



NEWSLETTER

Laying the Foundation for Success

DROPOUT PREVENTION—TYPICALLY WHAT COMES TO MIND IS NOT A PRESCHOOLER. THIS NEWSLETTER WILL FOCUS ON THAT VERY CONNECTION AND THE IMPACT THAT HIGH QUALITY EARLY EDUCATION CAN HAVE ON A CHILD'S FUTURE SUCCESS. WE WILL SHINE A SPOTLIGHT ON TEXAS, AND IN PARTICULAR CENTRAL TEXAS. TEXAS HAS THE GREAT DISTINCTION OF BEING ONE OF THREE STATES (WITH CALIFORNIA AND FLORIDA) THAT MAKE UP MORE THAN HALF OF THE POPULATION INCREASE OF CHILDREN UNDER FIVE. SIMILARLY, ONE IN FOUR CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF EIGHT IS EITHER LIVING IN TEXAS OR CALIFORNIA. TEXAS' HISPANIC POPULATION IS ALSO GROWING. HISPANICS MAKE UP THE MAJORITY OF THOSE LIVING IN TEXAS. THE RAPID GROWTH OF THE YOUNG CHILD POPULATION AND CHILDREN WITH SECOND LANGUAGE CONCERNS MAKE TEXAS AN IDEAL STATE TO TURN TOWARD.



Early Childhood Education

At one time, early care and education were seen by society as necessities for the convenience of working parents. It is now nationally seen as an integral piece of a child's growth and brain development. Given all the news regarding budget cuts in education, we find ourselves at a very important juncture on how to redefine education. It is time to recognize the fact that quality early care and learning isn't a time to simply prepare children for the "real learning" that comes later. Rather, it is a serious component of a child's fundamental early skills development.

As the growth of two-income families continues to grow, so does the number of children spending time in the care of someone other than their parents. This is an important insight in light of the current research on brain development. We know that there is rapid brain growth during the first three years of life. Research shows that environment and relationship lay a foundation that can affect the rest of a child's life. Just as positive experiences help secure these pathways, constant stress or abuse and neglect can cause development to take a different course. At-risk chil-

dren with high quality early experiences are more likely to have success in school, graduate from high school, have better health, and have greater job productivity and community engagement. Quality early learning reduces teenage pregnancies, welfare dependency, special education costs, and grade repetition. Research also shows that at-risk children left out of quality pre-kindergarten are five times more likely to grow up to become criminals by 27 years of age. This becomes a critical issue in the state of Texas where one in three juveniles sent to the Texas Youth Commission are school dropouts and more than 80% of Texas prison inmates are high school dropouts. Early intervention does make an impact.

The institution of education has been operating under a false premise that a child's education begins at five. If we wait until kindergarten to identify a child who is struggling, we are automatically in repair mode rather than building up mode. This understanding is leading the way for districts, preschools, and community agencies to begin to braid philosophies and services together to better serve our families. The result of

more coordinated effort will enhance partnership opportunities with our families and increase successful outcomes for our students. We need to understand that early education is an economic investment. The Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M concluded that investing in early childhood offers the best rates of economic and social returns as high as 13-14%.

We know that dropping out is not a one-time event but rather a process. We can begin by giving at-risk children quality early learning experiences—experiences which help parents understand the value and importance of school and their efficacy on their child's education, experiences which help children have a sense of belonging and not isolation, and a better response system for children who are not making progress. If we can do these things and continue to do these things as the child progresses through school, we have a better chance of keeping them in school and living successful, productive lives which will only benefit our communities.

—Mary Caputo, Guest Editor
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Ready or Not?

by Laura Koenig

A recent ground-breaking study by E³ Alliance on Kindergarten Readiness shows that 48% of Central Texas Kindergarten students were NOT ready for school in 2010.

Education Equals Economics (E³) Alliance is a regional collaborative of education, business, and community leaders in Central Texas, working to coordinate, integrate, and improve education for students from early childhood through workforce entry.

The E³ mission is to leverage objective data to dramatically increase and sustain educational outcomes for students and thereby increase the region's global competitiveness, economic vitality, and overall quality of life.

