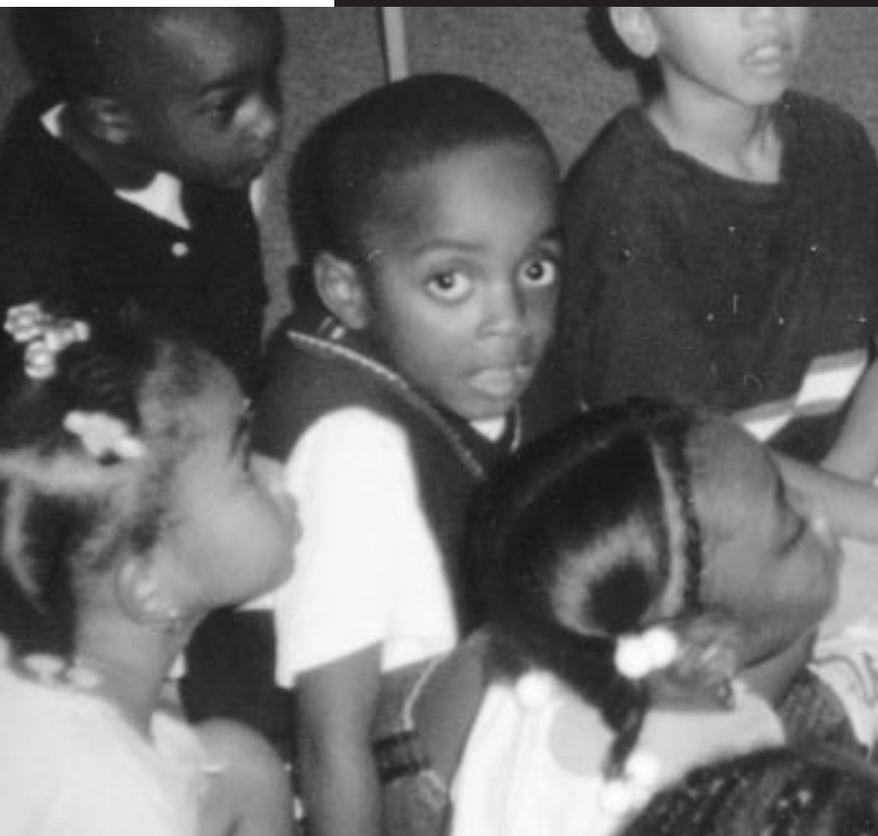


# COMMUNITY

Issue No. 80

U P D A T E

September 2000



*“When you work with young children, there’s that window of opportunity...”*

*Cheryl Merritt, Principal of Double Oaks Pre-Kindergarten and Family Resource Center*

**FULL STORY ON PAGE 6**

## Record School Enrollments, Again

*Greatest Increases Seen at High School Level*

School enrollments will generally stay at record levels over the next 10 years and then begin to increase each year for the rest of the century, according to projections by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics.

This fall, a record 53 million students will enter the nation’s public and private school classrooms, and full-time college enrollment will reach 15.1 million, also a record.

“We cannot continue to apply temporary solutions to permanent, ongoing challenges,” U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley said. “The fact that

many schools have been using portable classrooms for some years now makes clear that we are not prepared for the kinds of constant growth the future will bring.”

Riley said the need for school construction is already critical in many communities. The administration supports legislation H.R. 4094, introduced by Reps. Nancy Johnson (R-Conn.) and Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.) that would authorize states to use \$24.8 billion in new tax credit bonds to build and modernize schools.

Currently, the greatest increase in enrollments is at the high school level.

Over the next decade the number of high school graduates will increase nationwide by about 10 percent. Six states—Arizona, California, Florida, Illinois, Nevada and North Carolina—will see the number of high school graduates jump by 20 percent or more. Full-time college enrollments are then expected to grow 19 percent by 2010; part-time enrollments will increase by 11 percent.

Riley said overcrowded high schools present a special challenge, as research indicates that teenagers do better, academically and socially, when they have fewer than 600 classmates. The adminis-

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 3)

## COMMENTS

Editor

Community Update

400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.

Room 5E209

Washington, D.C. 20002

Fax: 202-205-0676

OIIA\_Community\_Update@ed.gov

## SUBSCRIPTIONS

ED Pubs

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## CREDITS

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U.S. Secretary of Education

Richard Riley

Assistant Secretary

Mario Moreno

Director, Community Services

John McGrath

Editor

Nicole Ashby

Contributing Writers

Julie Black

Libby Doggett

Naomi Karp

Ed Leo

Mary Smith

Nicholas Cabiati

Menahe Herman

Aba Kumi

Barbara Patterson

Sharon Stevens

Designer

Jason Salas Design

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## Secretary Encourages Support for Early Learning

*In June, U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley addressed the Early Childhood Summit in Washington, D.C. An excerpt of his remarks follows.*

In the last 10 years, an extraordinary amount of scientific research has been developed that tells us in very clear terms that all of our children, even in the earliest months of their lives, have an amazing ability to learn. Over the years, I have had the opportunity to listen to presentations about what brain researchers are discovering and it is truly astonishing.

We now know that every conversation we have with an infant can literally spark their brain to grow some more. *The nursery rhymes they hear will surely help them in their later years.* That's my nursery rhyme to help you remember as well.

This research, coupled with new research on how children learn to read, has given all of us—parents, grandparents, childcare advocates and educators—some very clear direction about setting policy. We now know that it is absolutely imperative that we put a new, powerful and sustained

focus on the early years—ages 0 to 5 years—before children even enter first grade.

