



Committee on the Science of Children Birth to Age 8:
Deepening and Broadening the Foundation for Success
Public Information Gathering Session
Friday February 28, 2014

Question to be addressed: From your perspective, how can children be supported to move more seamlessly through the birth through age 8 continuum?

Thank you for providing this opportunity to offer comments and resources that may inform the direction of your study. My name is Deborah Adams and I am honored to represent the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS-SDE) to deliver our comments for consideration this afternoon.

The NAECS-SDE is the national organization for state education agency staff members with major responsibilities in the field of early childhood education, from infancy through the primary grades. The Association promotes high-quality services to young children and their families through improvement of instruction, curriculum, and administration of programs. Members of the Association have an opportunity to share ideas and to work together toward the solution of common challenges.

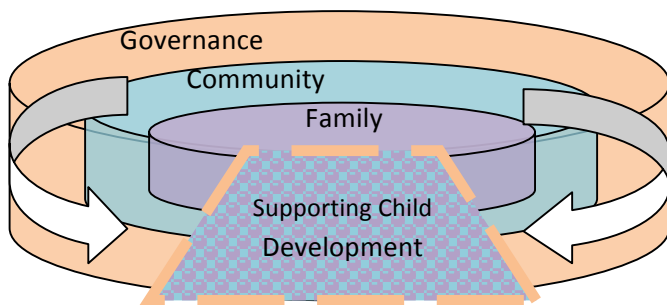
The organization is 40+ years strong and we continue to learn from one another by sharing early care and education innovations as they develop in our states. Our collective learnings may be of interest to your committee as a resource for exploring your question; how can children be supported to move more seamlessly through the birth through age 8 continuum? The NAECS-SDE website archives our [Policy and Position Statements](#) and noteworthy [member publications](#). Of particular interest is our latest position statement; [The Power of Kindergarten: 10 Policies Leading to Positive Outcomes for Children](#). Of the 10 policies, the following four you may find pertinent to your question; teacher competency and training, family engagement, defining high quality Kindergarten experience, and planning transitions.

In addition to the resources our organization has in written form, we feel our strength is how we work together across states and with national partners. The [Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes](#) (CEELO) offers additional support to our organization for this collaborative structure. Other partners include the [National Institute for Early Education Research \(NIEER\)](#), [Education Development Center \(EDC\)](#), the [Council of Chief State School Officers \(CCSSO\)](#) and the [National Association for the Education of Young Children \(NAEYC\)](#). Together we share the rich experiences and resources our respective organizations bring to the table to celebrate our successes and address the challenges in improving the lives of children and structure of our work. CEELO's website has a considerable number of resources available on assessment, data, birth- to- grade -three continuum, workforce, systems, and child outcomes. To address this work it takes high-level coordination. The comments I will share with you reflect the fundamental principle of coordinated efforts to bring about desired effects; a collective impact.

On behalf of the NAECS-SDE membership, we offer these comments for consideration:

We suggest that the committee consider a collective impact conceptual framework to guide the study. To achieve a more seamless continuum of growth and development for children birth through age 8 it will take collaboration between families, community, and government:

- The family, meaning any configuration thereof, to support the nurturing needed that will set the path for health, trust, and resilience.
- The community context that directly effects critical family supports (culture, local government and support services for health, etc. (welfare assistance, shelters/homeless supports, mental health, special needs supports – Birth to 3, home visitors, etc.). The community context that supports out- of- home educational experiences for children, but also crosses over into coordinating or providing critical supports such as Head Start with comprehensive services, state-funded preschool, other settings such as family home care, centers including private programs, library and museum programs, and formal schooling Kindergarten through grade 3.
- The larger system of state government that sets policy that affects families and community contexts (regulation around delivery of services, policies regarding practices of those that provide out of home care, schooling, social services regulation, etc.).



A key resource to explicate why a collective effort, across community and cross-sector, is critical can be found within the work by the [Center for the Developing Child at Harvard University](#). To summarize, Harvard’s work helps us frame neuroscience as the critical knowledge base that should guide policy, funding, implementation of practice and most importantly, our intentional relationship- building practices that are critical to the future of our children’s health and well-being that will predict our future society.

To act upon the knowledge that neuroscience provides us, the NAECS-SDE members believe that a comprehensive systems approach that accounts for family, community and government accountability to be intentionally engaged in the lives of children is needed to make a collective impact toward supporting a continuum of growth for all children, including those with high needs. Our efforts as state specialists are dependent upon how well state and local governments coordinate services in the context of local and state political climates. We seek and inform research, engage stakeholders, administer programs, and provide the best information possible to policy makers in order to positively impact government systems, early care and education providers, and families. We depend on sound research to actualize effective policy that can help turn the curve for our high needs population toward increasing the probability of starting out on and sustaining a continuous trajectory of growth over time in all domains of development. Your research will help support our efforts as state specialists to inform policy decisions and develop implementation strategies within our states.

