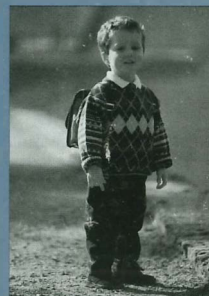




Governor's Task Force
On Early Childhood Education

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



MARCH 2001



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Education was presented to
Gov. Frank Keating December 21, 2000.

"While early childhood experiences alone are not sufficient to create a healthy human being, they are necessary to create a healthy human being. You gain less benefit from later experiences if you are without sufficient foundation developed during early childhood."

DR. BRUCE PERRY
TEXAS CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL
PRESENTATION TO TASK FORCE
MAY 23, 2000



Introduction

More is known today than ever before about how the brain develops and what that means about how and how well a child learns. Exciting new information on early brain development, backed by more than thirty years of scientific research, has underscored the fundamental importance of nurturing children in their earliest months and years of life. It offers the key to helping parents, providers, and policymakers give Oklahoma's youngest the best start possible: high quality early childhood care and educational experiences.

The benefits of early brain development are substantial. Investing wisely during a child's early years can reduce the need for remediation, treatment or crisis intervention programs in later years. Numerous studies have verified the effectiveness of early childhood education and the cost savings, documenting:

- HIGHER IQ AND COGNITIVE PERFORMANCE
- IMPROVED LANGUAGE
- FEWER INSTANCES OF GRADE RETENTION
- DECREASED NEED FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION
- HIGHER READING AND MATH ACHIEVEMENT SCORES
- HIGHER LEVELS OF FORMAL EDUCATION
- DELAYED PARENTHOOD
- FEWER TEEN MOTHERS, HIGHER RATES OF POST-HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION.

Such research findings indicate Oklahoma's opportunity for significant cost savings through a long-term, effective commitment to early childhood education. Dr. Larkin Warner, Regents Professor Emeritus, Oklahoma State University, notes "...under-investment in education today means a reduced ability to add intellectual capital tomorrow. Moreover, the earlier in the child's life the under-investment occurs, the greater the cumulative opportunity that is lost. That is why the Task Force reports such high returns to early childhood education programs."

These benefits can only be achieved with a dramatic shift in political will—from short-term quick fix to long-term human capital development. As Dr. Warner notes, "The effort required for improved early childhood education is immediate and direct, while the payoff is long term. Especially within the political sphere, there is a tendency to emphasize immediate rather than long-run policy benefits. The Governor's Task Force on Early Childhood Education has provided a wake-up call that will hopefully overcome political reluctance to take the long view."

Oklahoma's Workforce 2020 was born in the late 1990's. These are the teachers, plumbers, pilots, nurses, politicians, professors, sales clerks and others upon whom Oklahoma's future depends. The challenges facing this future workforce will be shaped by unprecedented demographic, social, economic, and technological changes. A highly skilled, strong, competitive workforce that is actively engaged in civic participation is the most critical factor in obtaining and sustaining a high quality of life for our state. Without question, effective early childhood education will be the engine that propels Oklahoma most rapidly in this direction.





Governor's Task Force on Early Childhood Education

In early 2000, Frank Keating, Governor of the State of Oklahoma, issued an Executive Order establishing the Governor's Task Force on Early Childhood Education. Governor Keating directed the Task Force "to bring forth ideas and recommendations for improving the methods currently used to prepare our children for the learning experience."

To accomplish this charge, the Task Force was to assess "the needs for early childhood education, the availability and quality of the programs, both public and private, throughout Oklahoma, and develop a proposal and implementation recommendations to the Governor."

The Task Force was composed of eight private citizens and three state officials. The Task Force's work was inclusive, involving an ambitious schedule and a broad array of resource people and stakeholders. The recommendations are drawn from this intensive process of learning, sharing, and building consensus.