The call "Ready or Not?" is a warning that the game has begun. If you are not ready, you can quickly lose the game and end up sitting on the sidelines watching as the other kids play on. This is what is happening to

What does it mean for a child to be school ready?

the thousands of children entering kindergarten already behind.

Having every child enter kindergarten school ready is a priority goal for Central Texas as detailed in *The Blueprint for Educational Change*—the region's strategic plan to build the strongest educational pipeline in the country.

Texas has the fastest growing child population in the nation, and Central Texas has grown at almost twice that rate. Child poverty has been growing at an alarming rate as well with Texas schools now having a majority (59%) of students living in poverty. It is crucial that we make smart investments in education in order to support our strong economic future.

The Central Texas community came together in early 2008 to answer the question: "What does it mean for a child to be school ready?" The collaboration of early childhood educators, community leaders, and expert researchers developed a definition of school readiness grounded in the Texas Education Agency's Pre-K Guidelines and Kindergarten requirements. They developed an assessment to establish a baseline for the region of how many of our children entered kindergarten ready to learn and succeed.

In the fall of 2010, a sample of almost 1,000 Central Texas kindergarten students from eight school districts was assessed across four domains of child development to determine their readiness for school.

Key findings by E³ Alliance revealed that poverty was the strongest factor associated with school readiness. Only one low-income child in 10 was school ready if they did not attend Pre-K (12%), but this rate more than triples if they attended Pre-K (42%). In fact, the school readiness of low-income children who attended Pre-K was statistically equal to their more affluent peers who did not attend Pre-K, implying that pre-K eliminated the effects of poverty!

Pre-K attendance was also linked to greater levels of readiness in specific domains. Children who attended Pre-K were kindergarten ready at higher rates in early literacy and mathematics, than their non-Pre-K peers. Low-income children who attended Pre-K were kindergarten ready at higher rates in their social emotional development and language and communication domains than their non-Pre-K peers.

Research shows children who start behind stay behind. They are more likely to:

- fail early grades;
- need intensive education services;
- drop out; and
- enter the criminal justice system.

Not being ready for kindergarten puts children at a clear disadvantage for school success and jeopardizes our society's economic prosperity.

The data show that kindergarten is too late for low-income children to start getting ready for school. By kindergarten, the game has already started, and most of our low-income children are left sitting on the sidelines. The cost to intervene after a child is struggling in school is time consuming and expensive. Providing Pre-K to low-income children is a proven, efficient, and cost-effective practice, and research conducted by E³ Alliance indicates it is making a huge difference in the Central Texas region.

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National
Dropout Prevention
Center/Network

NEWSLETTER

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Network Notes

Changes at the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network—

Thank You, Dr. Jay Smink

■ Twenty-five years ago, in 1986, the National Dropout Prevention Center (NDPC) at Clemson University was founded. The dropout issue was only recognized by a few as an area of concern in those days, and yet the Center, with roots in the College of Education, soon began to collect the sparse research and program information available, that showed that at least in some schools and school districts, this challenge was beginning to be noticed and addressed.

Coming to Clemson in 1988 to lead this effort and expand on these early efforts by education professor, Dr. John V. “Dick” Hamby, was Dr. Jay Smink. Dr. Smink came from The Ohio State University Research Center on Vocational Education and quickly began to build a center to meet the needs of practitioners across the country. With conferences, publications, and eventually internet resources including model programs, the National Dropout Prevention Center provided critical information that became more and more valued as an increasing number of schools and communities began to understand the importance of this issue of dropout.

More direct services were offered through both action research projects and program evaluations using the NDPC Performance Assessment and Review (PAR) process. Based on these efforts throughout the 1990s, the Fifteen Effective Strategies of Dropout Prevention emerged that are a major source of information for LEA's and SEA's across the United States today.

Fast forward now to 2011, and it is time to acknowledge the huge body of the Center's work, affecting every state in the nation, as well as international impacts through its conferences, Web presence, and international journal.



