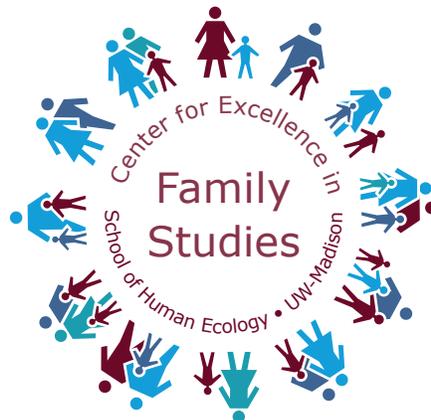


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**Wisconsin Family Impact Seminars  
Briefing Report**

**Can Government Promote  
Competent Parenting?**



**University of Wisconsin-Extension  
Center for Excellence in Family Studies  
School of Human Ecology  
University of Wisconsin-Madison**

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# Can Government Promote Competent Parenting?

*First Edition*

## Wisconsin Family Impact Seminars Briefing Report

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## Wisconsin Family Impact Seminars

*“Can Government Promote Competent Parenting?” is the 3rd seminar in a series designed to bring a family focus to policymaking. This seminar featured the following speakers:*

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Family Impact Seminars have been well-received in Washington, D.C., by federal policymakers, and Wisconsin is one of the first states to sponsor the seminars for state policymakers. Family Impact Seminars provide state-of-the-art research on current family issues for state legislators and their aides, Governor’s Office staff, state agency representatives, educators, and service providers. Based on a growing realization that one of the best ways to help individuals is by strengthening their families, Family Impact Seminars analyze the consequences an issue, policy, or program may have for families.

Each seminar is accompanied by an in-depth briefing report that summarizes the latest research on a topic and identifies policy options from across the political spectrum. Copies are available at Extension Publications, 630 West Mifflin Street, Room 170, Madison, WI 53703, (608) 262-3346 (voice and TDD); (608) 265-8052 (fax).

“Building Policies That Put Families First:

A Wisconsin Perspective”

March 1993

“Single Parenthood and Children’s Well-Being”

October 1993

“Can Government Promote Competent Parenting?”

January 1994



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## Executive Summary

### Can Government Promote Competent Parenting?

**C**itizens across Wisconsin perceive an array of societal ills, in areas ranging from school achievement to societal violence to issues of character and values, and see these as having a common contributing factor: ineffective parenting. But do we know what competent parenting is? To a surprising extent, researchers can agree.

Thinking of U.S. culture in this era, researchers can give a surprisingly coherent picture of competent parenting across the years of childhood. The picture will have some variations depending upon the gender of the child and the subculture, social class, and family structure of the family. The picture is complex but can be summarized in terms of (1) the development of a secure attachment between the child and one or more parents in infancy, and (2) the use of authoritative parenting in the years of childhood and adolescence.

Research also documents that we know ways to help parents establish secure attachments and become more authoritative in their parenting. Exemplar programs include parenting newsletters, home visiting, and specific parent education curriculums.

Several principles of successful programs can be extracted from the research literature. Successful programs are ecological, collaborative, long-term, and targeted to specific ages and outcomes. They have terrific staff, intervene at critical periods in the family life course, build on parents' existing strengths, and allow for individual differences. Standard statewide programs which support parents' near-universal desire to do their best in raising their children are possible, but they must be tailored to the age of the child, the issue or outcome, the locale and subculture, and the family structure.

The next section of the briefing report documents the growing interest of policymakers in promoting competent parenting and supporting families. Family support is not a new concept. For decades, parents have received support in village greens and on park benches; during barn raisings and church meetings; and at gatherings at the general store, post office, or neighborhood cheese factory. Even though few of these customs remain, the needs they met and the purposes they served, continue. Since the 1970s, a number of community initiatives have sprung up to provide the parent education and family support that occurred more informally a century ago. Increasingly, these grassroots efforts are drawing policymaker's attention due to the changing conditions of contemporary family life, public pessimism over the state of the family, emerging research on child and family development, growing recognition that changes are needed in how we deliver child and family services, and bipartisan consensus on the need for more public as well as private support for families.

What policies can support families and, through families, their children? One proposal that has received broad-based support is the development and expansion of community-based family support and education programs. While the diversity of family support and education programs defy easy definition, they are typically community-based, prevention-oriented, voluntary, easily accessible, and more comprehensive than parent education or home visiting alone.

In the spirit of encouraging debate about a range of policy options, the report reviews 25 additional policy proposals from five national and one state source spanning the political spectrum: the American Public Welfare Association, the Council of Chief State School Officers, the National Commission on America's Urban Families, the National Commission on Children, the U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement, and the Wisconsin Governor's Task Force on Family and Children's Issues. These policy proposals fall into four categories: family support, parent involvement, parent education, and incorporating family support principles into existing programs.

Next the report turns to the efforts of five pioneering states that have developed preventive, family-oriented services on a broad or fully statewide basis Connecticut, Kentucky, Maryland, Minnesota, and Missouri. Even though these states share a similar approach, they vary extensively in their goals, services, sponsorship, and funding.

Do family support and education programs work? We know that a handful of fairly intensive programs work when implemented on a small scale. For example, children participating in early intervention programs for low-income families were more apt to be literate, employed and attending post-secondary education, and less apt to be mentally retarded, school dropouts, welfare recipients, or in trouble with the law. We don't know whether these programs will work, however, if replicated on a larger scale. In summary, the results are encouraging, but we have much experimenting yet to do before we will know the most cost effective means of family support and education.

A former Iowa state senator raises several challenges facing states in this area the level of commitment needed, whether programs should be universal or targeted to the needy, how to reach more parents while maintaining program quality, and evaluating program effectiveness. Four potential funding sources at the federal level are reviewed The Comprehensive Child Development Program, The McKinney Homelessness Prevention Act, The Family Resource and Support Grants Program in the Young Americans Act, and the Family Preservation and Support Services Program in the 1993 Budget Agreement.

Since no comprehensive overview of Wisconsin parent education and family support programs is available, the report overviews the range of programs and services funded through the Children's Trust Fund, which was created by the Wisconsin State Legislature in 1983 to expand family support and parent education services statewide. Between 1991 and 1993, nearly \$1.3 million of grants were made to public and private providers.

Since 1988, the Children's Trust Fund has distributed 180,000 free parenting booklets and 10,000 parenting kits. The Children's Trust Fund also provides funding for nine Family Resource Centers in LaCrosse, Ladysmith, Madison, Manitowoc, Milwaukee (two programs), Prairie du Chien, Wausau, and West Bend. To illustrate the programs and services available through the state's Family Resource Centers, the report ends with a brief overview of the programs and services of one family resource center in Wisconsin, the Silver Spring Community Center in Milwaukee.

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## Introduction

**R**esearch documents that families are the most powerful, humane, and economical system for building competence and character in children. Thus, it came as no surprise that policymakers, human service providers, and family professionals requested a Family Impact Seminar on government's role in promoting competent parenting. Since this is a complex issue, this introduction is intended to aid the reader in locating those parts of the report of most interest by identifying the questions each writer addresses.

In the first section of the report, "Some Principles for Designing Effective Parent Education/Support Programs", Dave Riley poses these questions which underlie the development of any program or policy to support parents:

- ❖ What evidence is there that parents are struggling today?
- ❖ Do we know what competent parenting is?
- ❖ Do we know enough to mount effective programs to improve parenting?
- ❖ How can we adapt parenting programs to meet the needs of specific families?

In the next section of the report, "Innovative Policies and Programs that Promote Competent Parenting and Support Families", Karen Bogenschneider raises and responds to the following questions:

- ❖ Why the recent interest among policymakers in promoting competent parenting and supporting families?
- ❖ What is the family support and education movement?
- ❖ What policies can support families and promote competent parenting?
- ❖ What family support and education efforts have five pioneering states invested in?
- ❖ Do family support and education programs work?
- ❖ What challenges face state government in this area?
- ❖ What federal funding opportunities exist?