At their core the recommendations call for the state, its communities, and all parents to strengthen their commitment to Oklahoma's youngest children. The state and a few communities have some exemplary efforts underway to improve opportunities for children under age five. However, there is a lack of an overall comprehensive approach that is needed to achieve greatest success. The elements of this approach include parent education and family assistance, health care, early care and learning, school readiness, community mobilization, and strong public policy and public engagement.

The following Executive Summary highlights the Task Force's major findings and recommendations. Background information and additional suggestions for action can be found in the Task Force's official full report. Readers interested in learning the basis of these recommendations and more about the conditions of and opportunities for young Oklahoma children are strongly encouraged to read the complete report.

KEY TO SUCCESS: LEADERSHIP

Weaving together the different elements required to support young children will be a difficult, time-consuming and long-term job. Success will depend upon changes in programs, policies, working relationships, and responsibilities, but most importantly it will depend upon leadership.

The Task Force found that in states making the most progress on early childhood education, the one most common ingredient was the very active leadership from the state's top public official—the governor—as well as within business, philanthropy, education, health, and local government, and among parents.



The following are some of the important facts the Task Force reviewed about Oklahoma's Workforce 2020 - Oklahoma's children born in the late 1990's:

How many and where are they?

- There are close to 250,000 children under age 5 in Oklahoma.
- Most of the young children live in the state's five largest counties.

With whom do they live?

- Young children increasingly live with a single parent.
- Many children under age six do not live with either parent.
- Substantial numbers are being raised by grandparents.
- Increasing numbers are in foster care.
- Many have one, both, or the only parent living in prison.
- One-third of Oklahoma births are to unmarried mothers.

How healthy are they when they are born?

- Infant mortality in Oklahoma is high and increasing.
- About one half of births result from unintended pregnancies.

How many are clearly not ready to start school and not ready to learn?

- Statewide, about one in four of incoming kindergartners are not ready to begin school.
- Many individual schools report much higher rates.

How are they cared for when their parents work?

- Most children under age five live in households in which both or the only parent works outside the home, with only about half cared for by licensed child care programs.
- Most child care program teachers earn around minimum wage with few or no benefits, resulting in high turnover rates.
- The annual cost to an Oklahoma family for enrolling a four-year-old in a full-time child care center is higher than public college tuition.
- The high cost of providing licensed infant and toddler care limits availability and creates long waiting lists.

How many have teenagers for mothers?

- About one in every six infants has a teenage mother.
- Oklahoma ranks high among all states in birth rates among women under age 20.

What is the impact of poverty on the early brain development of young Oklahomans?

- More than one in four Oklahoma children under age five live in poverty.
- Poor children are at high risk of impaired brain development through their exposure to the variety of problems associated with poverty: inadequate nutrition, trauma and abuse, poor quality daily care, and poor health care.

THE KEY STRATEGIES

The Governor's Task Force on Early Childhood Education proposes four key strategies for a long-term successful early childhood education initiative for Oklahoma leading to healthier children, healthier families and a stronger future economy.



Strategy One:

ENACT A STRONG PUBLIC POLICY PROMOTING EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION

Oklahoma holds families, parents and children in high esteem. Policymakers at all levels understand that the well-being of individual families and children is inextricably linked to government policy. The Task Force strongly recommends that Oklahoma clearly articulate its early childhood policy, vision, and results in state statute. The proposed statute should codify a long-term vision, outlining the specific results being sought to drive government and agency policy in this arena, and specifying the key strategies promoted to achieve those results. The Task Force recommends that Oklahoma make the needs of young children and their families its highest priority through the adoption in statute of the following vision and desired results.

VISION: All Oklahoma Children Will Be Healthy, Eager to Learn, and Ready to Succeed By the Time They Enter School

RESULTS SOUGHT:	RESULT 1: Families Nurture, Teach And Provide For Their Young Children
	RESULT 2: Children Will Be Born Healthy And Remain Healthy
	RESULT 3: Families With Young Children Are Able To Find And Afford High-Quality Child Care When Needed
	RESULT 4: Children Enter School Prepared To Learn And Continue To Succeed
Supported by a clearly articulated public policy, state agencies can combine their efforts in a collaborative manner with those from the public and private sectors in local communities, to achieve this vision and these results for Oklahoma.	