Today, dropout prevention is THE national issue in education. The NDPC/N has spent more than two decades building an information infrastructure needed to guide school districts as they seek to rectify this problem with proven solutions. The role NDPC/N has played over the years includes serving as the information source on dropout issues, providing professional development and technical assistance, evaluating programs, conducting research, and offering practitioner publications and other resources.

Under Dr. Smink, these interconnected roles have been woven into what the Center represents to the world today. As Dr. Smink retires from his 23 years as Center Director, and with the passing of the torch to Dr. Appleton, the NDPC/N is well positioned to meet the needs of the new century.

Welcome Dr. James Appleton



■ After a national search, the College of Health, Education, and Human Development (HEHD) at Clemson University is pleased to introduce Dr. James J. Appleton, Coordinator of Research and Evaluation in Gwinnett County Public Schools (GA), as the new Director of the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (NDPC/N); Dr. Appleton will also be a member of the HEHD Faculty in Educational Foundations.

Dr. Appleton holds a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology from the University of Minnesota. His publications include the area of student engagement with school, a pathway for dropping out, and he presents and

consults nationally on this topic. Dr. Appleton has research and evaluation experience in district advisement and graduation coach programs, school initiatives, accountability metrics, and nested data. He has work experience in research and consultation within large, urban, and small rural school districts. Dr. Appleton has also served as mentor and researcher within the Check & Connect school completion intervention. He has co-developed the Student Engagement Instrument that will be an additional source of information related to dropout prevention.

Dr. Appleton will begin his tenure on July 8, 2011.

Meet Our Guest Editor

■ Guest editor Mary Caputo has been working in the field of early childhood for over 20 years— as a preschool teacher, a special education teacher, and a coordinator in the public school system. She graduated from the University of Texas at Austin with a B.A. in psychology and a B.S. in advertising. She returned to UT to get her M.Ed in special education. She is married and has three children and one grandson. She has recently shifted her career by following another passion in her life. She is an Executive Director for a nonprofit organization that provides support and community for adults who have a mental health diagnosis. This organization is dedicated to helping integrate adults back into the community through education, employment, and relationships while trying to overcome the stigma of mental illness.



Solutions to the Dropout Crisis

Broadcasts will resume in September. If you have a topic to suggest write us at ndpc@clemson.edu

Program Profile

Every Child A School-Ready Child

by Leah Newkirk Meunier

All Central Texas children will enter kindergarten happy, healthy, and prepared for school success—that’s the vision of United Way Capital Area’s Success By 6 (SB6) initiative. By bringing the early childhood community together in partnership and collaboration, that vision is becoming a reality.

SB6 is a robust coalition of families, educators, health and human service providers, and civic leaders dedicated to improving the lives of young and economically vulnerable children. Children are born learning, and their experiences between birth and school entry greatly determine whether they will enter school ready for sustained success. Without high quality early experiences and support, a gap in competencies—cognitive, social, emotional, and physical—will exist from the start of K-12 education. This gap leads to difficult and costly problems in the future, including students disengaging from school and eventually dropping out.

In Travis County, there are more than 37,000 children under the age of five living in low-income households. More than half of these children are not served through formal child care before they enter kindergarten. Through the generosity of United Way Capital Area donors, SB6 funds and guides a portfolio of early childhood services that align with the needs of these children and their caregivers and families.

To become part of the SB6 initiative, programs must be research- or evidence-based and demonstrate cultural and linguistic sensitivity. Based on research, community data, and the input of both service providers and issue area experts, SB6 has concentrated its efforts on three goals:

- **Family Support**—25% of children living in low-income families will have parents who have completed research-based parent education programs by 2016.

Every child a school-ready child is a formidable goal that no individual, agency, or school district working in isolation can accomplish.

- **Quality Early Care & Education**—75% of early care and education centers serving low-income children will be quality rated by the Texas Rising Star Program or accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) by 2016.
- **Social Emotional Development**—50% of early care and education programs serving low-income children will have access to mental health consultation services by 2016.