Put simply, and this should be our collective motto—the stronger the start, the better the finish. Our children are eager to learn, they are creative in how they learn, and they have an extraordinary capacity to learn if we know how to encourage them the right way. Our children are, as I have said so many times before, smarter than we think.

*A full copy of the speech is available at [www.ed.gov/Speeches/06-2000/000623a.html](http://www.ed.gov/Speeches/06-2000/000623a.html).*

## Mars Project Continues



Due to an enthusiastic reception by schools and community organizations, the Mars Millennium Project has been extended for the coming school year. To see pictures and descriptions of over 500 model communities designed by children who have

participated, go to the Mars Millennium Project Web site at [www.mars2030.net](http://www.mars2030.net) and click on the "Virtual Gallery," and select "Martian Communities." For more information, call 1-800-USA-LEARN.

## Early Learning Investments Pay Off in South Carolina

Due to the growing participation of mothers with young children in the labor force, the demand for quality childcare is at an all-time high. Over the last three decades, the percentage of three- and four-year-olds enrolled in preschool programs rose from about 11 percent to 48 percent.

Studies indicate that children living in poverty are much more likely to succeed in school if they attend well-planned early childhood programs.

South Carolina provides an example of how targeted investments and policies can improve learning along with the

high involvement of parents.

Starting in the late 1970s, it was clear that the state's education potential would be severely limited unless efforts were begun to address early childhood education. For example, in 1979 only 60 percent of preschoolers met the school readiness standard on an individually administered assessment.

In the early 1980s, large-scale efforts were begun to boost half-day kindergarten availability and attendance, and, for the first time, thousands of low-income four-year-olds were provided a half-day child development program.

Then-Governor Riley stated in his first inaugural address, "If nothing else, we should try to be first in the first grade where it really counts."

The result: readiness scores jumped to 75 percent by 1987, a 15 percent increase. However, from 1987 to 1997, little new activity took place to expand early childhood education and readiness scores stagnated. Then from 1997 to 1999, the state expanded full-day kindergarten and began the "First Steps" program. Consequently, readiness scores rose again from the 1987 level of 75 percent to 84 percent in 1999.

# New Study Explores Solutions to Early Education Challenges

SEPTEMBER  
Satellite Town Meeting  
to Focus on Technology,  
School Construction

Ensuring that early childhood programs are of high quality demands a substantial investment in the education and training of those who work with young children, says a soon-to-be-released report from the National Research Council.

The study, *Eager to Learn: Educating Our Preschoolers*, presents an up-to-date picture of early learning and care for children ages two to five, and offers a number of suggestions for improving early childhood education in preschool, day care and other settings. An important message of the study is that education and child care cannot be thought of as separate; both are critical to the development of young children.

*Eager to Learn* recommends that every group of children in an early childhood program be assigned a teacher who has a bachelor's degree and has completed coursework in developmental psychology, early childhood education, special education or similar fields of study.

Pre-service preparation for early childhood teachers should include a

supervised student teaching or internship experience. And education programs for new teachers should provide them with a strong foundation of knowledge about the development of children's social and affective behavior, thinking and language.

The study is the work of the National Research Council's Committee on Early Childhood Pedagogy, established in 1997 to study a broad range of behavioral and social science research on early learning and development and to evaluate the quality of preschool programs. Their study was conducted at the request of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement and Office of Special Education Programs, as well as The Spencer Foundation and The Foundation for Child Development.

*Eager to Learn* is scheduled for release in October. An executive summary of the report is now available free of charge at <http://books.nap.edu/books/0309068363/html/1.html#pagetop>.



(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

tration is seeking a \$120 million appropriation to help communities restructure high schools into smaller, more intimate learning environments.

While national K-12 enrollments will remain relatively stable over the next 10 years, all Western states will have increases—Alaska, Idaho, Nevada and New Mexico can expect jumps in enrollment of more than 10 percent. After 2010 the number of school-age children nationally will begin to increase, rising some 6 percent by 2020.

“We need to figure out where we will put these children, and who will teach them,” Riley said. “Many communities

need to be building more schools now, to reduce overcrowding and to reduce class sizes. We also need to find ways to induce more people into teaching as a career.”

*Growing Pains*, the annual back-to-school report issued this August, projects that some 2.2 million teachers will be needed over the next decade just to meet enrollment expectations and to replace teachers leaving the profession through retirement or to pursue more lucrative opportunities. A copy of this report can be downloaded from [www.ed.gov/pubs/bbecho00/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/pubs/bbecho00/index.html).

U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley will open the Satellite Town Meeting's 2000-2001 season with a program entitled “Modernizing Schools: Technology and Buildings for a New Century.” The live satellite broadcast on Tuesday, September 19, from 8:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Eastern Time, will focus on how communities can extend the benefits of technology to all students while meeting the challenge of overcrowded classrooms and crumbling school buildings.

A panel of school and community leaders will join Secretary Riley to discuss ways that well-designed schools and thoughtfully planned educational technology can be powerful tools to enhance teaching and learning. Among the questions to be addressed are: How can technology help raise achievement for all children? And how can facilities meet the needs of the explosively growing school population, while providing students with the smaller learning environments they need?

For program and technical information about the Satellite Town Meeting, call 1-800-USA-LEARN, or visit [www.ed.gov/registerevent](http://www.ed.gov/registerevent). Updates are also available from STM-List, a free service providing current information about programming and teleconferences, which can be joined by sending an e-mail to [Satellite\\_Town\\_Meeting@ed.gov](mailto:Satellite_Town_Meeting@ed.gov).

The Satellite Town Meeting is produced by the U.S. Department of Education in partnership with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the National Alliance for Business. Corporate partners for the 2000-2001 series include the Bayer Foundation and the Proctor & Gamble Fund.