In the third section of the report, Kari Morgan responds to the question, “What parent education and family support efforts has Wisconsin invested in?” Since there is no comprehensive overview of parent education and family support programs in Wisconsin, the paper overviews the range of programs and services funded through the Children’s Trust Fund, which was created by the Wisconsin State Legislature in 1983 to expand family support and parent education services statewide.

Finally, the paper addresses the issue, “How does a Milwaukee family resource center promote competent parenting?” Sally Lundeen overviews the offerings of one family resource center, Silver Spring Neighborhood Center in Milwaukee. This center is included in the report in order to get a picture of what services a family resource center might offer. Please note that this center is only one example of the many successful Family Resource Centers that are currently operating in Wisconsin.

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# Some Principles for Designing Effective Parenting Education/Support Programs

*Professor Dave Riley*

*University of Wisconsin-Madison/Extension*

**P**arents are struggling today.

Here are some ways we know this is true:

- ❖ Over 4,000 Wisconsin babies (about 1 in 20) are born each year at low birth weight, most due to poor prenatal care.<sup>14</sup> These high risk infants require extra medical care that is expensive, and is easily preventable. It is one cause of the next indicator:
- ❖ Babies are more likely to die before their first birthday in the U.S. than in 18 other nations, including Hong Kong, Singapore, and Spain. The rates in Wisconsin are better than in most of the U.S., but we still lose about 600 infants a year.<sup>15</sup>
- ❖ Short of infant mortality, the most extreme measure of problematic child-rearing is the official rate of child abuse and neglect. We do not know the actual incidence of abuse, only how much abuse was blatant and public enough to be reported: in 1990, over 38,000 cases in Wisconsin.<sup>16</sup> These abused children cost us plenty, not only in heartache, but also in increased costs to our criminal justice system, as these children are at significantly increased risk of violent and criminal behavior, which leads us to our next indicator.
- ❖ Juvenile arrests in Wisconsin rose more than 11% in the five years between 1985 and 1990. Juvenile arrests for homicide tripled in that same period. But most startling is the sheer size of our juvenile crime problem: nearly 100,000 juvenile arrests in Wisconsin per year.<sup>11,12</sup>
- ❖ The academic achievement scores of even our best children show that we are falling behind the rest of the industrialized world. Compared to school children in Japan or Taiwan, children from excellent U.S. schools begin with the same abilities, but fall further behind in mathematics performance with each year in school.<sup>13</sup> By the fifth grade, only one U.S. child appeared among the 100 top scorers in mathematics achievement, leading to the prediction that the U.S. will not be among the countries with the most and best engineers and scientists in the early 21st century. We know quite a bit about why this is so; much of it has to do with differences between their schools and families and ours, and many of these differences are within our power to change.

- ❖ By the 9th grade in Wisconsin, 30% of youth report they got drunk (had 5 or more drinks in a row) in the past month. By the 12th grade, the rate is 49%, about half of all students. While parents are far from the only cause of alcohol abuse, it is also clear that simple parenting skills can make a difference: parents who monitor their children's activities (who know where their children are, and who they are with) have 9th graders who are about 8 times less likely to get drunk than those who do not.<sup>10</sup>

### **Community leaders view "Parenting" as a top priority for state effort.**

In 1990, the University of Wisconsin-Extension assessed the most important perceived needs of state residents through a Strategic Planning exercise. In a systematic process used in every Wisconsin county, 1,849 local community leaders (ranging from PTO presidents to bank presidents and farm co-op managers) met in small groups across the state. Their task was to identify the major concerns of the people in their counties (upon which the University Extension service should prepare itself to respond). When the priorities from each county were compared, four concerns were consistently ranked high across the state: water quality, solid waste management, youth risk behaviors (e.g. drug use, pregnancy, suicide, violence, etc.), and parenting. The parenting issue actually subsumed a variety of more specific concerns. Citizens across Wisconsin perceive an array of societal ills, in areas ranging from school achievement to societal violence to issues of character and values, and see these as having a common contributing factor: ineffective parenting.

### **Do We Know What Competent Parenting Is?**

Parenting seems like such a personal matter, and children are all so different from each other, that we might wonder if there can be any agreement on what "competent parenting" is. To a surprising extent, researchers can agree.<sup>5</sup> The greatest agreement is in the infancy period, where the characteristics of competent parenting are most strongly influenced by biology, and least by culture.

With increasing age, competent parenting is increasingly defined by the cultural context; a society that depends upon hunter/gatherers raises its children to have different skills and attitudes than does a society based on agriculture. Similarly, a democracy must raise a different kind of citizen than an authoritarian regime. And cultures also differ in values that are not related to their economies or politics; for example, a talkative child (and adult) is more highly valued in the dominant American culture than it is in Chippewa society, and therefore "competent" parenting must be defined differently within these two cultures.

Thinking just of U.S. culture in this era, researchers can give a surprisingly coherent picture of competent parenting across the years of childhood. The picture will have some variations depending upon the gender of the child and the subcul-

***We cannot really grasp where we are going until we better understand our past.***

ture, social class, and family structure of the family structure of the family. The picture is complex, and will not be summarized here.

Researchers are also quick to admit that their knowledge is incomplete. But it is fair to summarize that, to a surprisingly great extent, researchers can observe normal interactions of parents and their children at home, and from these observations can predict quite a bit about children's later compliance with adults, cooperativeness with peers, empathy with the distress of others, aggressiveness across their childhood years and into adulthood, school failure or success, and many other outcomes of interest to most parents.

Much of the complex picture of parenting that is painted by research findings can be summarized in terms of (1) the development of a secure attachment between the child and one or more parents in infancy, and (2) the use of authoritative parenting in the years of childhood and adolescence. Secure attachments derive from parenting that is sensitively responsive and reliably available to the infant. Authoritative parenting is a style that combines high demandingness (high expectations for the child, a willingness by the parent to exert authority, set rules, act consistently), and high responsiveness (expression of warmth with the child, a willingness to listen to the child's point of view, to engage in verbal give-and-take with the child, a willingness to explain the reasons for the parent's rules). Hundreds of research studies document that children who experience secure attachment relationships and authoritative parenting are much more likely than other children to "do better" in almost any way that you might ask about. They are less resistant with their parents as two-year olds; they are more cooperative with peers as preschoolers; they get better grades and get drunk less as teenagers.<sup>5</sup> Research also documents that we know ways to help parents establish secure attachments and become more authoritative in their parenting.

### **But Do We Know Enough to Mount Effective Programs to Improve Parenting?**

The short answer is "yes." First, we have some examples of specific programs which have proven successful in rigorous evaluations. For example, a treatment-control group, experimental field trial of UW-Extension's Parenting the First Year newsletter series, using a sample of 1,104 Milwaukee area parents, showed that parents who received the newsletter report having to spank or slap their babies significantly less often than did non-recipients.<sup>8,9</sup> Based on these results, Extension can claim to have prevented over one million instances of babies being hit by their parents in Wisconsin last year.

One of the most exciting innovations in parent education in the past two decades has been the development of various kinds of home visitor programs for new parents. These are more intensive and expensive than the newsletter series described above, but they also have larger impacts. They seem especially well suited to parents who are identified as "at risk" of parenting difficulties, and who may therefore need more intensive help. Rigorous evaluations of home visitor programs, using treatment-control group (experimental) research designs, have

shown them to be effective at preventing child abuse, reducing childhood accident (emergency room) rates, increasing IQ, increasing secure attachments, and reducing the number of subsequent pregnancies by the mothers.<sup>4,6</sup>

In the early adolescence period, the work of Gerald Patterson and his colleagues is exemplary in showing that we can have consistent positive impacts on distressed families who are struggling to raise an aggressive, delinquent, or noncompliant child.<sup>7</sup> The program focusses on training parents in specific child management practices, like how to convey clear expectations for acceptable and unacceptable behavior, how to respond effectively to noncompliance, and how to reward children's prosocial behavior. One of the most encouraging findings reported by Patterson's team is that this training program leads not only to a decrease in problem behavior among the target children, but to significant improvements in the behavior of their siblings as well.