Progress toward these three goals is changing community conditions in Austin. For example, in the past five years, the number of quality-rated early care and education centers has increased to 61% from 12.5%. In 2005, only 4.5% of child-care centers had access to mental health consultation services. Responding to this gap in services, SB6 led a group dedicated to finding a solution to this issue. Now, mental health consultation services are available to more than 16% of child-care centers. Meeting the social/emotional needs of children—and training their parents and teachers to do the same—reduces behavior problems and makes the classroom environment more conducive for learning. Moreover, social-emotional competency is a prerequisite for success in kindergarten and the academic course that lies ahead.

Thanks to a generous grant from Samsung Austin Semiconductor, SB6 is exploring new and innovative approaches to community planning and resource allocation. This spring, in collaboration with UCLA and United Way Worldwide, SB6 collected kindergarten

readiness data from 14 Austin area elementary schools. Data from the Early Development Instrument (EDI) will be geo-mapped, along with relevant socio-demographic indicators, to determine the developmental needs and assets of children in economically vulnerable neighborhoods. Consequently, appropriate services will be able to be targeted to the specific needs of children by neighborhood, and changes in community conditions can be tracked over time.

Listening to the data is informative, but United Way Capital Area is also listening to the voice of the community. Through a series of community conversations in targeted neighborhoods, SB6 is inviting parents of young children to share their experiences, needs, obstacles, and dreams for the future. Understanding the services that parents want and need for their children will inform SB6’s work in systems coordination and community planning.

Every child a school-ready child is a formidable goal that no individual, agency, or school district working in isolation can accomplish. United Way Capital Area’s SB6 initiative brings parents, nonprofits, schools, funders, and planners to a shared table to define and implement work toward a common vision. This strong, coordinated system of early childhood services provides the Central Texas community with a foundation upon which future graduates can be built.

—Leah Newkirk Meunier
Program Manager
Success By 6

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Program Profile

Parents As Teachers

by Erin Garner

Parents As Teachers (PAT) is an early childhood parent education program serving families from pregnancy until their child enters school. This family support program is international in reach, research-based, and has the vision that all children will learn, grow, and develop to realize their full potential. By viewing parents as a child's first and best teacher, the PAT mission is to provide the information, support and encouragement parents need to help their children develop optimally during the crucial early years of life.

Texas was the first state to take the PAT philosophy and curriculum out of Missouri, which is the birthplace of the program. There are currently 82 sites in Texas, including child-care centers, school districts, and community agencies that offer some aspect of the PAT curriculum. Leander ISD, in Leander, TX, is one of the few school districts in the state that serves a diverse cross-section of the population that includes teen parents, Spanish-speaking families, and families who are economically disadvantaged and noneconomically disadvantaged. The Leander PAT Program serves families who live within the boundaries of the nine Title I elementary schools. Leander first embraced the PAT program in 1998 when they found that a portion of the student population living within the boundaries of Title I schools was not school ready. A charter group was formed to research best practice for school readiness. The conclusion was that education needed to start in the home before school age, and a home visitation model was adopted.

The program started with one parent educator and one classroom with a goal of serving 10 families. The year ended with having served 98 children. Today, Leander ISD has seven parent educators and one registered nurse providing home visits to over 220

children. The program has expanded from the four core elements as prescribed through the national PAT center to include center-based programs which consist of community playgroups, baby sing and sign, baby massage classes, preschool academy, and music and movement classes which accounts for an additional 130 children being served. The center-based activities were a direct result of parents being on a waiting list for visitation services for three to four years at a time.

The Parents as Teachers Model includes these core elements of parent education and family support:

1. Personal Visits
2. Resource Network
3. Group Connections
4. Screening

From the beginning, it was apparent that families were interested in knowing what they could do in the home to help their child experience success in school. The next step was to measure the program's effectiveness on preparing children for school. These measurements include kindergarten nine-week assessments and third grade reading and math scores on the state mandated Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills, or TAKS test. Preliminary data shows that PAT graduates have outperformed their non-PAT peers from the same economic group, with a disproportionate benefit to the Spanish-speak-

ing population. PAT graduates will be followed through high school to gather information on early start intervention and graduation outcomes.