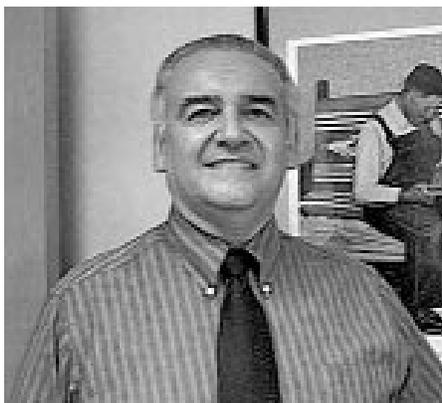
# Making Early Literacy a Family Affair

By Ed Leo, *Sánchez Elementary School, Texas*

Located in the heart of our city's oldest Hispanic barrio, Sánchez Elementary School of Austin, Texas, has found a way to draw on the strengths of the community to get preschoolers ready to learn. With the "PALS" program—Parent Advocates for Literacy at Sánchez—we are helping to ensure two essential ingredients for school success: a strong foundation in early literacy as well as active family involvement in education.

What began in 1995 as a local campus effort comprising parents, early childhood teachers and administrators now includes the Austin Independent School District, the University of Texas Dana Center, and Americorps. Our unique partnership has allowed us to recruit community parents and provide them with training in early literacy practices, and to create a cadre of volunteers who can support Sánchez teachers and students.

Each school day features a 45-minute "PALS time," when parents and preschoolers confidently participate in pre-reading and writing activities, in a print-rich classroom that parents themselves constructed and maintain. By the



end of a given school year, PALS will have given the approximately 60 pre-school students who participate an additional 22.5 instructional days.

After each session, students return to their regular teachers and PALS parents begin work in pre-K and kindergarten classrooms, focusing exclusively on reading and writing skills. All these literacy experiences, provided by members of the children's own community, help build a strong foundation for school success.

PALS works closely with other programs within the school, such as Americorps and the grant-funded Dual Language Project. The latter has funded

literacy training for early childhood teachers and PALS parents, English/Spanish student literacy packets, parent literacy sets, and children's music for the program. Grant funds also helped to send PALS parents to several state and national education conferences.

Most importantly, the program works: students participating in the program have demonstrated significant growth in early literacy concepts, skills and understanding. But the benefits have not been limited to the PALS students. The children's parents, families and community members have become confident and valued partners with our school, and, as a result, are seeing and pursuing new educational opportunities for themselves.

*Ed Leo is the principal of Sánchez Elementary School, in Austin, Texas. He has been in education since 1966 and a principal of several elementary schools for more than 30 years. For more information on PALS, call 512-414-4423.*

## Legislation Supports Young Children with Disabilities

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) aims to strengthen academic expectations and accountability for the nation's 5.4 million children with disabilities and bridge the gap that has too often existed in education between the curricula for these children and their peers in the regular curriculum.

Since 1986, IDEA has provided funds to states for two programs that specifically address the developmental needs of young children at a crucial stage in their lives when they begin

building skills for learning.

Under Part C of IDEA, each state provides early intervention services to children with disabilities, from birth to age three, and assists families using an Individualized Family Service Plan. The plan assigns a service coordinator to each child to be a contact for the family and to coordinate all needed services—educational, health and social.

Approximately 190,000 children currently benefit from the program.

Under the Preschool Grants program, each three- to five-year-old with a dis-

ability is entitled to receive a free appropriate public education. Special education and related services are provided to a child using an Individualized Education Plan. The program, which reaches 575,000, works closely with Head Start and other community organizations to ensure that children receive services in the least restrictive environment and have opportunities to interact with their non-disabled peers.

For more details on IDEA, visit [www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/IDEA/](http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/IDEA/).

# The Preschools of Reggio Emilia, Italy

By Naomi Karp, *National Institute on Early Childhood Development and Education*

Tucked away in the hills about 70 miles north of Florence, Italy, is the beautiful municipality of Reggio Emilia. This May for one week, I had the privilege of visiting Reggio. The city's old Italian architecture and art works are remarkably well preserved, considering the toll that World War II took on the area. The citizens are industrious and dedicated to their families.

What is most remarkable, however, about Reggio Emilia is its preschool system. The residents of Reggio have made a commitment to support a network of 33 education and care programs for children from infancy through six years of age. Many early childhood experts consider the Reggio preschools to be among the best in the world.

The Reggio approach to young children's education and care is built upon families, teachers and children working together. Citizens believe that all children have a right to an education, a belief they back up with financial support.

In addition, young children are respected and seen as competent, capable

learners. They are not simply "empty vessels waiting to be filled," but instead, as they say in Reggio, "they are filled with 100 languages." Teachers are taught how to bring out the 100 languages by giving children opportunities to explore their environments, to experiment with math, music, science, dance, art and storytelling. The Reggio teachers are the keys to the children's success.

Teachers in the Reggio preschools are trained to be scientists, in that they must know how to develop hypotheses regarding what and how children will learn from an activity. The teachers also must know how to predict children's reactions and help them develop problem-solving skills. They also instill in the children the ability to predict and reflect. Teachers document carefully, in writing, what happens during a learning activity. The written documentation is then displayed in the classroom with children's art, photographs, writing and other explanatory aids.

Perhaps the key characteristic of the Reggio teachers is their ability to listen to children, and to be responsive to each

child's strengths and needs. Research tells us that the most important component of a high-quality preschool program is a responsive teacher. That is what Reggio prides itself on.

