



SUMMER 2005

SECA REPORTER

SECA 2006 & Nashville, TN

“Working in Harmony for Children”

It’s hard to believe, but we’re already beginning preparations for our 2006 conference.

We’re excited about being in Nashville TN in 2006, and the **Opryland Hotel will host us on February 1-4, 2006**. We’ve negotiated a special rate for the hotel, and all you’ll have to do is walk through the beautiful Opryland Hotel to get to everything the conference has to offer.

Special events are being planned and registration materials will be going out in September. We’ll also have the information posted on the conference page of the SECA website at www.SouthernEarlyChildhood.org.

We’ll begin the conference with the **T. Berry Brazelton National Seminar Series**. Dr. Brazelton will provide a session on Wednesday evening, February 1, for professionals and parents. On Thursday, February 2, the seminar is directed to early childhood professionals and includes presentations by Dr. Joshua Sparrow, Maria Trozzi and Kristie Brandt. We’ll have a separate registration for the Brazelton Seminar but are offering his Thursday morning presentation to anyone who registers for the conference.

On Thursday afternoon, we’ll have **tours** sponsored by the Tennessee Association for the Education of Young Children, our state affiliate. These tours will showcase both the educational and “fun” side of Nashville.

On Friday, February 3, 2006, **Marlo Thomas** will join us to receive the 2006 SECA Friend of Children Award. We’ll feature Ms. Thomas in a morning session to highlight the wonderful work that she and St. Jude’s Children’s Hospital have done for children in the South and across the country.

Our 2006 Director’s Seminar will be held on Friday and Saturday, with special programming just for directors and administrators.

2006 promises to be a wonderful year for SECA. Watch for the conference information in your mailbox and be sure to save your “pennies” for 2006! If you’re not a SECA member, call us at 1-800-305-SECA, and we’ll be happy to send you a registration brochure. You’ll have the best in professional development in a setting that is second to none. See you there!

Early Childhood to Graduation: What's Happening to our Students?

At the annual meeting of the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) on June 27, 2005, experts warned Southern education leaders that falling graduation rates may threaten the region's progress in improving students' test scores, access to preschool and other advances in recent years. (*SREB represents all the SECA states, plus the states of Delaware and Maryland.*)

SREB released at the meeting a report on the South's low graduation rates, *Getting Serious About High School Graduation*. It provided the following statistics:

- Although the South's graduation rates remain low, the startling fact is that graduation rates in many states have dropped during the past decade.
- Graduation rates dropped by an average of 5 percentage points in the SREB states from 1992-2002. The national graduation rates dropped 2 percentage points to about 70%.
- During the decade, Tennessee's graduation rate dropped 13 points, Georgia's and Alabama's dropped by 10 points. South Carolina saw an 8 point decline.

- All but three of the SREB states saw graduation rates drop between 1992-2002. Graduation rates increased by 4 percentage points in Louisiana, 3 points in Texas and by 1 point in Oklahoma.
- Statistics provided by the Manhattan Institute showed that only 65 percent of students in the SREB states graduated on time in 2001, ranging from a high of 79% in Oklahoma to a low of 53% in South Carolina. Rates for minority students, particularly males, were even lower.

Experts encouraged the educational leaders of the state to attack this problem that has been downplayed during the last few years while focusing on assessment and academic rigor.

The South has been recognized during the last decade as a progressive region in early childhood education. Most Southern states have created statewide pre-school programs during that period and several are moving toward universal pre-kindergarten.

The SREB report is a "wake-up call" to the states to ensure that students have positive experiences throughout their academic career. For a copy of the report go to www.sreb.org.



New On-Line Resource from the *Harvard Education Letter*

The *Harvard Education Letter* has developed a series of articles on PreK-3 education that are available on a new free-access website. The website was launched in July 2005.

The site includes the following articles:

Early Childhood at a Crossroads by *Deborah Stipek*

This article assesses the state of preschool and elementary education in the US, evaluates current federal initiatives and their impact, and suggests directions for future development.

From Literacy to Learning: An Interview with Catherine Snow

Catherine Snow, an expert in early reading and literacy development, talks about the importance of vocabulary and other literacy skills in preparing young children for later academic success.

Bridging the PreK-Elementary Divide by *Sue Miller Wiltz*

Former *Newsweek* correspondent Sue Miller Wiltz profiles innovative programs that are bridging the transition between preschool and elementary education.

Testing Goes to Preschool by *Robert Rothman*

Leading education journalist Robert Rothman looks at the growing national trend of standardized testing in preschools.