Parents As Teachers appears to be making significant contributions in the district's effort to close the achievement gap for students who are economically disadvantaged. Another benefit is that the PAT model empowers the families with a sense of efficacy in their child's academic success. This lays the foundation for parent/school engagement as the child moves along the education continuum. Continued parent involvement is one of the predictors for school achievement and ultimately graduation for our students. The district sees PAT as an important component of the overall strategic goal to close the achievement gap.

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Book Review

Early Literacy Education: First Steps Toward Dropout Prevention, 2002. Dolores Stegelin. Clemson, SC: National Dropout Prevention Center. Order from www.dropoutprevention.org

In 2002, the National Dropout Prevention Center created the *Effective Strategies for School Improvement* series, and fittingly, the first monograph for this series was focused on early literacy education—truly the foundation of dropout prevention.

In this era of test-based accountability, so-called “dropout factories,” data-driven decision making, and risk factors, this book is a refreshing reminder of how we can really stem the dropout tide if we would only start at the beginning—when our children are very young, before they even come to kindergarten.

In this pioneer monograph, Dolores Stegelin compiled approaches to early literacy development, acknowledging from the start that preparing children to read is not solely about producing early readers. Not at all. What is required is a holistic approach to literacy development, with “stimulating play environments” which incorporate oral and written language skills, storytelling and dramatization, and parent involvement.

And Dr. Stegelin then proceeds to explain clearly and succinctly how this kind of early literacy environment can be created in the classroom, supported by routines and schedules, informal assessments, as well as connections to the home and family.

It’s time to focus again on the most effective dropout prevention approach—providing children in the preschool years with a strong basis for school success by offering strong early literacy experiences. This book gives early childhood educators the guidelines they need to make this happen.

—Marty Duckenfield, Editor
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Also Recommended

Family Literacy: First Steps to Academic Success. (2003). Dolores Stegelin. Clemson, SC: National Dropout Prevention Center.

Dolores Stegelin followed her initial book by building on one of the key components—engaging the family. This monograph provides schools and other agencies that support family literacy with concrete, effective strategies to support this important work.
www.dropoutprevention.org

Resources

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

NAEYC is the world’s largest organization working on behalf of young children with nearly 80,000 members, a national network of more than 300 state and local Affiliates, and a growing global alliance of like-minded organizations.
<http://www.naeyc.org/>

Parents as Teachers (PAT)

PAT is a trusted resource providing a proven home visiting model for the most respected organizations and professionals who serve the evolving needs of families.
<http://www.parentsasteachers.org/>

Parent-Child Home Program

The Parent-Child Home Program is an evidence-based, research-validated early childhood literacy, parenting, and school readiness program.
<http://www.parent-child.org/>

Prek Now

A Campaign of the Pew Center for the States, supporting early childhood education.
<http://www.preknow.org/>

Kids Count

A national and state-by-state status of children in the U.S.
<http://www.aecf.org/MajorInitiatives/KIDSCOUNT.aspx>

Zero to Three—National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families

A national, nonprofit organization that informs, trains, and supports professionals, policymakers, and parents in their efforts to improve the lives of infants and toddlers.
<http://www.zerotothree.org/>

Calendar

October 9-12, 2011 Chicago, IL
23rd Annual NDPN Conference—
Systems Together Advancing Youth
www.dropoutprevention.org

Nov. 2-5, 2011 Orlando, FL
2011 NAEYC Annual Conference and Expo
www.naeyc.org

Nov. 7-10, 2011 St. Petersburg, FL
2011 Educational Strategies & Student Engagement Institute
www.dropoutprevention.org



From the Web Site

The National Dropout Prevention Center advocates 15 Effective Strategies for Dropout Prevention, and one of these strategies is Early Childhood Education. These excerpts on Early Childhood Education come from the NDPC/N Web site at www.dropoutprevention.org. Also be sure to find high quality programs incorporating Early Childhood Education in the Model Programs Database!