Most of the classrooms I saw in Reggio are not filled with expensive toys and other shiny new pieces of equipment. However, I saw rooms with adults who understand the importance of nurturing young children's development, who provide children with experiences every day that integrate language, numbers and problem-solving skills, and who allow children to express their 100 languages. The rooms are filled with love and respect for young children and their ideas.

For more information about the Reggio Emilia preschools, e-mail [info@reggiochildren.it](mailto:info@reggiochildren.it) or visit <http://ericps.ed.uiuc.edu/ece/reggio.html>.

*Naomi Karp is director of the National Institute on Early Childhood Development and Education in the U.S. Department of Education. She has been with the Department for 17 years and is one of the co-founders of the Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health.*

## Technology Offers Early Childhood Educators Increased Learning Opportunities

By Libby Doggett, *National Head Start Association*

Many educators are turning to distance learning—using the Internet, satellite TV, and video- and teleconferencing—for professional development. Distance learning enables educators to participate in coursework in or near their homes or jobs, at hours that don't conflict with job or family responsibilities.

The convenience and affordability of distance learning make it especially helpful in providing training for teachers of prekindergarten, Head Start or childcare classes. Early educators are often underpaid, and they face other challenges that make ongoing professional development a struggle. Additionally, federal law has recently required that by 2003 at least 50 percent of all Head Start teachers have at least an associate degree.

To address the training needs of the early childhood field, the National Head Start Association has established a satellite television network called "HeadsUp!" Each month, early childhood teachers and parents nationwide can turn on the TV in the staff or conference room and participate in lively classes, taught by national experts and based on the latest research. September's topics will include "Focus on the Early Years," "Dialogue for Directors," and "Parent Power."

In October, the HeadsUp! Network will offer its first college course, "HeadsUp! Reading." This 44-hour course on early literacy will air on Wednesday evenings beginning October 4 in over 2,000 sites. HeadsUp! Reading aims to give early childhood educators and parents the skills they need to ensure

children succeed in reading and writing when they enter school. Based on research funded by the Department of Education—and financing provided by the Carnegie Corporation, Heinz Endowments and the states of Ohio, California, Florida and Nebraska—HeadsUp! Reading is a credit-bearing course at the associate degree level.

For more information about HeadsUp!, call 1-800-GET-HUTV or visit [www.heads-up.org](http://www.heads-up.org).

*Libby Doggett is the executive director of the National Head Start Association, a private not-for-profit membership organization representing 835,000 children, 170,000 staff, and 2,051 Head Start programs throughout the country.*

# RIGHT BEGINNINGS



This fall, for more than 400 wide-eyed and excited four-year-olds, the Double Oaks Pre-Kindergarten and Family Resource Center in

Charlotte, North Carolina, will be their first introduction to school. Thanks to the center's comprehensive and imaginative program, children who might otherwise have started their school years behind their peers will be ready to learn when they head for kindergarten next fall.

Double Oaks is the school district's largest center for its Bright Beginnings initiative—a literacy-rich program for children with identified educational needs. The program is the brainchild of Superintendent Eric Smith, whose goal is to ensure that 85 percent of students from all racial and economic backgrounds in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools read at or above grade level by the third grade. Double Oaks was the first of several centers to pilot the program.

Now going into its fourth year, Bright Beginnings serves over 2,000 students in 25 locations. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District is using a large majority of its Title I dollars—approximately 85 percent or \$8.4 million—to fund Bright Beginnings. Smith's long-term goal,

however, is to serve about 4,000 children who may be eligible each year for the program.

"From what research tells us about early learning and from what I have seen of the need for intense remediation efforts, a better use of time and dollars is being made through the implementation of this program," says Principal Cheryl Merritt, who had been an elementary school principal for several years prior to coming to Double Oaks.

## Double the Support

Prior to August 1997, Double Oaks was a Community Resource Center housing several community agencies that served the surrounding neighborhoods. Among the school's strongest advocates was the chief executive officer of the Bank of America. "Without Hugh McColl's support and commitment, we would not have been able to make the dream of Double Oaks a reality," said Smith. The school now functions as a family resource center, offering services such as "Mother Read," teen mentoring training, and nutrition classes.

The center operates up to 12 hours per day, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. during the week and until 4 p.m. on Saturday. Among the agencies housed at Double Oaks is the Even Start/Family Independence Initiative, sponsored by the Knight Foundation and Central Piedmont Community College, which helps parents of children in the program complete a GED. "It just folds us over into a school with an inclusive family approach," says Merritt about the shared space.



*Double Oaks Principal Cheryl Merritt*

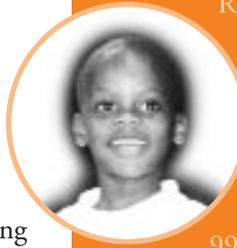
## A Bright Beginning

When U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley visited Double Oaks last year during his America Goes Back to School tour, Frazier Lee Brown, Jr. from the Bright Beginnings class of 1998-99 made a presentation to the secretary. Recognized for his progress in reading and writing, Frazier was offered as a great example of the program's success. This fall the six-year-old will enter the first grade.

"Last year in school he had a good year because he had been around kids, learning how to listen to the teacher and how to follow directions," said Jean Cherry about her grandson's performance in kindergarten. "His reading has come up real good. He does good with numbers. I'm just a proud grandmother.