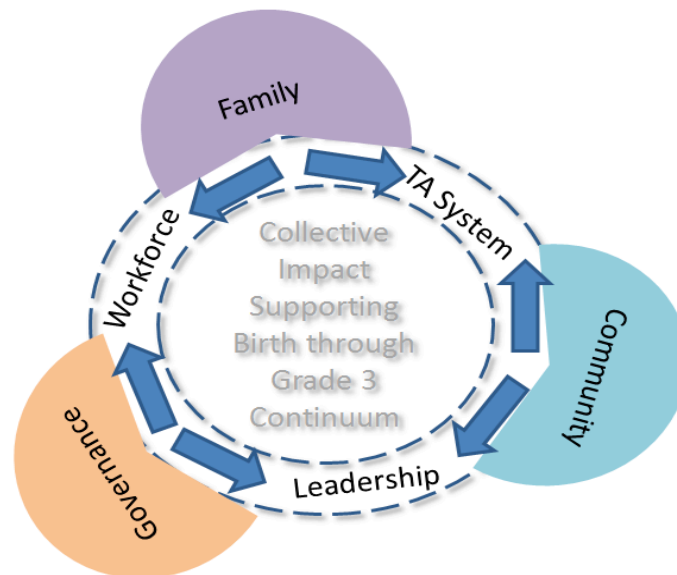
To address your question specifically, we must borrow from Harvard's established work. The foundation for your study resides in our collective understanding and application about how experiences shape the architecture of the developing brain. It is critical that any person who interacts with and provides programs and services for young children (parents, teachers, administrators, social workers, librarians, interventionists, local, state and federal government policy makers, home visitors, coaches, consultants, professional development designers, college faculty, researchers, pediatricians, and the list goes on) is considered the conceptual "workforce" that is actively taking responsibility for building the brain architecture that will affect all learning, behavior and health for young children.

That said, here are four considerations including resources that could inform your study as it evolves:

- Illuminate the importance of the birth to grade 3 age range as the foundation for all learning in later life, in other words, we don't need to delineate ages and silo our work accordingly. If we are really aiming for a continuum, then the field, including parents and caregivers, should see early life as a continuum and not necessarily as parts (B-3, 3-5, 5-8) that create BIG transition. Part- to- part creates transition anxiety and pushes inappropriate practices to "prepare" for a transition instead of promoting the foundational child development continuum. State specialists face challenges in supporting a continuum of practices when the systems bifurcate by ages and settings. The literature addressing transition and adult interactions supports the need for messaging child development from a continuum perspective while understanding the transitions that occur within that continuum. Those resources can be found in the works of Dr. Pianta and colleagues.¹ If we were all able to message a continuum rather than the parts, or in context of the parts, this could influence the re-organization of governance structures that supports a coordinated system of implementation for the benefit of the end-user; the families, programs, and services we wish to have a positive impact upon.
- Address the role of leadership, especially in the K-grade 3 arena, and the content as well as pedagogical knowledge needed to sustain the trajectory of growth through the early grades. The [Foundation for Child Development](#) provides a good resource for this work. Of particular interest is the policy brief entitled [Principals as Crucial Instructional Leaders](#). This work sets a frame to further address a current challenge in our states; what do principals and school leaders need to know (content) and do (skills) in order to support early childhood teachers in their settings? What are those competencies and does our current state certification systems provide for such competency development or do we need to create new pathways and regulations to require specific early childhood competencies? States are engaged in this work, particularly as it pertains to teacher evaluation, and a stakeholder group meeting could shed light on developing a core set of competencies.
- Focus on workforce development to include all individuals who interact with and develop programs and interventions for children. Looking at existing states' efforts in aligning and further developing Core Knowledge and Competency Frameworks for all early childhood roles (i.e. program administrators, trainers, consultants, interventionists, etc.) across all early childhood settings may provide a source of evidence. Equally essential is to evaluate state capacity to understand their workforce. The [National Registry Alliance](#) provides great information on the subject, in addition the [Center for IDEA Early Childhood Data Systems](#) otherwise known as DaSy, provides resources for data field development. Consider how your study can provide considerations for best practices to improve state Registry future data collection efforts, such as, changes in how we measure the progress of the workforce in attaining competencies as well as degrees? How do we message to families and the general public the importance

of intentional, reciprocal, interactions with young children is so critically important to brain development and that we all have a role to play?

- Examine the progress of states toward aligning their technical assistance systems to the changing context of a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). Guidance to states is provided by NAEYC in their [Workforce Designs Blueprint](#) and Head Start's [Training and Technical Assistance System](#). Of particular importance is to address how technical assistance systems utilize Core Knowledge and Competency Frameworks as a basis for coordinating the design, delivery, and evaluation of professional learning across pre-service and in-service sectors. Is it time to be thinking about competency-based adult learning across delivery models instead of, or at least a redesign of, how we count hours or credits? The neuroscience around adult learning would be particularly helpful to addressing this question, specifically, how professional learning can broaden the mental model complexity of teacher's existing schema and beliefs of teaching and learning and sustain the effects of transfer into practice. Is it time to develop robust pathways, such as credentials based on competency development, for the workforce in settings that are not administered by public schools but are critical to developing that early brain architecture?



In conclusion, utilizing the neuroscience that continues to amaze us, and framing it in the ecological context of family, community, and governance, provides a structure to address your question; how can children be supported to move more seamlessly through the birth through age 8 continuum? My comments on behalf of the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education may only begin to provide you with some resources as well as ideas for your study that would impact our work in the states. We look forward to assisting your efforts and encourage you to use us as a resource for state examples. We can work together to direct you to states that you feel may best address your interests. Thank you for providing this opportunity to speak before the committee.

ⁱ Pianta, R.C., Kraft-Sayre, M., Rimm-Kaufman, S., Gercke, N., & Higgins, T. (2001). Collaboration in building partnerships between families and schools: The National Center for Early Development and Learning's Kindergarten Transition Intervention. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*. Vol 16, Issue 1, pp117-132.