One of the most significant findings to emerge from research on dropouts is that early identification is vital to effective prevention. Although we tend to think of students dropping out during their last years of high school, many are lost long before that. Social and task-related behavioral problems that develop into school adjustment problems can be identified at the beginning of the elementary grades. The dropout problem is not one that can be addressed exclusively at the middle or high school levels; by then it is too late for some students.

Studies of birth-to-three interventions demonstrate that both child-centered and family-centered strategies often can make a lasting difference. These prevention strategies place infants and toddlers in stimulating, developmentally appropriate environments for part of each day. Family members are trained and given materials to help them stimulate their children's cognitive development, handle discipline and health problems, and develop vocational and home management skills.

Special education referrals and retention in grade are decreased by such early prevention strategies. It appears to take intensive efforts over a period of several years to produce lasting effects, but the fact that even the least intensive models produce strong immediate effects suggests that a combination of approaches within a comprehensive preventive program will have great promise in increasing children's cognitive functioning. Strategies that include birth-to-three, preschool, and kindergarten programs can ensure that children enter first grade with good language development, cognitive skills, and self-concepts regardless of their family background or personal characteristics. Schweinhart & Weikart (1985)



found that early intervention for young at-risk children decreased the dropout and juvenile delinquency rate.

Research has revealed that effective early schooling experiences include preventive health and nutrition components and involve parents as their children's first teachers. Children with prekindergarten experience through programs such as Head Start had parents who were more involved in their children's school activities. Because of this influence on parental involvement, prekindergarten experience appears to have an indirect, positive effect on first grade academic achievement and on children's social adjustment. In studies with matched control groups, more students who had early schooling experiences were employed at age 19, fewer were on welfare, and fewer were involved with the criminal justice system.

Best practices in early childhood education are identified as Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP). DAP is age, individually, and culturally

appropriate. The most important component is a caring classroom. Early intervention effects include lower rates of retention, higher levels of academic achievement, fewer special education services, and a stronger commitment to graduating from high school (Stegelin, 2004). Children who participate in these programs build confidence, competence and skills (Wishon, Huang, & Needham, 1987). Research demonstrates that early childhood education is definitely a good investment.

References and Resources

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Viewpoint

A reality in our society today is that most parents work, leaving children of all ages in the care of others. Many children start their child-care experience as early as six weeks old and are in a child-care setting until they start school. Parents often leave their children in the care of someone else out of necessity because they must work to support their family. All parents want the best for their children, and they want their children to be in a safe, nurturing, and learning environment while they are at work.

Economics is a factor in early childhood education today. Not all child-care settings are created equal; the more you can afford to pay for child care, the better the quality of child care you can buy. Parents pay for the best they can afford, and not all parents can afford to pay for the highest quality child-care setting.

The research is overwhelming that quality child care promotes the cognitive and social development

of children, with effects lasting into adolescence and adulthood. A study of child care sponsored by the National Institute of Health followed children from one month to 15 years of age. The study included information about the children's families, as well as detailed information about the types of child care and school settings to which the children were exposed. This study, along with many similar studies, showed the long-term effects of quality child care on children's cognitive and intellectual development. Children who had higher quality child care developed better vocabulary, attained higher scores in reading and math, and functioned at a higher intellectual level than those who had lower quality child care. Children who stayed home with their parents did not necessarily fare better than the children who were in quality child care. By the age of 15, the children who had experienced quality child care had fewer behavioral problems. The cost-benefit analysis comes out

positive because crime and juvenile delinquency are reduced. We can no longer claim that we do not understand the relationship between child care and school readiness, or the impact of child care on our workforce.

This is why I filed HB 2269 during the current Texas Legislative Session, a bill that provides funding to support quality initiatives for child-care providers who accept students in the subsidized system.

In Texas, we talk mostly about Pre-K, a program that helps three- to four-year-old children become school ready before they start kindergarten. We need to make a similar commitment to children below three years of age when critical brain functions and social skills start to develop. By focusing our attention on this earlier age group, we can prepare our children for success as adults.

—Mark Strama
Texas Legislature, District 50