Leading ECE: What I learned on the way to the Roundtable

Steve Barnett, NIEER, Rutgers University
Movement to Replace ECE with Cheap Care

Major studies with disappointing results

- Head Start Impact Study and others with little or no long term effects
- Tennessee VPK evaluation with negative long-term effects

What is the message from some prominent think tanks?

- Preschool is a waste of money
- What is needed is cheap child care birth to 5
- We can afford this is we don’t spend on quality pre-K

What is the message from some prominent researchers

- We don’t know what to do and need more research
- You need to use our “special sauce” or “magic formula”
“Paradox” of Early Care and Education Policy

Science finds early experience has broad, persistent effects
- Learning, development, and health
- Educational, social, and economic success

ECE has produced high rates of return
- Primarily from long-term impacts on children
- Also labor force benefits for parents

Large scale public programs often fail to reproduce results
- Weak initial effects
- No persistent benefits or even negative results
- Costs can exceed measured benefits
What explains this paradox?

Best small scale study results are not reproducible
- Luck (extreme outcomes receive undue attention)
- Populations and contexts differ at scale

*We* underinvest for the intended goals
- Costs are immediate, obvious, and concentrated
- Benefits are long-term, hard to discern, and dispersed

Two major problems result
- Design failure
- Implementation failure
How do we get out of this mess?

Design for success

- Begin with high but realistic goals
  - What do we want for our children now?
  - What do we want for the long-term?
- Design and assess integrated P-3 process

Focus much more on supporting implementation

- Sustained attention—avoid constantly shifting priorities & approaches
- Wright way—start small to go big, go slow to succeed fast
- Use data to inform policy and practice—everyone needs a GPS—good measures of child well being and progress P-2
Research Offers Some Guidance

- Strong intentional teaching
- Focus more on unconstrained domains
  - Language
  - Mathematics
  - Character, creativity, dispositions to learn?
- Individualize 1-on-1 & small groups
- Coaching, feedback, reflection
- Deliver a “big” dose—cross thresholds
- Alignment from preschool to/thru school
Can we avoid another curriculum war?

- Research produces apparent contradictions
- Little research on persistent impacts of curriculum
- What works best depends on what we want for children
- Real life curriculum implementation varies much more within each model than in small studies
- Curriculum models do not stay the same over time
- Need to inform policy makers: the “best” approach, including “virtual pre-K” will be directly marketed to elected officials
Reasonable Goals

- Research provides only general guidance on design and implementation
- States need to guide and support, provide tools and resources based on evidence
- A GPS at every level—continuous evaluation & analysis—classroom to capitol—no one “right” approach for everyone, everywhere, always
- Teachers must have the capacity to design and continuously improve their own practice

Implementation Depends on State Leaders and a Strong Workforce
## Progress 2002 vs. 2017!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Only 3 states &amp; DC served more than 1/3 of 4-year-olds</td>
<td>This is now the national average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 states enrolled &gt;50% of 4-year-olds</td>
<td>10 states enroll 50% or more of 4-year-olds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 “No Program” states</td>
<td>7 “No Program” states</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3% of 3-year-olds served</td>
<td>5% of 3-year-olds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$2.4 billion in state pre-K spending</td>
<td>$7.6 billion in state pre-K spending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$3,458/child or $5,395 inflation-adjusted</td>
<td>$5,008/child slight decrease in real $</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No programs met all 10 quality standards benchmarks; 3 programs met 9</td>
<td>5 programs met all 10 original quality standards benchmarks; 15 others met 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 programs met fewer than half of the benchmarks</td>
<td>9 programs meet fewer than half of the benchmarks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# “New” Quality Standards Benchmarks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive Early Learning Standards</td>
<td>Enhanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Implementation Support</td>
<td>New</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead Teacher Degree (BA)</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead Teacher Specialized Training</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Teacher Degree (CDA)</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff Professional Development</strong></td>
<td>Enhanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum Class Size (20)</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff:Child Ratio (1:10)</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screenings and Referrals &amp; 1 support service</td>
<td>Slight change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least one meal</td>
<td>DELETED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring ➔ Continuous Improvement</td>
<td>Enhanced</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Top challenges to meet the PD Benchmark

• Lack of policy requirements for PD for assistant teachers, modest cost

• Lack of policy regarding PD plans for all teachers

• PD for all classrooms needs to include coaching or other classroom embedded support

• Can changes in the profession and its work allow us to make these changes without raising cost?
Top challenges for CQIS (GPS)

• Conducting valid observations in all classrooms
  – Expertise
  – Cost of training, materials, and time

• Valid and reliable measures of children’s learning and development

• Capacity to use this information (expertise and time)
Conclusions: Leading for change in ECE

- Designing effective ECE to meet needs of our children can drive equity
- Set high goals for all children and teachers
- Structural “quality” is necessary not sufficient
- ECE agencies need capacity to support strong implementation not just set policy
- ECE needs major reform—preschool 2.0—transform the work and the workforce, we can work smarter at a feasible cost