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Strategy Two:

CREATE A STATEWIDE PUBLIC-PRIVATE EARLY CHILDHOOD PARTNERSHIP

Oklahoma is a leader among states, with many innovative programs dedicated to early intervention, parent education, family support, quality child care and preschool education. Policymakers have made wise and significant investments in the early care and education of Oklahoma children. The abilities of these resources to achieve their purposes are frustrated by the absence of a comprehensive policy structure. There is no individual or entity charged with the overall coordination of children's early care and education and its linkages to vital family support and health care services. In short, the benefits derived from Oklahoma's creativity and concern are being stymied by incomplete and unconnected programs, services, ideas and initiatives.

The Task Force recommends that the Legislature and the private sector take the leadership to create by statute a statewide public-private early childhood Partnership that is comprised of leaders from business and philanthropy, local community partnerships on early childhood education, state agencies, leaders from the governor's office and state legislature, parents, and early childhood education professionals. This Partnership should be given the responsibility to guide the overall development of an effective early childhood education initiative for Oklahoma focused on accomplishing the desired results.



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Strategy Three:

IMPLEMENT A COMPREHENSIVE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT CAMPAIGN

Even in the best of circumstances, parenting can be enhanced with quality support and information. A key initial and continuing function of any Oklahoma initiative should engage Oklahoma citizens in early care and education. Going beyond public awareness and education, public engagement entails the dissemination of information and assistance in a manner that results in action—changing behavior.

The full benefit of effective public engagement will be achieved only through a coordinated, fully funded campaign which will help—

- parents to be actively involved in quality early childhood practices with their own children.
- providers to serve infants, toddlers, preschool children and their families in ways which best take advantage of the opportunities afforded during the early years of a child's life.
- policymakers to advance the quality of early childhood care and education in Oklahoma through effective design, high standards, and adequate support.
- diverse stakeholders to engage in action that facilitates quality early childhood care and education at the community level.



Strategy Four:

MOBILIZE COMMUNITIES TO PROVIDE ENVIRONMENTS THAT SUPPORT CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Families want to live in communities where their children will be healthy, safe, educated and economically secure. Not all Oklahoma families do. Many live in cities, towns or rural areas without child care facilities or family support. Even when quality community-based opportunities do exist, many families do not know where to go and how to access help.

The children and families living in Oklahoma form the heart of Oklahoma. Every Oklahoma community, from the most cosmopolitan metropolis to the smallest town, can initiate or expand local initiatives which give their youngest citizens the best chance to be healthy, eager to learn and ready to succeed by the time they enter school.

The Task Force recommends that every community in Oklahoma focus attention on the needs of its young children and their families and marshal resources on their behalf.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GETTING THE DESIRED RESULTS

The Task Force recommends the following for achieving each of the results sought under Strategy One.

RESULT 1: Families Nurture, Teach And Provide For Their Young Children

How well a child's brain develops is more influenced by what happens to a child during his or her first three years than previously understood. Science is beginning to explain the reasons behind what many already know: No job is more important or more challenging than that of a parent.

1. Establish within the recommended Partnership a state level responsibility for promoting and assuring the engagement of the public in the care and education of young children.
2. Initiate a statewide campaign to engage and educate families about prenatal care and the care and education of infants and toddlers.
3. Assure that each new family having a child in an Oklahoma hospital or birthing center receives a personal contact within twenty-four to forty-eight hours of the birth of their child, to receive information about child development, ideas and hints which support their efforts to get their child off to the best start possible, and information to help locate resources they may need.
4. Provide new Oklahoma mothers information about the benefits of breast-feeding, and campaign for public support and accommodation for breast-feeding mothers.
5. Encourage all Oklahoma Libraries to establish programs that provide family support and offer resources and recommendations to help parents raise children who read.
6. Ensure that those who are professionally involved with young children or become parents are engaged and educated about early brain development and its impact on the child, family and community.
7. Provide a single toll-free telephone number where parents and caregivers can receive parenting advice and be referred to services or programs that meet their strengths and needs and those of their children.
8. Support and expand the number of high-quality, intergenerational Family Literacy Programs to help break the cycle of poverty in Oklahoma families.