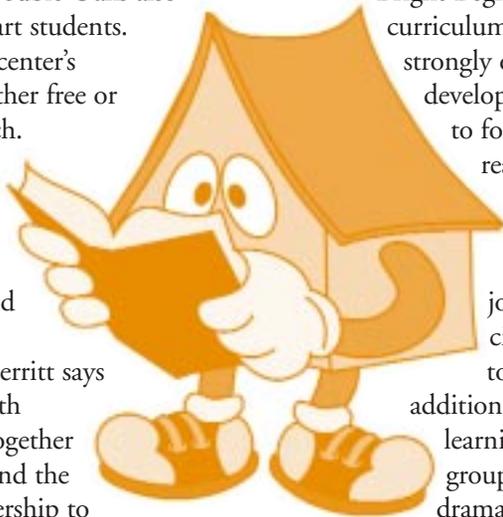
"I thank God for Double Oaks, Ms. Cheryl and all the teachers there—they are wonderful with the kids. I can't begin to tell you how much I thank God, because they gave Frazier a first start.

"If he hadn't been in the program, it would have been hard on me," says Cherry, who works the night shift at the Frito Lay plant in Charlotte, North Carolina, "and the teachers too because he wouldn't have been adjusted. But he was adjusted when he went to kindergarten because he knew what to look forward to."



The partners who help support the Double Oaks program also include local business and community organizations, along with the faith community (see sidebar for listing).

Located in what has been defined as the “inner-city,” Double Oaks also serves 80 Head Start students. Two-thirds of the center’s students receive either free or reduced-price lunch. Although Bright Beginnings screens its applicants for academic needs and Head Start for economic ones, Merritt says the partnership with Head Start pulls together resources that extend the reach of the partnership to a larger population of children.



## All in the Family

The high level of parent and community involvement at Double Oaks, for which it was recently recognized with a school district award, contributes to the consistent progress of its children.

Parents must sign a contract—a unique and “non-negotiable” feature of the program—in which they commit to maintaining the child’s health, ensuring his or her regular attendance, and participating regularly in various events. A goal of the program is to have at least 85 percent of parents attend four family involvement events each year.

In addition to the family resource center, partnership efforts such as Project Uplift further supports parents by helping to prepare the younger siblings of four-year-olds for the pre-kindergarten program. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, in partnership with United Way’s Success-By-Six, pairs educators

with parents who have children ages birth through three years to provide home visitations.

## Literacy Circles

Children are the center of the Bright Beginnings curriculum, which focuses strongly on language development and early literacy to foster the skills needed for reading and understanding what is read. Each day the children join in four “literacy circles” that each last 10 to 20 minutes, in addition to participating in learning centers and small group activities that include drama, writing, computers, science and art.

There is a teacher and a teaching assistant for every 19 students, compared to the ratio of 2 to 23 for most pre-kindergarten programs in the district. Teachers working in the Bright Beginnings program are early childhood specialists who have at least a bachelor’s degree and are certified by the state, or are provisionally certified as they complete additional courses.

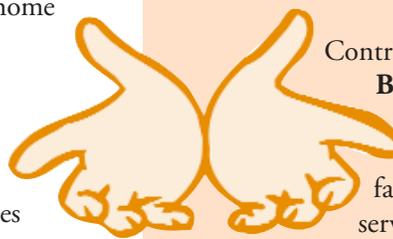
## Bright Endings

Research shows that the 1997-98 class performed consistently better on the end-of-year kindergarten assessment than did a comparable group of children who did not participate in Bright Beginnings.

“When you work with young children, there’s that window of opportunity,” says Merritt about the importance of early childhood intervention. “There’s that zest and enthusiasm for school. There is that feeling that ‘I can do everything’—and they can. And if I start out and feel like I can do everything, I can experience some success.”

*For more information about the Bright Beginnings program, visit the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools’ Web site at [www.cms.k12.nc.us/](http://www.cms.k12.nc.us/) or contact Barbara Pellin, assistant superintendent for Student, Family and Community Services, at 704-343-6256.*

## Community Partners



Contributions from the **Bank of America** helped to renovate the facility; employees serve as readers and lunch buddies in classrooms.

**Behavioral Health of Mecklenburg County** provides family services information, family/child intake services and assessment, and staff consultation.

**Charlotte Speech and Hearing** and **United Way** help place a certified speech/language pathologist in the classroom and train the entire staff.

**A Child’s Place** provides outreach services to families in crisis and homeless children, through the services of a family advocate housed at Double Oaks.

Employees of **First Union’s Read Aloud Program** volunteer in classrooms by reading to students and donating books.

**Head Start** provides a teacher’s assistant and supports 80 students at Double Oaks.

**Mecklenburg County Health Department** provides screening and health services.

**Myers Park Methodist Church** donates funds for the Learning Gallery and supplies trained volunteers to teach literacy lessons at Double Oaks.

**Smart Start** funds the distribution of the Bright Beginnings curriculum to private day-care sites.

**St. Gabriel’s Catholic Church** donates funds for the Learning Gallery at Double Oaks.

**United Way** funds a parent educator to work in the homes of families served at Double Oaks.

# What to Look for in a Preschool

By Naomi Karp, *National Institute on Early Childhood Development and Education*

Every year families are faced with a big decision: where should their young children go to preschool? To decide, families need to be informed consumers.

The most important thing to remember is that a *high-quality* preschool program has long-term effects on young children's success in school and, perhaps, even later in life. Two key features of a high-quality preschool program are the teachers or caregivers and what is happening in the classroom environment. When evaluating a preschool class for your child, keep these things in mind:

## Teachers or Caregivers

- Adults who spend their days with young children must be responsive to each child's abilities, needs, language differences and overall development. Perhaps the single most important characteristic of a high-quality preschool is a teacher's relationship with the children in his or her class and the ability to be responsive to each child.
- Teachers have to talk to children—a lot. They should have interesting conversations with one child at a time; with small groups of children; and with the whole group. Make sure the adults are not only talking to other adults.