The three examples above were cited because they have more rigorous evidence of impact than most, but virtually every parenting program in the state can tell stories of individual successes: parents who themselves give credit to the parenting resource center, or workshop or home visitor, for a dramatic change in their lives as parents. These stories, when heard first-hand, can be very convincing.

But, equally important as specific program evaluations, we are also able to extract from the research literature the general principles of successful Parenting programs.<sup>1</sup> We can summarize the most important of these principles:

- (1) Successful programs are **ecological**. Rather than focussing exclusively on just one aspect of the issue, typically the parent's behavior, the most successful programs affect the systems surrounding the parent and child as well. As in other areas of behavior change, the evidence from parenting programs shows that it is usually fruitless to try to change an individual without simultaneously changing the environment to which the individual is adapted. An ecological intervention might focus as much on the availability of secure jobs and family-friendly workplace policies as on the contents of parents' minds.

An ecological intervention that more directly effects the parent's behavior might be one that changes neighboring patterns so that parents have available more sources of childrearing advice and practical assistance. This could be accomplished through home visitor programs or parent discussion groups, each of which could help establish a "sense of community" for parents. This kind of thinking has led some experts to argue that we ought to invest as much in parent support as in parent education. Some evidence supports this idea; for example, home visitor programs for new parents are effective even when they use volunteer home visitors (not professional educators) and when they have little or no curriculum they attempt to teach.

- (2) Successful programs are often **collaborations**. This follows from the first principle: since most organizations can respond to only part of the ecology of parenting, ecological programs typically require the collaboration of community groups. Successful programs often require that community organizations and agencies move beyond their usual ways of operating, to become partners in more intensive and community-wide efforts, or establish well-organized systems of referral.
- (3) Successful programs are **long-term**. A single-session program may be appropriate for some goals, such as to reassure parents about their childrearing efforts, to introduce them to a few new ideas, or to describe a more intensive parenting program. But there is no evidence that one-shot workshops with parents have any consistent or lasting effect upon serious childrearing difficulties. The Wisconsin Children's Trust Fund, for example, has a policy of not even awarding grants to child abuse workshops that last for fewer than 8 sessions.
- (4) Successful programs have **terrific staff**. One review of 48 parent education program evaluations found that who led the workshops was more important than the specific curriculum used.<sup>2</sup> Little research exists to tell us about what makes one staff member more effective than another, or how best to train staff. But people in the field generally agree that the staff member's interpersonal sensitivity, skill at leading small groups, and personal emotional health are crucial, regardless of the staff member's formal educational background.
- (5) Successful programs tend to be **targeted to specific ages and outcomes**. They do not try to make everything better. They have clear goals, focusing on something specific like preventing child abuse, or getting parents to talk with their teens about sex. They are also targeted by age, since advice to parents of teens and infants must be so different.
- (6) Successful programs intervene at **critical periods** in the family life course. This means they intervene to prevent problems before they are well established, and they intervene at family transition points when parents are most receptive to learning (e.g. the first year of life; at parental divorce; at step-family formation; at child's puberty).
- (7) Successful programs **build on parents' existing strengths**, rather than focussing on their weaknesses. This is really true of all behavior change. Focussing on deficits makes people feel incapable and defensive, so that they are less likely to take the chance to experiment with new ideas or skills. All people have strengths and abilities, and effective programs recognize and build upon those abilities. Successful programs are open to all; they do not require parents to prove they are failures or "at risk" before giving them services.

- (8) Successful programs allow for **individual differences**. The best advice is best only in a probabilistic sense: it will work most of the time for most parents, but it will not work for every parent in all circumstances. As any parent who has had a second child knows, what works with one child may not work with another. The best programs are not rigidly dogmatic. Rather, they are tolerant in allowing differences, and in recognizing the parent as the final authority in deciding which advice fits best with their child, culture, and family values. A corollary of this principle is that the program will likely be more effective if parents themselves have some say in its design.

Based on these principles, can we develop a standard parenting program for the state? The answer is both Yes and No. There are efficiencies to mounting a standard program, but a standard program should never be simply adopted, but rather should always be adapted to the specific families.

**Any program we mount, to be successful, should be tailored to fit at least the following:**

- (1) **The age of the child.** A parenting program for parents of teens must be very different than one for parents of infants. There is no single thing called “good parenting” that remains constant across the several developmental stages of childhood.
- (2) **The issue or outcome.** A parenting program whose aim is to increase children’s academic achievement will be very different from one to reduce child abuse or delay teen sexuality. Programs targeted to the infancy period may be the exception, since physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional development of the child (and the parenting practices promoting that development) are so closely linked in infancy.
- (3) **The locale and subculture.** Like the natural ecology, social ecologies also vary. We cannot assume (as we once did) that causal processes will remain constant across changes in ecological habitat, whether that ecology is defined in the natural or social world. For example, an authoritarian parenting style is related to better school grades for Asian-American youth, but lower grades for most other American groups.<sup>3</sup> Another example: encouraging parent-child conversation (especially elaborated and responsive language) in the early childhood years makes good sense in most American groups, since it predicts later literacy and success in school. But it makes little sense among most Native Americans, for whom talkative children are not a high cultural value.

- (4) In some cases, by **the family structure**. The “new demography” of the American family shows a varied set of arrangements, including prominently single-parent households, blended families, and 2-earner families. Each occupies a different niche in the social ecology, with its own opportunities and constraints, and programs for each type will often differ. For example, the two years of parent-child relations following a divorce follow a course very different from parent-child relations in intact families, and the research literature allows us to make highly specific and useful suggestions to parents in that family structure.

So: a one-size-fits-all parenting program is unlikely to work. We can produce standard, statewide programs, which support parents’ near-universal desire to do their best in raising their children well. But these programs must be specific to content and age of child, and will usually need to be tailored to the specific locale.

Further, our preconceptions about the needs of any particular locale must always be questioned. How can we sift the real from the perceived needs of parents in a community? Whatever we do, we are well advised to begin by assessing local needs and local supports for parenting; by hiring (and listening to) staff from the communities to be served; and by giving local programs the authority to run themselves, so that local variations in the programs are possible.

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# Innovative Policies and Programs That Promote Competent Parenting and Support Families

*Asst. Professor Karen Bogenschneider*

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## Why the Recent Interest Among Policymakers in Promoting Competent Parenting and Supporting Families?

**F**amily support is not a new concept. For decades, parents have received support in village greens and on park benches; during barn raisings and church meetings; and at gatherings in the general store, post office, or neighborhood cheese factory.<sup>1</sup> At these events, which were once commonplace in America, parents were able to talk with each other, observe other parents interacting with and disciplining their children, and find out about community rules and standards for child rearing. Through these interactions, parents developed social ties to neighbors and community and a commitment to their well-being.

Even though few of these customs remain, the needs they met and the purposes they served, continue.<sup>1</sup> Since the 1970s, a number of community initiatives have sprung up to provide the parent education and family support that occurred more informally a century ago. Increasingly, these grassroots efforts are drawing attention from policymakers, business leaders, private foundations, and others interested in child and family well-being. To cite only a few examples:

- ❖ A federal budget agreement last year included a capped entitlement which will provide \$930 million for family preservation and family support services over a five-year period.
- ❖ Minnesota, Missouri, and Kentucky have committed state funds to extend family support initiatives to all families in the state.<sup>2</sup>
- ❖ A number of private foundations have invested heavily in state initiatives. For example, the Annie E. Casey Foundation has been a pioneer in partnering with states around child and family agendas such as the “Wisconsin Kids Count” project here in Wisconsin.<sup>3</sup>
- ❖ The private sector echoed these same sentiments in a report issued by The Committee for Economic Development (1989). Over 200 educators and CEO’s of the country’s leading corporations, including Exxon, Proctor & Gamble, AT&T, Goodyear, and Ford Motor Company, recommended supporting families through home-visiting, parent-child centers, and family resource programs.<sup>4</sup>

While there are undoubtedly a myriad of reasons fueling this heightened interest in parent education and family support, this paper begins by enumerating only five.