RESULT 2: Children Will Be Born Healthy and Remain Healthy

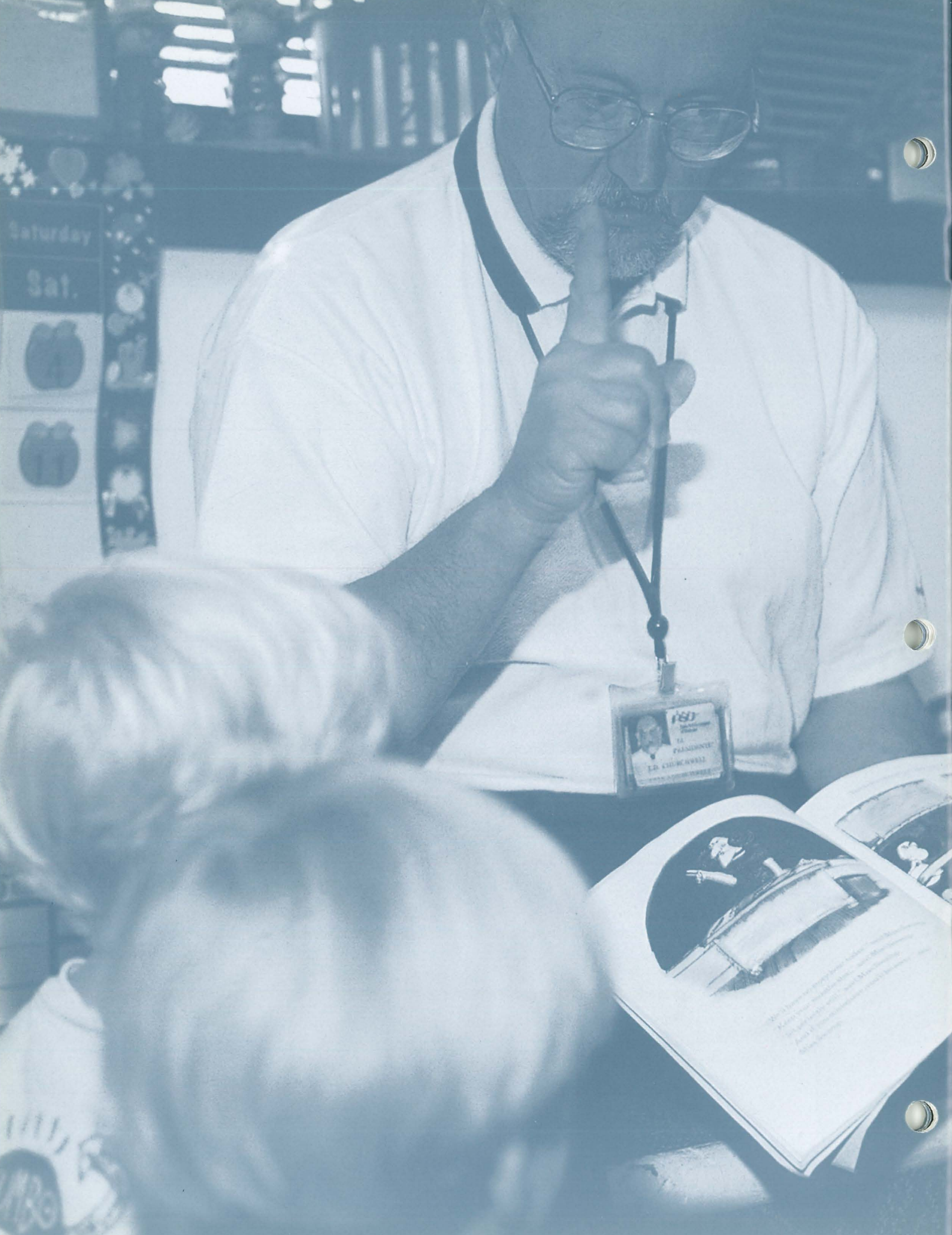
A healthy beginning is critically important to young children's development. Several factors clearly indicate that a large portion of Oklahoma's infants face severe challenges in being born healthy and staying healthy as they begin the first years of life, including: unintended pregnancies, high infant mortality rates, lack of adequate prenatal care, high teen birth rates, large numbers of children without any health insurance, poor rates of pediatricians accepting Medicaid, and low rates of immunizations.

