



STATE PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS OVERLOOKING FACILITY NEEDS

New study reveals what states can do to increase quantity and quality of preschool facilities

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NEW YORK (August 15, 2007) – Nearly 40 state governments throughout the country are aggressively launching or expanding preschool education programs for 3- and 4-year-old children. But a new report contends that unless those states also develop policies and strategies to address the need for new and better facilities, these promising preschool programs run the risk of falling short of their goals.

Building Early Childhood Facilities: What States Can Do to Create Supply and Promote Quality, a joint publication of Rutgers University’s National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) and Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), is the first report to highlight the role of the physical environment in generating program quality and meeting state early education policy goals. It both sounds a warning and offers hope in the form of an extensive menu of program and policy options available to states.

The most prominent of state early education policy goals is closing the achievement gap and preparing young children for the rigors of elementary school classrooms. Studies have found that high-quality preschool programs – those that support a child’s social and emotional development and teach basic language and related skills – result in life-long benefits such as higher graduation rates and higher earnings.

“Little attention is paid to the role facilities play in shaping high-quality preschool programs,” said Dr. Steve Barnett, NIEER director. “States need to carefully consider the kinds of environments where children spend many hours each day and policymakers must recognize that the adequacy and quality of the learning environment is an important part of building an early education system.”

The report describes a wide variety of state programs and policies, ranging from new proposals to little-known pilot efforts successfully tested in a number of states. These policies are designed to address capital needs, gaps in the capacity of the production system, and the elements of a supportive policy and regulatory environment.

“Building early learning centers is an essential part of creating sustainable communities – good places to work, do business and raise children,” said Michael Rubinger, president and CEO of LISC. “When building new facilities, preschool programs face all of the challenges that community developers face in raising affordable capital and managing the real estate development process. States can borrow lessons learned in the community development field to overcome these hurdles,” he added.

The report recommends comprehensive policies to address financial barriers, design and real estate development practices and the policy and regulatory environment. It calls for capital subsidies for renovation or new construction; development of technical, organizational, real estate and architectural capacity; facility standards that address program quality in addition to health and safety; and a reliable system and supportive policy and regulatory environment.

The report also itemizes the obstacles – affordability, access to private debt, training issues, physical design practices, etc. – that states typically encounter when developing early child care facilities programs, and provides recommendations on how address those situations.

The policy brief is based on a more comprehensive report. Both reports are available on both the NIEER and LISC web sites.

About LISC

LISC combines corporate, government and philanthropic resources to help community-based organizations revitalize underserved neighborhoods. Since 1980, LISC has raised more than \$7.8 billion to build or rehabilitate more than 215,000 affordable homes and develop 30 million square feet of retail, community and educational space nationwide. LISC’s Community Investment Collaborative for Kids program works with early childhood providers and nonprofit groups to develop and improve facilities throughout the country. It also coordinates with policy makers in many states to craft an organized approach to the development of well-designed child care centers as a way to revitalize communities and provide higher-quality care for the children who live in them. For more information, visit www.lisc.org.

About NIEER

The National Institute for Early Education Research (www.nieer.org), a unit of the Graduate School of Education, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, supports early childhood education policy by providing objective, nonpartisan information based on research. NIEER is supported through grants from The Pew Charitable Trusts and others. The Pew Charitable Trusts (www.pewtrusts.org) is driven by the power of knowledge to solve today’s most challenging problems. Pew applies a rigorous, analytical approach to improve public policy, inform the public and stimulate civic life. For more information, visit www.nieer.org.

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