The *Harvard Education Letter* is published by the Harvard Graduate School of Education and is made possible by a grant from the Foundation for Child Development.

To access the website, go to www.hel-earlyed.org.

School-Age Notes is Moving

After 25 years in Nashville, TN, School-Age Notes is under new ownership and is moving to Ohio. School-Age Notes was founded by Rich Scofield, a longtime member and supporter of the Southern Early Childhood Association.

School-Age Notes provides useful materials for school-age program providers and is committed to becoming even more efficient and responsive to the needs of school-age providers.

Visit www.AfterSchoolCatalog.com for more information.

Investing in Young Children

The UNICEF leaflet, *Why Invest in Young Children*, includes Robert Myers' reasons to support programs for young children. Listed below are some of the reasons included in the leaflet.

Reason #1: Human Rights

Children have a right to live and to develop to their full potential.

Reason #2: Moral & Social Values

Through children, humanity transmits its values. To preserve desirable and moral and social values in the future, one must begin with children.

Reason #3: Economics

Society can benefit economically from investing in child development, through increased productivity and cost savings.

Reason #4: Program Effectiveness

The effectiveness of other programs (health, nutrition, education) can be improved through their combination with child development programs.

Reason #5: Social Equity

By providing a "fair start" (or at least the best possible start), it is possible to modify distressing socio-economic and gender related issues.

(Excerpted & paraphrased from *Why Invest in Young Children*, *ExchangeEveryDay*, July 14, 2005)

Florida Facing Challenges with UPK

According to the Florida *Children's Campaign*, the Florida media has reported looming problems surrounding the implementation of Florida's new Universal Pre-Kindergarten program.

Some areas of the state have more children enrolled than there are slots, while in others enrollment hasn't met expectations. As of July 2005, only 67,000 of the expected 154,000 children had enrolled statewide.

Officials anticipate the situation will improve as more providers come on line. Public service announcements are promoting the program to encourage enrollment.

We'll keep you posted as Florida implements this program over the next year.

Nothing in the world will take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than the unsuccessful person with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. The slogan "press on" has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race. *Calvin Coolidge*

NAEP Reading & Math Results: The South is a Leader in Educational Progress

According to the latest results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the SECA states continue to lead the nation in educational progress.

The new national and regional long-term study results show that NAEP's southeast region, which includes all of the SECA states, had the largest gains since 1999 in both reading and math for 9-year-olds of any region in the country. Additionally, the Southern region, which has historically trailed the other three regions of the country, moved to within a point of the Central and West regions in the math scores of 9-year-olds and led the West in reading at all three ages tested.

The NAEP is the "Nation's Report Card" and is released annually by the National Center for Education Statistics. The report describes long-term trends in 9-, 13-, and 17-year-olds' achievement in reading and mathematics during the last three decades. The latest report provides comparative information for 1999 to 2004. NAEP will release the 2005 state-by-state results this fall.

The SECA states have made significant commitments to improving the educational status of the region's children, and those children are steadily

gaining in comparison to children in other regions of the country.

For more information on the report, go to www.sreb.org to find a press release on the report or to www.nces.ed.gov for more in-depth information.

For profiles of the SECA states, go to www.SouthernEarlyChildhood.org and click on the "Public Policy" page. You'll find a summary of state profiles developed by the National Center for Education Statistics.

What is Professional Development?

The McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership of National-Louis University in Illinois published a research brief in the spring of 2005 entitled, *Professional Development: How Is It Defined? How Is It Measured?* The research brief focused on the following questions:

- ✓ *What exactly does professional development mean?*
- ✓ *How is professional development measured?*

These two questions were the focus of a paper, *Defining and Measuring Professional Development in Early Childhood Research* by researchers Maxwell, Field and Clifford.

Based on a review of numerous studies on the issue, the researchers discerned

(Professional Development cont'd)

that no common definition of professional development exists. The reviewed studies did not provide explicit definitions of the terms used in the studies. Instead the terms were operationalized to imply the meaning.

Because no clear definitions emerged from the analysis of the studies, researchers Maxwell, Field and Clifford identified three key components of professional development: **Education, Training, and Credential.**

Education refers to professional development activities that occur within the formal education system and includes both general education and current specific education.

Training refers to professional development activities that occur outside the formal education system.

Credential refers to certification or licensing of individuals that conveys both status to the holders and provides assurance to consumers.

Because the lack of consistency in definitions used in different studies poses problems for researchers, policymakers and study participants, the researchers developed a series of recommendations to assist in standardizing the research.

