
Innovative Policies and Programs That Promote Competent Parenting and Support Families

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Why the Recent Interest Among 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 in the general store, post office, or neighborhood cheese factory.¹ 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.¹ 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.²
- ❖ 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.³
- ❖ 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.⁴

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,⁵ 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.⁶ 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 Children⁷ 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 lines²⁵ and extends to parents with children as old as adolescents.⁷

(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.⁶ The first discovery of this research on family matters is that the family matters.⁸ 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.⁶

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.⁹ 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.¹⁰ Truly integrated systems are the exception;⁹ 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,¹¹ 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.¹²

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

According to Weiss,¹³ 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*.¹⁴ The report underscores the families' responsibility to support children, while recognizing public and private responsibility to support families. The National Governor's Association,⁹ 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.^{18,19,20,21,22,23}

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 Halpern⁹ 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.⁹ 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 support¹⁵
- ❖ Provide the chief elements of social support information, guidance, feedback, practical assistance, and encouragement¹⁶
- ❖ Relate to parents as partners rather than experts¹⁶
- ❖ Build on family strengths rather than managing problems and deficits⁵
- ❖ Emphasize prevention and laying the groundwork for positive development rather than remediation or treatment⁶
- ❖ Provide ongoing, noncategorical services rather than strict eligibility requirements for limited periods of time⁵
- ❖ Voluntary participation⁵
- ❖ Community ownership which facilitates sensitivity to the culture, family structure, and ethnicity of the families in the community¹⁶

- ❖ Involve parents in designing the program and place priority on employing community citizens as workers⁵
- ❖ Are easily accessible, often on a drop-in basis or in parent's own home¹⁶

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.¹⁴ 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".⁹ 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.¹⁷ 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 Association¹⁸
- ❖ The Council of Chief State School Officers¹⁹
- ❖ The National Commission on America’s Urban Families²⁰
- ❖ The National Commission on Children²¹
- ❖ U.S. Dept. of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement²²
- ❖ Wisconsin Governor’s Task Force on Family and Children’s Issues²³

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.^{18,19,20,21,22,23} 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.^{18,21}
- ❖ Three of the reports^{20,21,23} recommend high quality child care as an important family support.²⁴ 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.²³
- ❖ 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.²² 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.²⁵
- ❖ 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.^{20,21}
- ❖ Governments can create awards to honor persons, organizations, or programs that strengthen families or communities.²⁰
- ❖ Governments, civic organizations, and businesses could establish opportunities for intergenerational contact between seniors and children.²⁰ 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.²⁰
- ❖ Public and private recreational activities could charge family admission rates when parents and children attend together.²⁰
- ❖ Government and private employers should establish family-oriented policies and practices.^{20,21} 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.²⁰

(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.^{18,19,20,21,22}
- ❖ State education agencies should promote parents' involvement in their children's schooling through teaching, support, and decision making roles.¹⁹
- ❖ 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.²⁰

(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.^{18,20,21,22,23}
- ❖ 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.²³
- ❖ Communities can develop and help create public awareness of marriage preparation and enrichment opportunities.^{20,21}
- ❖ Schools can incorporate parenting education into the curriculum,²⁰ with special attempts to target the unique needs of teen parents, both male and female.²³
- ❖ 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.²¹

(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.^{18,20,21,23}

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

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.²⁶ 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, Bruner³ 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.²⁶

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 Booklet²⁷ 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.² 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).^{2,27}

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?

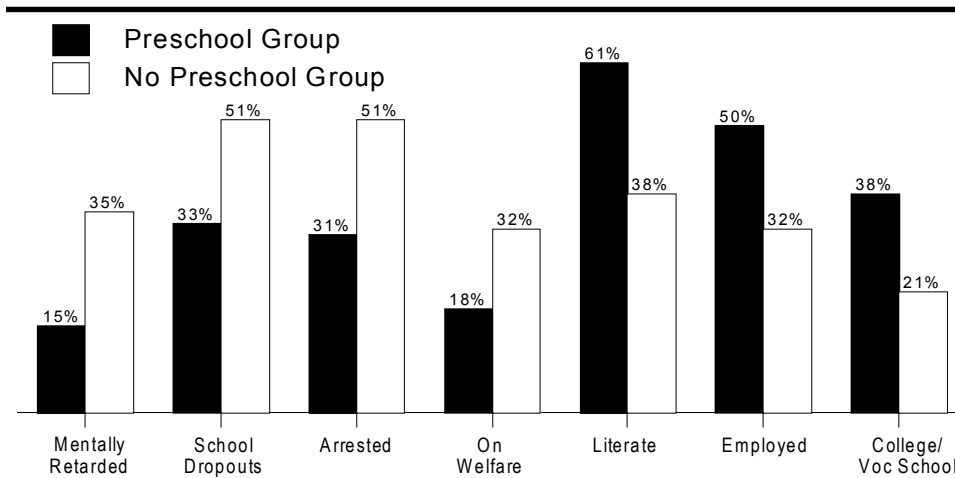
Everyone wants an answer to the question, "Do family support and education programs work?" Unfortunately, in the real world, such simple questions don't lead to easy answers. Instead, the questions that need to be asked are:

...what programs work best for whom, when, for how long must they exist, how do they work, and ultimately, why are they effective?¹⁶ (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).²⁸

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.²⁹

When the goals and expected outcomes of programs are more clearly defined, evaluation is easier.¹⁶ 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.²⁷

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.¹⁶ 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.³⁰ 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.³ 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,² 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).²

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.²

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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