

QUALITY EXPERIENCES FOR OUR YOUNGEST CHILDREN:

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Nina Sazer O'Donnell
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The Unacceptable Gap

- **1/3 - 1/4 of America's kindergarteners are coming to school behind**
- **The most vulnerable children are at least 1-2 years behind**
- **By the age of 5, many children in high-risk environments are already developmentally behind**

This gap only grows over time -- undermining school readiness and success in life.

-- Dr. Craig Ramey, Center for Health & Education, Georgetown University

Families

- Majority low-wage earning;
- Many part-time and lack benefits;
- Many languages, cultures and needs; and
- Many play dual role of employee and caregiver.

Parents and Caregivers Need Help and Information

- **Parents & caregivers dramatically undervalue their role in school readiness -- 1 in 3 incorrectly believe their loving interaction has little impact on their child's learning capacity.**

(2000 study done by Civitas, Zero To Three & BRIO)

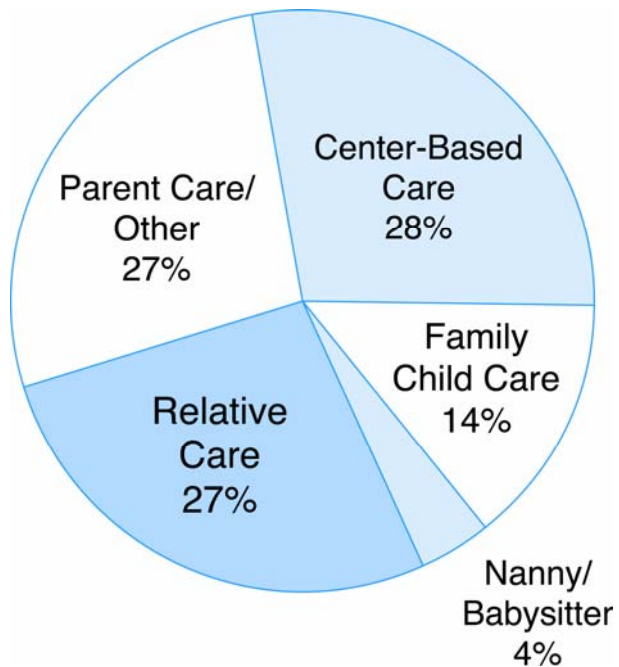
- **Caregivers know the early years matter, but don't know exactly what to do to promote early learning – and don't think they have time to do what it takes.**

(Ad Council & UWA public opinion research, 2004)

Where Are The Youngest Children?

- The majority (more than ½) of the youngest and poorest children are in Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) Care (including parents).
- Many are in more than one setting.

How Many Children Are in FFN Care?



- infants and toddlers are more likely to be with relatives
- children from lower-income families are more likely to be in relative care

(source: The Urban Institute 2002)

What All Children Need and Deserve

- To be safe;
- To be loved; and
- To be learning.

Why Do Families Choose FFN Care?

- Trust, familiarity
- Age of children
- Flexibility
 - Schedules, location
- Culture/Values
- Individual Attention

Caregiver Motivation

- Helping out a relative or friend;
- Enjoy being with the child(ren);
- Helping the parents; and
- Only 4% provide care for income, but 40% are paid.

Resources

- Born Learning Campaign:
 - www.bornlearning.org
- Promising FFN practices, model programs, summary of quality research, evaluation of outreach and service strategies, policy recommendations and more:
 - Sparking Connections Reports (2)
 - www.familiesandwork.org

Policy Recommendations

1. Find out where the children are;
2. Find out what families and caregivers want and need;
3. See FFN care as family support, not part of the formal early childhood system;

Policy Recommendations (cont'd)

4. Bring multiple systems and unlikely partners to the table (libraries, museums, public television, public health, senior services, faith communities, retailers, etc.) and create incentives for them to work together;
5. Support neighborhood-and-relationship based programs and services that bring caregivers and families into social networks (Play and Learn, SKIP);
6. Build on existing assets (Schools of the 21st Century, Family Resource Centers and Hubs, Help Me Grow);

Policy Recommendations (cont'd)

7. Support paid parental leave.
8. Encourage cities, counties and regions to develop customized FFN service plans.
9. Keep FFN care in family support system rather than the state child care regulatory system.
10. Involve families and caregivers in designing, implementing and evaluating programs that serve them.

Thank
You