A child's spoken vocabulary is one of the best ways to predict how well that child will read. The size of a child's vocabulary depends directly on how many words he or she has heard, beginning in infancy. It is up to teachers to make sure that children hear lots of words and take part in rich conversations every day.

- Teachers should know about child development and how young children learn about the alphabet and number concepts. They also have to know about children's social and emotional

development. For the most part, teachers with early childhood college preparation are well-qualified teachers.

- Because most early childhood educators are not paid very well, they tend not to stay in the profession very long. However, in a high-quality preschool, the average stay of teachers is longer, which fosters a sense of security and stability in the children.

## The Environment

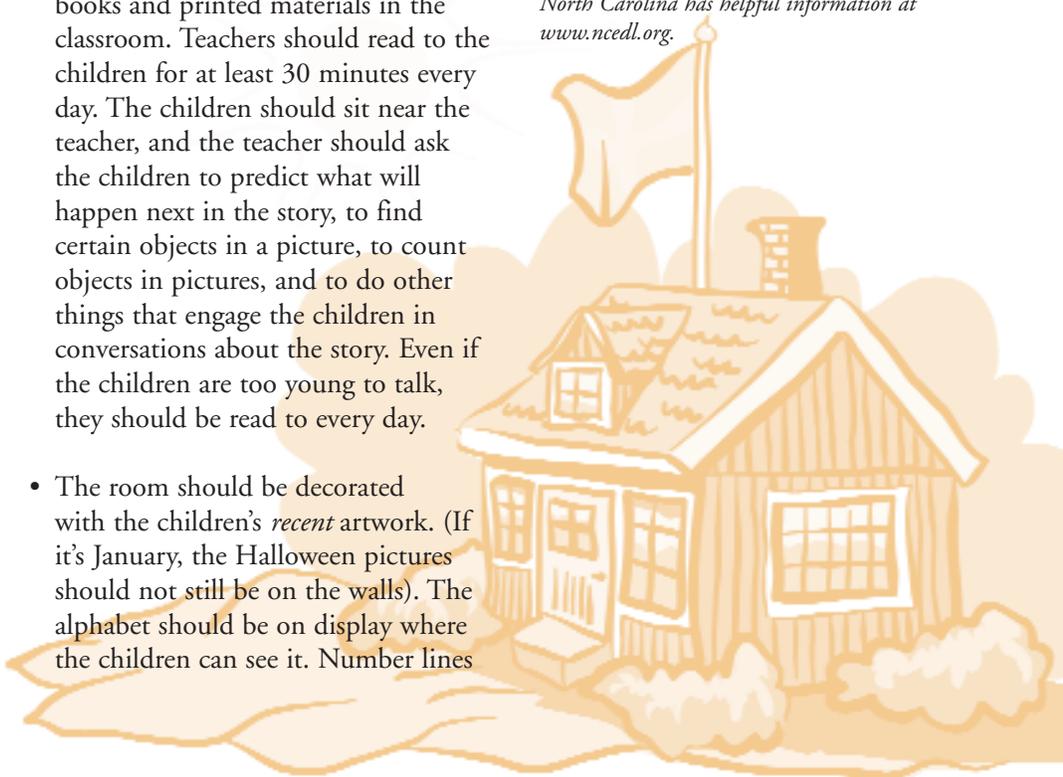
- Indoor and outdoor activities should develop all the child's skills. That means, every day, children should be doing things that develop their language, mathematics and problem-solving skills. They also need activities that build their social and emotional development. They should have opportunities for painting or coloring, singing, dancing, jumping, running and climbing. These activities all help build the skills needed to do well in kindergarten and elementary school. The adults should be engaged with and talking to the children.
- There should be *lots* of children's books and printed materials in the classroom. Teachers should read to the children for at least 30 minutes every day. The children should sit near the teacher, and the teacher should ask the children to predict what will happen next in the story, to find certain objects in a picture, to count objects in pictures, and to do other things that engage the children in conversations about the story. Even if the children are too young to talk, they should be read to every day.
- The room should be decorated with the children's *recent* artwork. (If it's January, the Halloween pictures should not still be on the walls). The alphabet should be on display where the children can see it. Number lines

also should be visible. Children's names should be printed on paper and easily visible. Items in the room should be labeled so that children associate objects and the printed words that represent them.

- The preschool should use a curriculum or a set of educational activities that blend together opportunities for children to experience language, science, mathematics, physical education, art and music experiences every day. The activities should be well planned and help children develop the ideas, concepts and skills needed for kindergarten and elementary school.
- Small classes allow more opportunities for young children to explore the environment, more time for teacher-child interactions, and more time for teachers to devote to individual children's special needs and abilities.

*For more information about early childhood education, visit the Web site for the National Institute on Early Childhood Development and Education at [www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/ECI](http://www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/ECI).*

*In addition, the National Center on Early Development and Learning at the University of North Carolina has helpful information at [www.nccd.org](http://www.nccd.org).*



# Activities for Engaging Preschoolers



## Have-It-Your-Way Yogurt Snacks

### What you need

- containers of your favorite flavors of yogurt
- variety of toppings, such as chopped nuts, raisins, maple syrup, granola, and sliced fruit
- bowls
- spoons

### What to do together

1. Peel and slice your favorite fruits. Then place all the ingredients on the table, and ask your child to think about which yogurt flavor and toppings he or she would like to use to make a yogurt sundae. Let him or her taste toppings individually.
2. Talk about what a sundae is and how to make one. Then ask your child to fill a bowl with yogurt and spoon fruit slices, nuts, and other toppings onto it. Encourage him or her to taste the snack after adding each topping.
3. Make your own sundae, perhaps using different ingredients so that you can compare tastes later.
4. As you enjoy your snack, talk about how these sundaes are different from ice cream sundaes. Brainstorm other kinds of sundaes you could make at another time.