**(1) The Changing Conditions of Contemporary Family Life**

The recent interest in parent education and family support has been a response to the well-documented changes in the conditions of American life more children living with one parent, rising rates of children in poverty, more mothers and fathers employed outside the home each day,<sup>5</sup> and frequent family relocation. The average family that buys a home sells it within three years; a surprising 20 percent of the population moves every year, and the average individual moves 14 times in his or her lifetime.<sup>6</sup> These residential moves do not allow enough time for parents and children to develop close ties to neighbors, schools, and the community.

**(2) Public Pessimism Over the State of the Family**

A recent survey commissioned by the National Commission on Children<sup>7</sup> revealed public pessimism about the state of families and children. While the majority of parents reported close relationships with their children, 88 percent of Americans believe it is harder to be a parent than it used to be and 86 percent are often uncertain about what is the right thing to do in raising their children. Most parents reported considerable stress in their lives due, in large part, to conditions outside the family work demands, negative peer pressure on children, damaging cultural messages, social isolation, economic pressure, and unsafe streets and neighborhoods. Findings like these have led to the growing perception that parents are having a more difficult time nowadays getting the help they need from both formal and informal sources; furthermore, the need for this support cuts across socioeconomic and education lines<sup>25</sup> and extends to parents with children as old as adolescents.<sup>7</sup>

**(3) Emerging Research on Child and Family Development**

As research moved from the laboratory to real-life settings, three discoveries provided impetus to the parent education and family support movement.<sup>6</sup> The first discovery of this research on family matters is that the family matters.<sup>8</sup> Families are the most powerful, humane, and economical system for building competence and character in children. Second, studies revealed that fathers, like mothers, are an important influence on child development. Furthermore, the capacity of a parent to parent depends to a large extent on the relationship with the other parent. Third, families do a better job of raising children when they can count on the support of people outside the family kin, friends, neighbors, and the community.<sup>6</sup>

***We cannot really grasp where we are going until we better understand our past.***

**(4) Growing Recognition that Changes are Needed in How We Deliver Child and Family Services**

Another reason for the growing interest in family matters is growing dissatisfaction with traditional human service programs which by mandate, caseload, or mode of service are unable to meet the needs of multiply stressed families.<sup>9</sup> In many states, services are aimed at individuals rather than the family unit. Too often, interventions are crisis-oriented, functioning more like an ambulance at the bottom of the cliff than a fence at the top to prevent people from falling.<sup>10</sup> Truly integrated systems are the exception;<sup>9</sup> unfortunately, examples of families having six or seven caseworkers is not rare. Nor are instances of families filling out repetitive forms to gain access to state and federal programs. In the words of Bronfenbrenner,<sup>11</sup> we ask families to prove over and over again in writing that they are the inadequate people they claim to be. How can we bring people up by putting them down? Such fragmentation makes it difficult to treat the whole family, to tackle more than one problem at a time, and to treat those families with multiple problems in a comprehensive way.<sup>12</sup>

**(5) Bipartisan Consensus on the Need for More Public as Well as Private Support for Families**

According to Weiss,<sup>13</sup> the bipartisan National Commission on Children is one example of how citizens have been able to overcome the ideological differences that have limited the willingness of politicians to put family issues on the table. The Commission, appointed by a Republican President and a Democratic Congress, met for 2 1/2 years to develop an American agenda for children and families. Liberal and conservative members of the commission were able to agree on a set of principles and actions in their extensive report, *Beyond Rhetoric*.<sup>14</sup> The report underscores the families' responsibility to support children, while recognizing public and private responsibility to support families. The National Governor's Association,<sup>9</sup> legislators, and a number of specially convened commissions increasingly view strengthening families as one way to prevent a variety of social problems.

Given all the enthusiasm, support, and good will these programs are generating across the political spectrum, I will turn first to defining the family support and education movement and what differentiates it from some of its close cousins parent education, family preservation, and home visiting. Then I will address the question of government's role in promoting competent parenting by turning to five national reports and one state report that address this issue. Next, I turn to actual programs that five pioneering states have invested in and what we know about whether these programs work. I conclude by detailing the challenges facing state governments in this area, and summarizing recent funding opportunities at the federal level.

## What is the Family Support and Education Movement?

Since the mid 1970s, there has been steady growth in a grassroots family support movement, but it was not until the 1980s that the movement really captured the attention of reform-minded governors, child and family service providers, and independently-appointed policy commissions. One proposal that received broad based support is the development and expansion of community-based family support and education programs.<sup>18,19,20,21,22,23</sup>

Despite their popularity, family support and education programs are not easy to define because of the diversity of programs included under this rubric. Weiss and Halpern<sup>9</sup> define family support and education programs as those in which communities employ lay or professional workers to support families, and through families, their children's health and well-being.

Even though these programs are different from each other in their objectives, organization, and content, they can be distinguished more readily by their approach than by the specific services they provide.<sup>9</sup> They share in common some core concepts and assumptions which have broad appeal across the political spectrum. Family support and education programs:

- ❖ Recognize that all families need support, regardless of economic status, but not all families need the same kind of support<sup>15</sup>
- ❖ Provide the chief elements of social support information, guidance, feedback, practical assistance, and encouragement<sup>16</sup>
- ❖ Relate to parents as partners rather than experts<sup>16</sup>
- ❖ Build on family strengths rather than managing problems and deficits<sup>5</sup>
- ❖ Emphasize prevention and laying the groundwork for positive development rather than remediation or treatment<sup>6</sup>
- ❖ Provide ongoing, noncategorical services rather than strict eligibility requirements for limited periods of time<sup>5</sup>
- ❖ Voluntary participation<sup>5</sup>
- ❖ Community ownership which facilitates sensitivity to the culture, family structure, and ethnicity of the families in the community<sup>16</sup>

- ❖ Involve parents in designing the program and place priority on employing community citizens as workers<sup>5</sup>
- ❖ Are easily accessible, often on a drop-in basis or in parent's own home<sup>16</sup>

Activities vary depending upon the needs and interests of local families, available resources, and the objectives of funding sources. Generally, however, the programs include parent education, peer support groups, child care, respite care, health screening for infants and children, home visits, help with securing access to publicly entitled benefits and services, and referrals for adult education or job training.<sup>14</sup> The preventive, developmental nature of the programs typically preclude intensive treatment services such as drug treatment or mental health services.

In terms of organization, family support and education programs can be free-standing or part of other institutions such as schools, churches, health centers, or community action agencies. Some are located at the workplace, others at child care sites, or Head Start programs.

The concept of community-based family support and education programs may become clearer by comparing it with some of its "first cousins".<sup>9</sup> For example:

- ❖ Parent education programs are typically less comprehensive than family support and education programs; furthermore, they focus on a specific, often predetermined, set of parenting skills taught by using a packaged curriculum.
- ❖ Family preservation programs are a treatment approach aimed at troubled families in which children are at-risk of being removed from the home. Unlike family support and education programs, they are generally not voluntary, crisis-oriented, and aimed at altering family dysfunction.
- ❖ Home visitors visit parents in their own home and provide parenting information, social support, and linkages to other family services. Home visiting has attracted attention recently because studies suggest it is one component of virtually any early intervention program that has proven effective.<sup>17</sup> Home visiting programs are just one service of many that a comprehensive family support and education program might provide; for example, in Wisconsin all Family Resource Centers must provide home visiting as one of the core services.

## What Policies Can Support Families and Promote Competent Parenting?

This section poses the policy question, “Can Government Promote Competent Parenting?” To answer this question, I turn to five national reports and one state report issued within the last five years that propose policy agendas for children and families. This section does not attempt to present an exhaustive review of policy options for promoting competent parenting. Instead this report summarizes policy proposals from six different, potentially contradictory, sources spanning the political spectrum. (A description of each of these policy sources can be found in Appendix A).