1. Develop common definitions of professional development.

2. Work toward consistency in measurement across studies.
3. Expand data collection to include the context of professional development activities.
4. Use hypotheses to drive instrument development.
5. Conduct additional research on the impact of professional development on teachers' behavior, the quality of care and education, and child outcomes.

Source: *Research Notes, Professional Development: How Is It Defined? How Is It Measured?*. Spring 2005. McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership. National-Louis University. Wheeling, Illinois.

Consistent research that defines professional development and measures its value will assist early childhood educators in advocating for enhanced quality standards for programs. This type of research is particularly valuable to states that are developing or reassessing their standards for state pre-K programs and child care. Knowledge of how different types of professional development impact the quality of services provided to children gives advocates concrete information to share with state administrators and policymakers.

Glenda Bean, SECA Executive Director

Far Off and Far Behind: Rural Children

Rural children are 60 percent more likely than non-rural children to be placed in special education in kindergarten according to a new analysis by the **National Center for Rural Early Childhood Initiatives**.

The National Center commissioned an analysis of the Kindergarten Cohort of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS-K), an ongoing national study by the US Department of Education.

The analysis found that disparities between rural and non-rural children were significant for some social-emotional indicators, and that the disparities were even more significant when rural black children were compared to non-rural black children.

The analysis did find that rural life is associated with some positive indicators for early childhood social-emotional development, but that rural children are at a significant disadvantage in terms of some parenting practices and in potential access to mental health services through formal early childhood programs.

Rural kindergarteners were significantly more likely to demonstrate social competence than non-rural children. Significantly more parents in the rural subset (81%) perceived that their neighborhoods were safe while 60.9% of

non-rural parents felt the same. Rural parents were significantly more likely to demonstrate warmth toward their children than non-rural parents, and rural families in middle-and high-income groups were significantly more likely to engage in frequent home activities together.

Rural life was a significant risk factor for young children in positive discipline, spanking, family routines and potential access to mental health services. Ethnic and income disparities on some measures of family and child social-emotional health were also present in the rural subset.

The National Center was established at Mississippi State University through a grant by the US Department of Education. The Center fosters original applied research on the quality, accessibility and replication of early educational services for at-risk young children and families in America. Dr. Cathy Grace, former Executive Director of SECA, is the Director of the Center.

For more information & the full brief go to www.ruralec.msstate.edu. Click on "New Analysis of ECLS-K Shows Wide Disparities for Rural Children".

My father used to play with my brother and me in the yard. Mother would come out and say, "You're tearing up the grass."

"We're not raising grass," Dad would reply. "We're raising boys."

Harmon Killebrew

Computer Use in Texas Preschools

According to a study by Dr. Sharon Lynch and Dr. Laverne Warner, computer use in the preschool classroom is widespread in the state of Texas.

The study investigated Directors' reports on the use of computers in Texas child care facilities. Directors of licensed programs responded to a survey of 12 questions about computer use in their centers. The primary goal of the use of computers in the preschool classroom according to the survey was to extend concepts learned in the classroom.

Results from the survey indicated that preschool children in Texas began using computers in child care centers between 2 and 4 years of age, regardless of the socio-economic status of the children.

The preferred method of instruction in computer use was individual instruction; the most common form of supervision was an adult monitoring a specific classroom zone. The most common placement of computers was in a special learning center in the classroom.

The Southern Early Childhood Association published in 2002 a position statement on computer use with young children. Entitled, *Supporting Learning with Technology in the Early Childhood Classroom*, the position statement articulates the following philosophy.

“The Southern Early Childhood Association believes that the use of technology is a powerful tool for supporting all learning in the early childhood classroom and should be integrated into all classroom curricula rather than utilized as an isolated component. When viewed as a tool for learning, the appropriate use of technology in the early childhood classroom has the potential to enhance the cognitive and social development of young children.

The use of technology in the early childhood classroom should be evaluated in the same manner as any other learning methodology or material. It should be viewed as a tool or means of supporting educational goals and outcomes and not as the goal or curriculum in itself.

For the summary of the study, *Computer Use in Preschools: Directors' Reports of the State of the Practice*, go to www.ecrp.uiuc.edu/v6n2/lych.html.

For a copy of the SECA position statement, *Supporting Learning with Technology in the Early Childhood Classroom*, go to the SECA website at www.SouthernEarlyChildhood.org and click on “Position Statements”. You can download the entire text of the statement.

Parents (and teachers) need to fill a child's bucket of self-esteem so high that the rest of the world can't poke enough holes in it to drain it dry.

Alvin Price