RECOMMENDATIONS to ACHIEVE RESULT 2: Children Will Be Born Healthy And Remain Healthy

1. Establish within the recommended Partnership a state level responsibility for promoting and assuring the health of all children under the age of five that would regularly report on the status of their health conditions.
2. Develop Oklahoma's health care system for young children in accord with the following key components: preventing health problems, assuring access and utilization, providing quality care, and financing and organizing service delivery options for the greatest success.
3. Promote the healthy timing and spacing of births to assure the good health of infants and their mothers.
4. Promote the benefits of breast-feeding as the best nutrition for a healthy baby.
5. Provide a comprehensive health promotion program on key preventive strategies for young children and parents beginning before birth.
6. Develop and implement a statewide child care health consultant initiative working through quality child care sites to provide health outreach, education and linkages to medical care for young children and families.
7. Develop a statewide voluntary home and clinic-based nurse case management program for Medicaid-eligible infants and their families through a public-private partnership to promote improved access to and use of medical homes (regular locations of care).
8. Create a single point of entry at the local level to facilitate early access to perinatal care and related services.
9. Assure adequate compensation for providers of health, behavioral health, and dental care to create and maintain a dependable, consistent base of local, quality providers.
10. Provide increased access to family planning services for all Oklahomans.
11. Develop a comprehensive plan of action to significantly reduce the number of births to teens in Oklahoma.
12. Promote strategies that increase the number of children receiving immunizations.
13. Encourage the adoption and promotion of health education curricula for schools suitable for children from kindergarten to high school, that will focus on child development, brain development, nutrition, hygiene, wellness promotion, injury prevention, health maintenance, early recognition of disease and early intervention.
14. Support Governor and Mrs. Keating's Marriage Initiative and encourage it to address access to drug and alcohol treatment as a means to support Oklahoma families in which addiction problems threaten the marriage.









RESULT 3: Families With Young Children Are Able to Find And Afford High-Quality Child Care When Needed

Today, most mothers with children younger than six are in the workforce and most preschool children today spend time in care outside their own home. Improving the quality of child care provides a tremendous opportunity to positively impact children's lives and Oklahoma's future.

Whatever occurs during the hours children are in care outside their homes, frequently ten hours a day, will determine whether each child is ready for school, can get along with others, is creative, and feels good about him/herself. Research shows clearly that the quality of early care and education—through the child's daily experiences, the delivery of parent education, nutrition, health services—will have a significant and long-lasting impact on his or her success in life.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ACHIEVE RESULT 3: Families With Young Children Are Able to Find And Afford High-Quality Child Care When Needed