- ❖ American Public Welfare Association<sup>18</sup>
- ❖ The Council of Chief State School Officers<sup>19</sup>
- ❖ The National Commission on America’s Urban Families<sup>20</sup>
- ❖ The National Commission on Children<sup>21</sup>
- ❖ U.S. Dept. of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement<sup>22</sup>
- ❖ Wisconsin Governor’s Task Force on Family and Children’s Issues<sup>23</sup>

At the outset, it’s important to point out that the intent of Family Impact Seminars is not to lobby for specific policies, but to stimulate debate around the potential consequences of a range of policy strategies. The policy options recommended by these six authoritative sources are summarized in the following four categories:

### (1) Family Support

- ❖ One recommendation that occurs in each of these reports is the need to develop and expand community-based family support and education programs to provide parents with the knowledge, skills and support they need to raise their children.<sup>18,19,20,21,22,23</sup> Most sources recommend that federal, state, and local governments work together with private community organizations to develop and expand grassroots, family-centered programs.
- ❖ Two of the reports underscore that supporting families requires more than parent education, social support, and information and referral. Particularly for vulnerable families, family support means ensuring a family’s access to high quality health and mental health care, education, recreation, housing, employment and training, and substance abuse prevention and treatment.<sup>18,21</sup>
- ❖ Three of the reports<sup>20,21,23</sup> recommend high quality child care as an important family support.<sup>24</sup> The reports recommend that government, communities, civic organizations, and employers work to improve the availability, affordability, and quality of child care services for all children and families that need them.

- ❖ The Wisconsin report suggested a statewide prevention resource center that would provide prevention resources and technical assistance on issues affecting children, families, and adolescents.<sup>23</sup>
- ❖ One report laments the loss of “social capital” or the social support that occurs when parents are connected to other parents in the community. The report recommends that schools and communities take steps to build community connections by creating opportunities for parents to get to know each other and become familiar with community rules and standards for childrearing.<sup>22</sup> The intent is to create formal systems of support that generate and strengthen informal systems of support that, in turn, can reduce the need for formal systems.<sup>25</sup>
- ❖ Communities need to create opportunities for citizens to demonstrate the value they attach to child rearing. For example, volunteers can establish parents’ groups, get involved in children’s education and activities, organize neighborhood activities, and lend clothes, books, and toys to neighbors with young children.<sup>20,21</sup>
- ❖ Governments can create awards to honor persons, organizations, or programs that strengthen families or communities.<sup>20</sup>
- ❖ Governments, civic organizations, and businesses could establish opportunities for intergenerational contact between seniors and children.<sup>20</sup> For example, Switzerland has a law that no institution that cares for the elderly can be established unless it is next to or shares facilities with a day care center or other setting for children.
- ❖ The use of public facilities could be examined to determine if there are ways that they could better support or strengthen families.<sup>20</sup>
- ❖ Public and private recreational activities could charge family admission rates when parents and children attend together.<sup>20</sup>
- ❖ Government and private employers should establish family-oriented policies and practices.<sup>20,21</sup> Such practices as family and medical leave, part-time work, flexible work scheduling, compressed work weeks, telecommuting, job-sharing, and career sequencing enable mothers and fathers to meet work and family responsibilities.
- ❖ Congress (or states) could create a tax credit for small businesses that offer employees with newborns or newly adopted children up to 6 months of unpaid leave with continuing health coverage.<sup>20</sup>

## (2) Parent Involvement

- ❖ Five reports emphasized that parents must play a strong role in planning and launching parent education and family support programs to ensure that they reflect local needs and interests.<sup>18,19,20,21,22</sup>
- ❖ State education agencies should promote parents' involvement in their children's schooling through teaching, support, and decision making roles.<sup>19</sup>
- ❖ Employers could allow parents to spend time away from work for parental duties such as parent/teacher conferences; at the same time, schools could provide more opportunities for parents to be involved during nonwork hours.<sup>20</sup>

## (3) Parent Education

- ❖ Five of the six reports recommended increasing parent education opportunities through institutions such as businesses, civic clubs, churches, public agencies, and schools.<sup>18,20,21,22,23</sup>
- ❖ The Wisconsin report recommended establishing home visiting services and informal parent-to-parent support programs, whereby parents are linked up with paraprofessionals or retirees with successful parenting experiences.<sup>23</sup>
- ❖ Communities can develop and help create public awareness of marriage preparation and enrichment opportunities.<sup>20,21</sup>
- ❖ Schools can incorporate parenting education into the curriculum,<sup>20</sup> with special attempts to target the unique needs of teen parents, both male and female.<sup>23</sup>
- ❖ Parents need to assume responsibility for planning their families and delaying pregnancy until they are financially and emotionally capable of assuming the obligations of parenting; although family planning should continue to remain a private matter, public support for family planning services can provide access to all families regardless of income.<sup>21</sup>

## (4) Incorporating Family Support Principles into Existing Programs

- ❖ Human service programs should review programs and services to ensure they reflect family support principles they build on family strengths, are voluntary and nonpunitive, represent a mix of preventive and early intervention programs, are multidisciplinary in orientation, delivered through the community, readily accessible to parents, coordinated across program areas, and designed to provide practical solutions to family crises.<sup>18,20,21,23</sup>

- ❖ A strong emphasis should be placed on keeping children with their families or providing permanent placement for those removed from their homes.<sup>18,20,21</sup>
- ❖ States and the federal government should develop mechanisms so that family eligibility for multiple programs can be more easily established.<sup>20,23</sup>
- ❖ State education agencies should incorporate family support, education, and involvement strategies into school accreditation standards and quality review.<sup>19,21</sup>
- ❖ Public and private funders should require community matches and collaboration with local bodies to help avoid duplication and ensure a continuum of services.<sup>23</sup>
- ❖ A “State of the Family and Child” assessment could provide an ongoing barometer of family well-being.<sup>18</sup>

### **What Family Support and Education Efforts Have Five Pioneering States Invested in?**

The interest, energy, and innovation that has fueled the growth of family support and education programs have been concentrated, almost exclusively, at the local and state levels.<sup>26</sup> In the mid 1970s, there was steady growth in locally generated programs with the 1980s bringing state-sponsored pilot programs or, in a few states, actual legislation of statewide initiatives.

To signify the richness of innovation that has occurred at the state level around family support and education, Bruner<sup>3</sup> refers to state governments as the “fifty laboratories of democracy.” While the efforts of states around the country are admirable, none is fully developed nor sets itself up as the exemplar for others.<sup>26</sup>

The Harvard Family Research Project has recently published four booklets that describe family support and education programs in states around the country including Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Iowa, Florida, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, Washington, West Virginia, and Vermont. The Pioneering States Booklet<sup>27</sup> was provided free of charge to seminar participants; any of these booklets can be ordered from the Harvard Family Research Project for \$6 each. (For ordering information, see Appendix B).

One of these booklets, *“Pioneering States: Innovative Family Support and Education Programs”* describes the efforts of five pioneering states Connecticut, Kentucky, Maryland, Minnesota, and Missouri; each has developed preventive, family-oriented services on a broad or fully statewide basis. These programs are summarized so completely and succinctly in this new publication that they are only briefly summarized here to provide a flavor of their diversity. Even though these states share a similar approach, they vary extensively in their goals, services, sponsorship, and funding.

### Goals of Five State Initiatives

First, the intent and the impetus for these programs varies greatly.

- ❖ The **Connecticut** program developed in response to alarming economic indicators including increases in child poverty, single parent households, and minority unemployment. **Connecticut’s** Parent Education Support Centers (PESC) aim to strengthen parenting competence through education and support.
- ❖ In 1990, the Kentucky Supreme Court ruled that the state educational system was discriminatory and had to be completely reconstructed.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the Legislature was faced with data that their state was last in the country in the percentage of adults who completed high school combined with related difficulties in attracting industry to the state. As a result, **Kentucky** provided funding for a family resource or youth services center for every school where more than 20 percent of children were eligible for free or reduced price school lunches. **Kentucky’s** Parent and Child Education (PACE) focuses on promoting positive attitudes toward academic achievement in both parents and children.
- ❖ The **Maryland** program was established in response to the state’s high teenage pregnancy rate and data linking teen parenthood to child abuse. The goal of **Maryland’s** Family Support Centers is to provide comprehensive, community-based preventive services on a drop-in basis to families in high-risk communities.
- ❖ The **Minnesota** program began as a pilot program in the early 1970’s aimed at providing early childhood education to prevent later school failure. **Minnesota’s** Early Childhood Family Education Program (ECFE) focuses on providing parent education, parent-child interaction, and early childhood education for all families with children, birth to kindergarten age.
- ❖ Since 1984, **Missouri** has been the only state in the country that mandates parent education and family support services in every school district. Parents as Teachers (PAT) provides preschool developmental screening and parent education to enhance child development and promote school achievement.