### Your child will work on these skills

- fine-motor skills through slicing, spooning, and pouring
- math skills such as comparing and counting
- self-confidence from preparing one's own food and deciding on preferences.

For more free learning activities for families and children, visit <http://www.scholastic.com/parentandchild/activity/index.htm>.

*From SCHOLASTIC PARENT AND CHILD. Copyright © 2000 by Scholastic Inc. All rights reserved. Used by permission. Use of this resource does not constitute endorsement from the U.S. Department of Education.*

## Coffee Can Stories

### Materials

- a coffee can
- a small object or a collection of small objects such as a seashell, an autumn leaf, a button, or a feather.

**Procedure:** Shake the can. Ask the children if they can guess what's in the can. Now open the can and show them what is in it: the seashell, the autumn leaf, the button, or whatever. Bring it out slowly, demonstrating by your action that this is a magical object.

*You know what's in the can? It's a button. What color is this button? Is it a round button or a square button? You know how this button got into the can? This button belonged to a little girl from New York City. She had this button on her coat. Well, she fooled with it and fooled with it until one day it fell off and rolled into the street. Poor button. It cried.*



**Examine the object together:** Discuss its color, texture, size and shape. Then, begin to tell a story about it.

As you tell the story, incorporate the children's ideas about what happened to the object. Use leading questions to draw the children into the storytelling process. You can make the story just a few sentences long, or extend it to last two or three minutes.

*Do you know what happened next? Was it a grown-up or a child who found it in the street? And what did she do with it?*



End the story with the reason why the object is now in the coffee can. Put the object back in the can and put the can away, until the next time you wish to do Coffee Can Theater.

For more free arts-related activities for teaching literacy and language skills, call 1-800-404-8461, or visit [www.wolftrap.org/institute](http://www.wolftrap.org/institute).

*From Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning Through the Arts, a program of Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts, © 1997. Created by Michael Littman, a former Wolf Trap Institute artist. Used with permission. Use of this resource does not constitute endorsement from the U.S. Department of Education.*



# PARTNERSHIP

## *for Family Involvement in Education*

*A coalition of more than 6,000 business, community, religious and education organizations nationwide. To join the Partnership, call 1-800-USA-LEARN or visit <http://pfie.ed.gov>.*

## Maryland Libraries Open Doors to Pre-Readers

Public libraries in the state of Maryland are helping babies take their first step toward learning how to read. Representatives in the 24-county library system are offering a community-based service for preschoolers—free of charge.

The libraries work extensively with children, from birth to four years old, providing literacy-rich activities that include stories, books, songs and puppets.

In Baltimore County, one of the state's largest public library systems, a recently funded program called "Baby Booster" targets newborns through tod-

dlers 23 months of age. Thirty-minute sessions will allow caregivers the opportunity to network, in addition to teaching new methods for engaging children in reading.

This fall, as part of a marketing campaign, the project will help spread the message about the importance of the library in the role of building good pre-reading skills for babies. Volunteers, recruited through the Baltimore County Department of Aging, will serve as library emissaries for 16 county branches to reach those persons who otherwise would not visit their neighborhood library.

"For the people who are already involved with their children and have their children involved in five programs weekly, it would be like preaching to the choir," explains Kathy Coster, the county's manager of marketing and programming, about the outreach effort. "We want people to know about the importance of their child's development."

The volunteers, mostly retired educators, some former teachers in the Baltimore County Public Schools, have at least 30 years of education experience. For more information about the Baltimore County Public Library system, visit [www.bcplonline.org](http://www.bcplonline.org).

## Partners Emphasize the Early Years as Key to Learning

Members of the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education have developed a number of programs, materials and resources that strengthen children's readiness in the early years. Here are some examples:

- Published in both English and Spanish by the Sesame Street Workshop, with support from the Prudential Foundation, *Language to Literacy* provides strategies for increasing children's language development, from birth to age three. Visit [www.ctw.org](http://www.ctw.org).

- Produced by the Public Broadcasting System, *Ready to Learn*, *Between the Lions*, and *PBS KIDS* offer parent support and programming options. Visit [www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org).

- *A Good Preschool for Your Child*, a brochure published by the National

Association for the Education of Young Children, provides an overview of developmentally appropriate preschool programs. Visit [www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org).



Photography by Richard Termine

- The Children's Museum of Indianapolis sponsors *Playscape*, a gallery of successful "play environments" for infants and children through age six. Visit [www.childrensmuseum.org/teachers/pssched.htm](http://www.childrensmuseum.org/teachers/pssched.htm).
- *Early Notes: The Sound of Children Learning* connects music and cognitive skills. For more information, visit the Texaco Foundation at [www.texaco.com/support/index.html](http://www.texaco.com/support/index.html).
- From the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, the *Daily Parent Newsletter*

and *Child Care Aware* provide information for busy parents and childcare professionals. Visit [www.naccrra.org](http://www.naccrra.org).

- Published by the Parents as Teachers National Center, Inc., the *Born to Learn* curriculum is a training tool for parent educators regarding children prenatal to age three. Visit [www.patnc.org](http://www.patnc.org).
- The American Library Association offers a variety of *Born to Read* products to promote reading. Visit [www.ala.org/alsc/raise\\_a\\_reader.html](http://www.ala.org/alsc/raise_a_reader.html).