1. Establish within the recommended Partnership a state level responsibility for assuring quality child care for all children under the age of five needing care outside their home.
2. Develop public awareness about the importance of early childhood brain development and how child care impacts the current and future workforce.
3. Focus additional funding and resources on children from birth to 3 years of age as critical years for brain development.
4. Offer incentives to support innovative, child-centered practices.
5. Facilitate the transition of existing child care programs to higher quality care by supporting the Oklahoma Department of Human Services' (DHS) plan to have all children whose care is subsidized by DHS to receive care in two and three Star centers and homes by July 1, 2002.
6. Facilitate the transition of existing child care programs to higher quality care by providing technical assistance to child care providers, planners and funders at the community level.
7. Create a facilities fund to provide capital for the renovation or construction of high-quality space for child care.
8. Lower staff to child ratios and the group size within minimum licensing requirements and Star quality criteria.
9. Support legislation that provides state and federal tax credits and deductions for employers and/or families who use child care in meeting higher quality criteria.
10. Build new child care capacity by providing data and technical assistance to communities to evaluate unmet child care needs and implement strategies to address those needs.
11. Recruit new child care sponsors with the resources to offer high-quality care, such as businesses, schools, and members of the faith community.
12. Increase subsidy reimbursement rates to reflect market rate surveys conducted at least every two years. In the long term, tie rates to an evaluation of programs' cost of care rather than the rate parents can afford to pay.
13. Lower the parent co-payment and increase the eligibility ceiling to allow greater access to the child care system for low-income families.
14. Enhance the education, training, professional development and retention of child care providers to attain the professional status of teachers.
15. Facilitate the dissemination of parent information through child care centers and child care homes.
16. Coordinate the use of State Department of Health Child Guidance staff as a resource to child care centers and child care homes for children with behavioral problems.



RESULT 4: Children Enter School Prepared To Learn And Continue To Succeed

School readiness means young children start school ready to learn. Across the nation and Oklahoma large numbers of the children entering elementary school lack the basic skills necessary to be successful. Many attend no early childhood education program before beginning kindergarten. Children who participate in high-quality early education perform better in school than those who do not. This is particularly true for children at risk of school failure.

RECOMMENDATIONS to ACHIEVE RESULT 4: Children Enter School Prepared To Learn And Continue To Succeed

1. Establish within the recommended Partnership a state level responsibility for promoting and assuring all children under the age of five have access to quality pre-kindergarten programs.
2. Ensure that all Oklahoma families have access to quality early care and education experiences with pre-kindergarten structured to meet the strengths and needs of their children.
3. Encourage pre-kindergarten collaboration between schools, Head Start and child care which blend funding, serve children more efficiently and offer a quality program for children and parents through a single site.
4. Encourage public school four-year-old programs to utilize alternative facilities when space is not available at the school.
5. Provide information (such as technical assistance on establishing quality pre-kindergarten programs) and financial incentives (such as bonuses) to encourage local school districts to use a greater proportion of available Title I funding for early childhood education.

Governor's
Task Force on
Early Childhood
Education

TASK FORCE MEMBERS

Pete Churchwell, Chair
Patrice Dills Douglas, Vice Chair
Dr. Floyd Coppedge
Sandy Garrett
Howard Hendrick
Dr. Gene Hunt
Robert J. LaFortune
Marlo Nash
Liz Reece
Lisa Slates
Joan Yoakam
John Rex, Ex-Officio

RESOURCE PERSONS

LaDonna Atkins
Wanda DeBruler
Phil Dessauer, Jr.
Mike Fogarty
Marcia Goff
Bob Harbison
Ivoria Holt
Grace Kelley
Tom Kemper
Sarah Lee
Susan McCauly
Dr. Edd D. Rhoades