**“You know,  
we are not  
talking about  
welfare anymore,  
are we?”**

## Services Provided By Five State Initiatives

- ❖ **Connecticut's** Parent Education Support Centers provides parent education and parent training, support groups, drop-in programs, activities for parents and their children, information and referral, and training for other community agencies.
- ❖ **Kentucky's** PACE provides a preschool program for three and four-year-olds and opportunities for parent/child activities. Parents have access to adult education classes, GED coaching, literacy tutoring, and support groups.
- ❖ **Maryland's** Family Support Center services range from developmental screening for infants to adolescent pregnancy prevention. Services also include parent education and support, job skills training, and literacy opportunities. Information and referral is provided along with advocacy and community-building.
- ❖ The most common program in **Minnesota's** Early Childhood Family Education is a weekly class for children held at the same time as a parenting class. Services often include home visits, sibling care, newsletters, and access to toys and books. Special attempts are made to reach Southeast Asian immigrants, single parents, and teen parents.
- ❖ All of **Missouri's** centers are mandated to provide home visits, parent groups, and developmental screening for children through age four. Centers may also provide toy and book lending libraries, newsletters, referrals, and "drop-in and play times".

## Sponsorship of Five State Initiatives

- ❖ In **Connecticut** and **Maryland**, the programs are sponsored by social service agencies, who, in turn, contract the resources to their own line agencies or to community-based organizations ranging from religious groups to community action agencies, mental health centers, and day care providers. Maryland's program is a statewide public-private partnership administered by the Social Services Administration and participating foundations with oversight by a nonprofit corporation called Friends of the Family.
- ❖ The **Kentucky** program is administered through the Department of Adult and Technical Education in the Workforce Development Cabinet. The school districts are eligible for grants to establish the program in or near public schools.
- ❖ The **Minnesota** and **Missouri** programs are provided through the education system. The local educational authority administers the program, although the programs can be subcontracted to other groups. Thus, the services are delivered at a variety of sites, including nonschool ones.

## Funding of Five State Initiatives

The two oldest programs have the most funding. In 1989-90, **Minnesota** received \$9.7 million in state aid and \$13.7 million in property tax revenues for 340 programs. Funding was nearly \$27 million in 1991-92. Local districts may also charge fees, and funding is received from other sources including state vocational-technical aid, federal grants, and foundation funds.

In FY 1990-91, **Missouri**'s program reached over 100,000 families with \$13 million in state funding; additional school district funds and in-kind services are provided at local discretion. Since 1981, Missouri has received more than \$1 million dollars in private funding from the Danforth, Ford, and other foundations.

In 1990-91, **Maryland**'s Family Support Centers reached 2,500 individuals annually in 13 sites with a total budget of \$3.8 million. The state and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services have provided 70 percent of the funding with the remaining 30 percent coming from individuals, corporations, and foundations (i.e. Goldseker, Straus, Ford, Knott, Public Welfare, Abell and Annie E. Casey).<sup>2,27</sup>

**Kentucky**'s program is funded entirely by the state. The budget doubled to \$3.6 million in 1990 for 33 classrooms in 30 districts.

**Connecticut**'s program is funded exclusively by the Department of Children and Youth Services. As of 1990, Connecticut developed 12 Parent Education Support Centers with nearly \$550,000 in annual funding.

## Do Family Support and Education Programs Work?

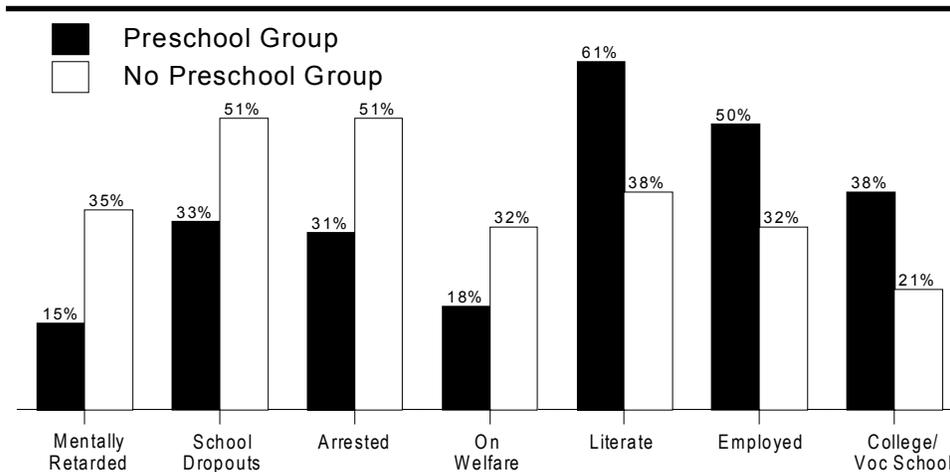
Everyone wants an answer to the question, "Do family support and education programs work?" Unfortunately, in the real world, such simple questions don't lead to easy answers. Instead, the questions that need to be asked are:

*...what programs work best for whom, when, for how long must they exist, how do they work, and ultimately, why are they effective?<sup>16</sup> (p.20).*

Much of the research supporting current family support and education programs come from careful, longitudinal studies of a few early intervention programs for low-income families, which provided education and support to help parents function better. These childhood intervention programs have resulted in significant, long-lasting, and positive results on children's intellectual and social skills, socioeconomic standing, and social responsibility. For example, preschool pro-

grams, like the Perry Preschool Program, increased the percentage of participants who were literate, employed and attending post-secondary education. At the same time, program participants were less apt to be mentally retarded, school dropouts, welfare recipients, or in trouble with the law (See Figure A).<sup>28</sup>

**Figure A**  
**High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Age-19 Findings**



**Note:** All group differences are statistically significant,  $p < .05$ , two-tailed.

Furthermore, mounting evidence suggests that providing education to parents improves parenting behavior which, in turn, benefits parent-child interaction. Across a broad range of programs and participants, programs that include parent education have shown small but important effects on parents greater maternal warmth and responsiveness, more participation in child care, and lower rates of child abuse and neglect.<sup>29</sup>

When the goals and expected outcomes of programs are more clearly defined, evaluation is easier.<sup>16</sup> Missouri's Parents as Teachers (PAT) program is a good example. The program's goal is to enhance a child's development and school performance through parent education and developmental screening. Studies show that children involved in the program scored higher on standardized measure of math and reading in first grade than nonparticipants; in addition, PAT parents were more involved in their children's schooling.<sup>27</sup>

These impressive results still don't answer policymaker's questions about whether these programs work. We know that a handful of fairly intensive programs work when implemented on a small scale; we don't know whether these programs will work if replicated on a larger scale.<sup>16</sup> While the trends from these model programs are encouraging, it would be premature to conclude that family involvement will increase the effectiveness of any program or policy or that parent education or family support will work alone. Clearly family education and support is not a magic bullet and the best solutions often involve comprehensive approaches.

Finally, even though the positive impacts of these early childhood education programs were detectable in children 5 and 10 years later, we cannot be certain what aspects of the program account for their success. In summary, the results are encouraging, but we have much experimenting yet to do before we will know the most cost effective means of family support and education.<sup>30</sup> Much of this experimenting is going on in states who are investing in these programs.

