't have the will to implement what we have learned.

### B. The Good News

On the positive side, virtually every state has sponsored *some* sort of preschool activity. However, of the 44 states that have pre-K programs, only 10 invest substantial resources (Children's Defense Fund, 2002). Still, the issue is at least on the radar screen. School leaders are slowly becoming aware of the necessity of linking preschool, kindergarten, and first grade, although it may not happen on their watch. If Montgomery County, Maryland, is right, when low- and middle-income kids attend the same preschool, the low-income kids do very well and decrease the gap, while the middle-income kids do as well if not better than middle-income kids in settings that are not economically diverse. If Georgia is right, it is in the state's short- and long-term interests to have *all* four-year-olds in a high-quality preschool *together*, hopefully moving down to three-year-olds as well. If 21st Century Schools supporters are right, a "community school" with preschool programs and services could easily be grafted onto an elementary school with outstanding results for students and parents. And Head Start plus Early Head Start is a package that works, but only for half of those it could benefit, and perhaps 5% of the Early Head Start children. (The President's 2003 budget will allow no increase in the number of Head Start kids, and "upgrading" will consist of four days of prereading training for only 2,500 Head Start teachers, after which they are to somehow pass this training on to the remaining 47,500 teachers who didn't get the training! That is *not* how we train our surgeons in new surgical procedures!)

Most important, the basic structure of a universal system of quality early care and education already exists. *Not by Chance (*Kagen and Cohen, 1997) describes the nature of quality programs, quality staff, quality parent collaboration, and financial support, with tasks for all the key players. In many ways, state leadership may be the vehicle for getting at least all low-income kids into preschool programs. A number of impressive state conferences dealing with the issue have occurred and, although state budgets have seldom looked so lean, programs can always be cobbled together from existing budget items if the need is strong enough. The trick is to keep the issue in people's consciousness as long as possible. In addition, there are many individuals and groups concerned with this issue who never have a chance to meet others who share their concern. How could we get local, state and national leaders together to create high quality programs for *all?* We close with a list of things to be done.

## *VII: Action Steps*

Recommended actions include the following:

1. Fully fund Head Start
2. Provide quality, universal child care
3. Provide federal incentives to promote high-quality programs like Schools of the 21st Century
4. Promote *all-day* kindergarten
5. Pay a competitive wage to child care and daycare workers
6. Convene a national Governor's summit on this issue
7. Ensure health care and resources for *all* children
8. Promote parent education
9. Implement the recommendations in *Not by Chance.*

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