ALTERNATES

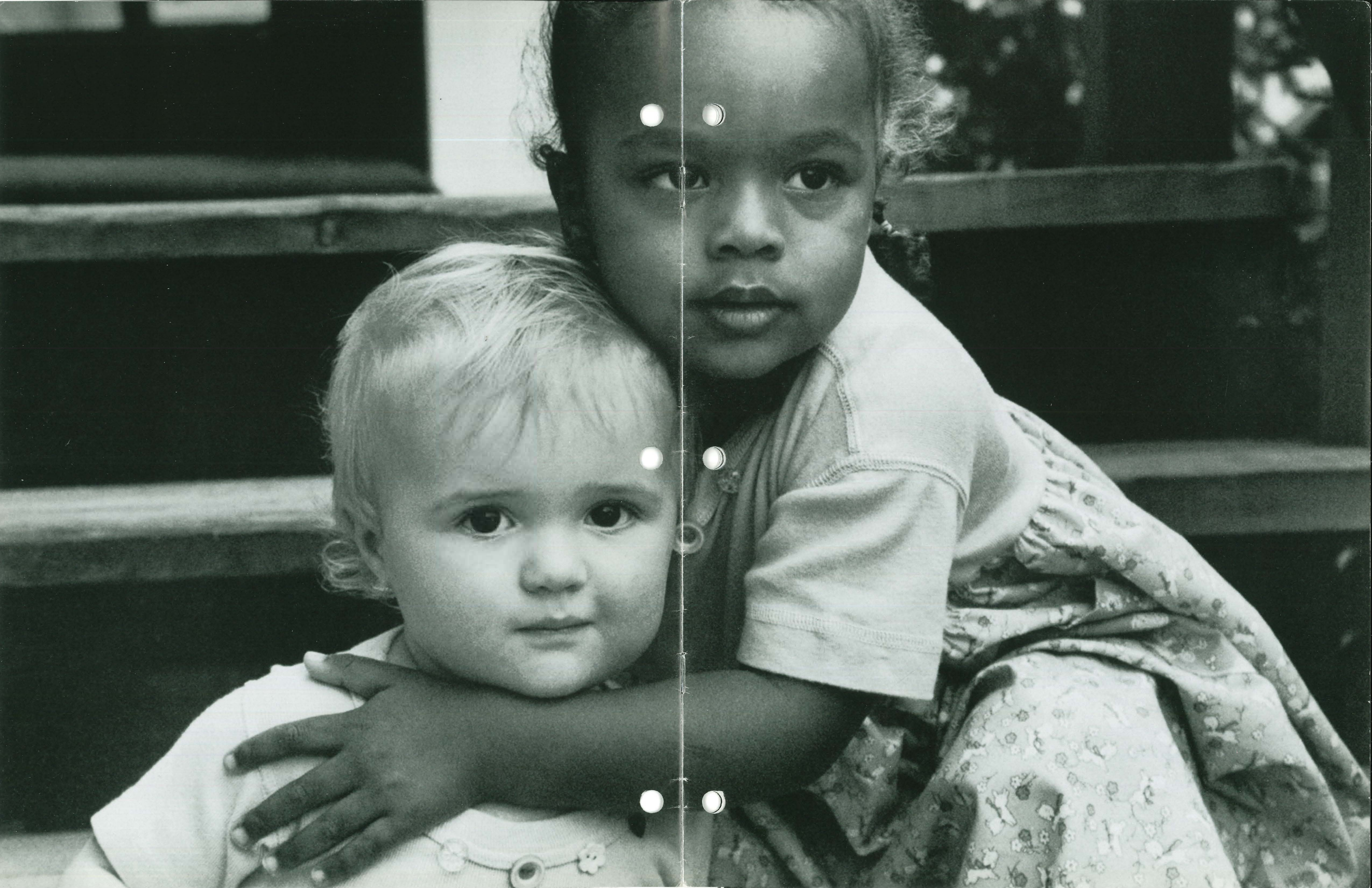
Dr. Ramona Paul
Anne Roberts
Nancy vonBargen

FACILITATOR

Sandy Ingraham

"There is nothing more vital to a
successful society than proper care
of our youngest members."

FRANK KEATING,
GOVERNOR,
STATE OF OKLAHOMA





For more information or a copy
of the full report, contact:

Marlo Nash
Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy

420 NW 13TH ST. SUITE 101
OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA 73103
405.236.5437
e-mail: marlonash@oica.org