### **What Challenges Face State Government in Family Support and Education?**

According to former state senator in Iowa, Charles Bruner, who now directs the Child and Family Policy Center, states must get involved if family support and education is to move beyond small scale demonstration projects. Bruner identifies several challenges facing states in a chapter in a book about to be released.<sup>3</sup> Among them are the following:

1. What level of commitment is needed? Should family support and education programs be made more widely available?
2. Will programs be universal or targeted to those who need them most? Those who argue for universality contend this is one of the core principles of the family support and education movement; attempts to target “at-risk” children often miss some who need help.

Those who argue for targeted services contend that they are more cost-effective and that harder-to-reach families may yield the greatest payoff. The natural tendency for providers is to work with those who are most willing and eager to receive assistance, precisely those who would be most likely to secure the services without help. On a practical level, the challenge is that those most in need of the services may be most difficult to reach; if reached, they may crowd out less needy, but loyal participants.

3. If family support and education programs try to reach more parents, will they be able to maintain program quality? For example, one of the distinguishing characteristics of the success of these programs is their intimacy; would expansion compromise this vital feature?
4. Will funds be available to adequately evaluate the effectiveness of these programs?

### **What Federal Funding Opportunities Exist?**

The federal government has funded much of the research driving this movement, but the lion’s share of funding has been private until just recently. The reason for

this, according to Carter,<sup>2</sup> is that this comprehensive and flexible approach defies the categorization underlying state and federal programs:

*It is not exactly education although it can contribute significantly to it. It is not a health service per se, although it can enhance and extend health services. It is not a specific social service that can be delivered to a specific individual who can be defined as "eligible" for it. In an era of fiscal restraint... widespread funding for any new service, especially one that does not easily fit into a single category, has been unlikely (p.11).<sup>2</sup>*

One funding source some states have successfully tapped is categorical Federal funds (i.e. Medicaid, Headstart, AFDC Job funds); in addition, four significant pieces of Federal legislation have become available in the last five years for funding family support and education programs. An overview is provided by Judy Carter in a chapter of a new book.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Comprehensive Child Development Program**

The Comprehensive Child Development Program, first authorized in 1988 at a level of \$25 million per year, funded 24 projects in 1989 and 1990 for five years. The program is intended to test the results of providing long-term, intensive services to high risk families. Grants averaged \$1 million with the number of families served held constant at 120 participants. Congress increased the annual appropriation to \$45 million in 1992.

### **The McKinney Homelessness Prevention Act**

The intent of the 1990 McKinney Homelessness Prevention Act is to stabilize families, especially teen parents, and prevent them from becoming homeless. Grants to local programs were first made in the summer of 1992.

### **The Family Resource and Support Grants Program in the Young Americans Act**

The Family Resource and Support Grants Program was authorized for three years in 1990 as part of the Young Americans Act. The grants program received \$4.9 million in 1992. Of the 44 states who applied, three states will be chosen to receive funds.

### **The Family Preservation and Support Services Program in the 1993 Budget Agreement**

As part of the 1993 Federal budget agreement, almost \$879 million was included over a five-year period to fund a capped entitlement for family support and family preservation services through the child welfare system. Each state will receive formula-driven funds to provide family support and family preservation

services. While the details are not yet worked out, the program is expected to allow local programs to provide services in some form of public-private partnership with state child welfare agencies. This year, 1994, is designated as the planning year for states to decide how to use the money.

## CONCLUSION

Let me conclude with the question I started with, "Can government promote competent parenting?" Clearly, government and agency commissions have generated many ideas about how government can support families. Even more convincing, innovative communities around the state and pioneering states around the country have developed programs and policies that successfully support families, and, through families, the well-being of children. While the efforts of communities and states have been admirable, none is fully developed nor sets itself up as the exemplar for others. Quite frankly, the mushrooming interest in supporting families has outstripped our scientific understanding of the most cost effective ways to deliver family support and education programs.

In some ways, the field seems to be at a crossroads. Will parent education and family support remain small scale community demonstration projects? Will government get involved in expanding the programs to reach more families? If so, what policies and programs will emerge and with what purpose? Clearly, there are no single or easy answers to these questions and the answers will be worked out in the "laboratories of democracy" communities and states across the country. The federal government, however, does not appear to be a passive observer. Communities and states must recognize that their actions have implications far beyond their boundaries and be willing to examine their successes and their shortcomings honestly.

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# What Parent Education and Family Support Efforts Has Wisconsin Invested In?

*Kari Morgan*

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**N**o comprehensive overview of parent education and family support programs in Wisconsin is available at this time. However, there are a wide range of public and private organizations providing effective parent education and family support programming throughout the state of Wisconsin.

This section of the briefing report will provide an overview of the parent education and family support programs that are available in Wisconsin by examining the range of local programs and services funded through the Children's Trust Fund, which was created by the Wisconsin State Legislature in 1983 to expand family support and parent education services statewide. The Children's Trust Fund provides funding for two major programs: Year-long Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Programs, and Family Support Centers.

Between the years of 1991 and 1993, nearly \$1.3 million of grants for Year-long Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention grants were awarded to 36 different Wisconsin programs. Each program was awarded a maximum of \$20,000. A range of public agencies received funding including community nursing agencies, family resource centers, hospitals, human and social service departments, public health departments, school districts, the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Universities, and University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension. Other providers included Advocates Inc., Boys and Girls Clubs, Catholic Social Services, Children's Service Society, Community Action Programs, Exchange Center for the Prevention of Child Abuse, Family Service Associations, Family Support Centers, Lutheran Social Services, Mental Health Association, Parents Anonymous, Pregnancy Hotlines, Renewal Unlimited, Rosalie Manor, Teen Pregnancy Services, UP Connection, and Women's Health and Resource Centers.

The Children's Trust Fund also provides \$675,000 a year (\$75,000 per center) for funding of nine Family Resource Centers. The Family Resource Centers are located in La Crosse, Ladysmith, Madison, Manitowoc, Milwaukee (two programs), Prairie du Chien, Wausau, and West Bend. Each year in Wisconsin, the Family Resource Centers provide a wide range of services including more than 1,400 group based parent education and support services; nearly 4,000 individual parent education and support services; more than 700 life skills, educational, and vocational skills classes, and nearly 800 child care sessions. Furthermore, more than 3,000 visits are made to resource libraries, 4,000 calls to "warmlines", and 8,000 requests for parent education and support.

The Children's Trust Fund is a public-private partnership with an annual budget of approximately \$1.4 million. The majority of that funding comes from a \$5 charge on duplicate Wisconsin birth certificates. The Children's Trust Fund receives additional funding from federal matching funds and gifts from private individuals, corporations, and foundations. The Children's Trust Fund is administered by the 14 member Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board consisting of six governmental members and eight members from the public with expertise on child abuse and neglect.

The goal of the Children's Trust Fund is to prevent child abuse and neglect in the state of Wisconsin. This goal is achieved by providing assistance and funding to comprehensive community-based child abuse and neglect prevention programs; developing public information campaigns that promote awareness and understanding of child abuse and neglect prevention issues; and advising state and local policy makers on child abuse and neglect prevention statutes and policies. The Children's Trust Fund also provides public education through a quarterly newsletter; parent education kits and information; training conferences; and advocacy for children and families at the state legislature. In fact, since 1988 close to 180,000 free parenting booklets, have been given away. In addition, 10,000 parents receive parenting kits each year.

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# How Does A Milwaukee Family Resource Center Promote Competent Parenting? Silver Spring Neighborhood Center Family Resource Center

*Sally Lundeen*  
*Director*

**Goals:** The Silver Spring Neighborhood Center Family Resource Center (SSNC FRC) is a primary prevention project designed to: 1) provide educational and support services which promote positive parenting for parents of children newborn to three years of age; 2) provide programming for children newborn to three years of age which fosters health, growth and development, and positive self-esteem; 3) promote an increase in self-esteem and improvement in coping skills in parents of young children through involvement in a variety of educational, social, and recreational programs offered on-site; 4) improve access for families with young children to a variety of health services; and 5) enable families to access other community resources to meet their needs.