## CALENDAR

**September 18–20**, Sacramento, California  
The first in a series of fall conferences for *Improving America's Schools*. The Partnership for Family Involvement in Education will hold meetings and a materials fair on the third day of each conference. The remaining dates are October 2–4 in Louisville, Kentucky, and December 13–15 in Washington, D.C. For more information, call 1-800-203-5494. Visit [www.ncbe.gwu.edu/iasconferences](http://www.ncbe.gwu.edu/iasconferences) or e-mail [ias\\_conference@ed.gov](mailto:ias_conference@ed.gov).

**November 2–4**, St Louis, Missouri  
*National Middle School Association, Annual Conference 2000*. Call 1-800-528-NMSA or visit [www.NMSA.org](http://www.NMSA.org).

**November 12–17**, Houston, Texas  
*National Association of Partners in Education, "Navigating Partnerships for Student Success."* Call 703-836-4880 or visit [www.partnersineducation.org](http://www.partnersineducation.org).

**November 29–December 2**, Reno, Nevada  
*National Community Education Association, 35th Annual Conference*. Call 703-359-8973 or visit [www.ncea.com](http://www.ncea.com).

## Lights On Afterschool, October 12

**O**n October 12, after-school programs across the country will be turning their lights on and hosting "open houses" so their communities may

see firsthand how these programs help children succeed. To register as a Lights On Afterschool event site, or to request a Lights On Afterschool Action Kit, call 202-296-9378 or visit [www.afterschoolalliance.org](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org).



## ABOUT *our* PARTNERS

**N**ature Net is a consortium of 16 local, not-for-profit organizations that offer environmental education programs for students of all ages throughout Dane County, Wisconsin. The goal of Nature Net is to make hands-on, outdoor education accessible to the classroom and relevant to the school curricula.



Photography by Treva Brench

"Our goal is to show teachers and parents that any subject can be taught using the 'original classroom'—the natural world," says Kathe Crowley Conn, executive director of Nature Net and the Aldo Leopold Nature Center, its parent organization. The Aldo Leopold Nature Center, which is one of the environmental education sites, is located on a 47-acre conservation park rich with a pond, wetland, prairie, woodland and Native American effigy mounds.

On September 17, families and children will convene at the Aldo Leopold Nature Center to celebrate the summer-long activity "Nature Passport," a scavenger hunt at 12 various sites throughout southern Wisconsin.

Nature Net, which has been modeled in several areas throughout the state, offers free educational resources for teachers and parents to engage students' curiosity about the world around them. For more information, visit [www.naturenet.com](http://www.naturenet.com) or call the Nature Net Hotline at 608-221-2575.



## ANNOUNCEMENTS

A "how-to" guide on children's health insurance includes tips to help uninsured children get free or reduced-price health coverage, developed by the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services, Education, and Agriculture. For more information, call 1-877-KIDS-NOW.

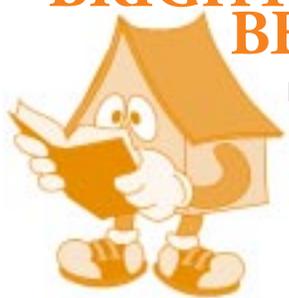
A starter's pamphlet for developing after-school programs, *After-School Programs: Keeping Children Safe and Smart*, is now available. Call toll free 1-877-4ED-PUBS with the order number EK0276B, while supplies last.

*While these resources are relevant to the mission of the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education, they are available from a variety of sources and their presence here does not constitute an endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education.*

IN THIS ISSUE:

# BRIGHT BEGINNINGS

PAGE 6



## Getting an Early Start

*Resources Help Parents Foster Early Learning Skills*

Because the parent is the child's first teacher, the U.S. Department of Education has several resources available to help families get their young ones ready to learn.

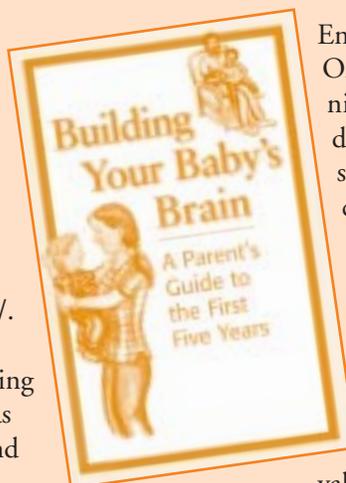
The popular publication **Building Your Baby's Brain: A Parent's Guide to the First Five Years** describes how children learn about the world around them. For instance, children learn by touching different textures and listening to various sounds, in turn allowing the brain to make important connections to stimulate learning. This booklet, which is also available in Spanish, can be downloaded from [www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/ECI/publications.html](http://www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/ECI/publications.html).

Another resource that shows how teaching and learning take place when parents and children do simple things

together, **Helping Your Child Get Ready for School** offers activities that reveal how even sorting socks can have educational value. For a copy, visit [www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/GetReadyForSchool/](http://www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/GetReadyForSchool/).

A host of activities for promoting a child's learning in various subjects such as art, history, geography and science are available in **Learning Partners: A Guide to Educational Activities for Families**. Available only online at [www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/LearnPtnrs.](http://www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/LearnPtnrs.)

Film celebrities LeVar Burton and Jamie Lee Curtis lead a discussion in



English, and Edward James Olmos in Spanish, on communicating with infants, language development, reading, and singing in a 20-minute video called **Ready to Learn**. This video will be available in late September. Check on its availability at

[www.ed.gov/americanreads/](http://www.ed.gov/americanreads/). Also, contact the I Am Your Child Foundation, producers of the video, for other valuable items at [www.iamyourchild.org](http://www.iamyourchild.org), or call toll free 1-888-447-3400.

*The first two of the above publications are free and can be ordered by calling 1-877-4ED-PUBS, while supplies last. For more information on resources for parents, call 1-800-USA-LEARN.*