**History:** SSNC is a private, not-for-profit, human service agency founded in 1958. Following the settlement house tradition, it offers a comprehensive range of educational, recreational, employment, emergency and health programs, and services. A hallmark of SSNC has been its openness to the development of collaborative arrangements with other providers. During the past four years, this philosophy has reached a new level through the integration of an extensive program of health services provided on-site at SSNC by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Nursing Center.

The SSNC FRC was established in July 1990 as a collaborative project of Silver Spring Neighborhood Center (SSNC) and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Nursing Center (UWM-NC). The opening of the FRC represented a major expansion of an existing Positive Parenting Program.

**Community:** Located on the northwest side of Milwaukee, the SSNC serves the residents of Westlawn, the largest federally subsidized housing development in Wisconsin, and the surrounding community. Of the 726 housing units in Westlawn, 89% receive public assistance and 80% are headed by single female parents. Ninety percent of the residents are African American, 5% other minorities, and 5% Caucasian. It is a young population, with almost 70% of Westlawn residents under 29 years of age; 51% 17 years of age and under, and 10% birth to 3 years of age. In the northwest side community which surrounds and includes Westlawn, 43.8% of the residents are African American and 51.7% are Caucasian.

***We cannot really grasp where we are going until we better understand our past.***

**Services:** The major programs and services provided to parents of young children include: Positive Parenting Classes; nurse clinician and community parent advocate home visits; telephone support; family events and field trips; structured parent/child interaction sessions; teen parent programs; mini workshops; child care/learning activities; childbirth education; primary health care/screening/health education for adults and children; on-site and home-based mental health counseling; developmental screening for children; women's support groups; advocacy and resource linking; and transportation for participants.

A partial list of other comprehensive services available on-site include: family living skills classes; recreational and social activities, GED classes and Adult Basic Skills Classes; employment placement services; emergency services (food pantry/clothing bank/energy assistance); afterschool children's programs; daycare; kindergarten; alternative middle and high school; and meal programs for children and seniors.

**Participants:** The FRC was established to serve all area families with children newborn to three years of age. During the first year of FRC operation, 270 families participated in FRC programs and services. In addition, the comprehensive collaborative model provides support services for area residents from the very young to the very old. Over 600-700 people pass through the doors of SSNC daily.

**Staff:** The multidisciplinary team of the FRC includes a .60 FTE project Coordinator, a full-time Early Childhood Specialist, a full-time community parent Advocate, four part-time Child Care Assistants, a part-time Family Nurse Practitioner, a part-time Mental Health Nurse, and a part-time secretary. Numerous volunteers including an Advisory Board provide valuable assistance in planning, promoting, implementing, and evaluating Family Resource Center programs and services. Administrative support is provided by SSNC and the UWM-NC.

**Outreach:** Outreach is an important component of all SSNC Family Resource Center programs and services. Home visits by the Community Parent Advocates and Nurse Clinicians provide support, parent education, referral, crisis intervention, and health care. Telephone warmline contacts are utilized to provide support, and to link families with needed services at SSNC or other community resources. Other outreach activities include quarterly mailing of the SSNC newsletter to 5,000 area businesses and residents; mailing of flyers and brochures to families with newborns and young children; door-to-door contacts; and special events such as family carnivals and African American cultural events.

**Evaluation:** Several methods of evaluation are utilized for the various FRC programs and services. Written and telephone satisfaction surveys are used to obtain participant feedback. Detailed service records are maintained to document utilization by families over time. A computerized data system is utilized by the UWM Nursing Center to document: (1) the needs of parents and children served by the nurse clinicians; (2) the nursing services provided; and (3) the outcome of the services. An evaluation study completed in December 1990 of the group parent education program utilized confidential in-depth interviews with participants and staff to document positive outcomes on several indicators related to effective parenting. A variety of indicators are also used to measure empowerment of parents and increased self sufficiency such as effective utilization of community resources, continued education and increased financial security through employment.

**Funding:** Silver Spring Neighborhood Center is a United Way supported agency. The FRC's current annual budget of \$114,479 is derived from the following sources: 66% from the Wisconsin Children's Trust Fund; 22% from United Way Community Initiatives Fund; 4% from Milwaukee County CAP Network. The comprehensive range of educational, recreational, emergency, health, and employment services available on-site is made possible by large in-kind contributions from over 15 collaborating agencies including UWM Nursing Center, Social Development Commission, Milwaukee Public Schools, Milwaukee Area Technical College, and Milwaukee Urban League. A variety of other organizations including the CAP Fund Be-A-Buddy Program, Hope Network, St. Joseph's Hospital Women and Infant's Center, and Hunger Task Force generously contributed gifts and needed supplies for FRC families.

**Suggestions:** Family Resource Centers which are effective in empowering economically disadvantaged families provide a comprehensive range of community-based programs and services designed to address the multiple needs and stressors faced by those families. However, it is not enough for a grocery list of services to be "available" at one location. The programs and services must also be "acceptable" to participating families that is they must be culturally appropriate and delivered by a culturally competent team of providers who respect and recognize the strengths of all families and individuals being served.

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## Appendix A

### The Six Policy Proposals Cited In This Report

**The American Public Welfare Association (APWA)** formed the National Commission on Child Welfare and Family Preservation in 1988 in response to serious concerns about the status of today's families. The 15-member commission, consisted of cabinet-level state human service officials, local administrators, public child welfare directors, and APWA board members from around the country. The commission's 1990 report, *A Commitment to Change*, proposes a new framework for children and family services.

**The Council of Chief State School Officers** adopted as a major initiative the role of family support, education and involvement in children's school success. One result of that initiative was a 1989 publication, *Family Support, Education and Involvement: A Guide for State Action*. The Council of Chief State School Officers is a nonprofit organization of 57 individuals who head departments of education in every state, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Dependents Schools, and five extra-state jurisdictions.

**The National Commission on America's Urban Families** released its report, *Families First*, in 1993. The eight-member commission was appointed by President Bush in response to the request of the nation's mayors to give special attention to changes in family structure.

**The National Commission on Children**, a bipartisan body with 24 members appointed by Democratic Congressional leaders and 12 by the Reagan White House, was formed on behalf of the nation's children. Members included politicians such as Bill Clinton, academics such as T. Berry Brazelton, advocates such as Marian Wright Edelman, the president of the AFL-CIO, teachers, doctors, agency heads, and volunteers. The Commission released its report, *Beyond Rhetoric*, in 1991 and a series of implementation guides in 1993. Of special interest in this report is the implementation guide, *Strengthening and Supporting Families*.

**The United States Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement** issued a series of reports, *Policy Perspectives*, to inform policymakers about ways to revitalize the nation's schools and communities. The 1991 report cited in this paper, *Parental Involvement in Education*, is authored by James Coleman, a distinguished sociologist from The University of Chicago.

**The Wisconsin Governor's Task Force on Family and Children's Issues** was a 22-member body appointed by Governor Tommy Thompson in 1989 to review policies that impact families and children. The commission issued its report in 1990 which proposed long-term guidelines for state policies relating to families and children.

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## Appendix B

### Booklets On State Family Support And Education Programs Available From The Harvard Research Project

The following four booklets provide a synopsis of the current efforts of states around the country in family support and education. For each program, the booklet describes the program, key events, organization, agency collaboration, goals, funding, participants, staff, services, parent's role, evaluation, and reflections from the program manager. Each book is organized in the same format so it is easy to find the information you need. The booklets have been so popular that two are already in their second edition.

#### Building Partnerships

Models of Family Support and Education Programs

North Dakota, Iowa, Florida, Vermont, and Massachusetts

#### Innovative States

Emerging Family Support and Education Programs

Arkansas, Iowa, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington

#### Pioneering States

Innovative Family Support and Education Programs

Connecticut, Kentucky, Maryland, Minnesota, and Missouri

#### Reinventing Systems

California, Colorado, New Mexico, and West Virginia

(to be released in Spring 1994)

These books can be purchased for \$6 each from:

The Harvard Family Research Project

Harvard Graduate School of Education

Longfellow Hall, Appian Way

Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138





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