

Testimony in Opposition to SF 673 and SF 949

Karen R. Effrem, MD
EdAction Board of Directors

www.edaction.org

952-361-4931

February 24, 2005

I will speak generally about issues concerning early childhood programs first and then specifically about each specific kind of program and why they are not needed.

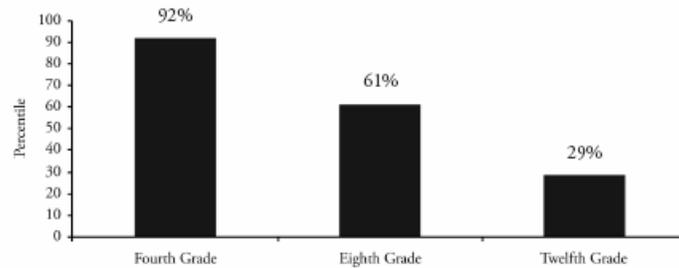
- 1) The need for all of the programs discussed today are based on flawed science or at least the flawed interpretation of neuroscience that says that without a stimulating early environment, babies and children under five will not develop properly. Here are some of the many quotes from neuroscience experts that belie that idea:
 - “What neuroscientists know about synaptogenesis does not support a claim that zero to three is a critical period for humans. ... Finally, there is no evidence, or even the suggestion, that specific kinds of learning experiences or early childhood environments influence the rate, duration, or outcome of synaptogenesis and synaptic pruning.” - John Bruer, “Education and the Brain: A Bridge too Far,” Education Researcher, November, 1997
 - “There is quite a mystique in our culture about the importance of early intervention, [yet] there is no evidence [for it] whatever.” - Sandra Scarr, “Developmental Theories for the 1990s: Development and Individual Differences,” Child Development 63, no. 1 (February 1992): 1516.
 - “But there is already plenty of evidence that the biggest obstacle to learning is the belief that one cannot learn. By encouraging parents and teachers to accept this self-fulfilling prophecy, your story with its imagery of windows of opportunity slamming shut, may well do more to stunt children's futures than any deficiencies in their early upbringing. So far as we know, it is never too late for a child to get on the path to learning.” - Dr. Seymour Pappert, Lego Professor of Learning Research at MIT, and Dr. Daniel Dennett, Director of the Tufts University Center for Cognitive Studies (Newsweek, 3/11/96, p.15)
 - “Assertions that the die has been cast by the time the child enters school are not supported by neuroscience evidence and can create unwarranted pessimism about the potential efficacy of interventions that are initiated after the preschool years.” - Jack Schonkoff and Deborah Phillips, ed., “From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development, National Academy Press”, 2000, p. 216

2) A false sense of crisis has been created by those with a vested financial and power interest in extending state control of education and indeed the raising of children to younger and younger ages. Indeed, we heard a week ago that the state is developing guidelines to tell parents how they should raise their children so that they will develop properly. Advertising by Ready for K says that fully half of Minnesota's children are not prepared for kindergarten and as a result are doomed to life of economic hardship and even prison, if taxes aren't increased and these programs are restored.

3) There is no crisis of kindergarten readiness in Minnesota or nationally. Although there is not anywhere close to solid agreement on what skills and characteristics constitute kindergarten readiness,

- The statistics that I gave you last week stating that 94% are proficient at recognizing numbers, shapes, and counting to ten, 92% are eager to learn and 97% are in good health came from a longitudinal study of 22,000 preschoolers that follows children for a long period of time, has a large sample size, directly measures skills of the children themselves instead of relying only on parental report, and controls for various factors that may confuse the facts by doing a multivariate analysis. That same study also said that 82% of America's kindergartners have basic pre-literacy skills such as knowing that print is read from left to right.
- Other studies show that the percentages of preschoolers who are read to three or more times per week; who are taught letters, words, or numbers with equal frequency; who are taught songs or music, and have done arts and crafts with a family member are all improving.
- It's also in the early years when American students are most competitive internationally. Consider France, England, Denmark, Spain and Belgium where more than 90 percent of 4-year-olds attend public preschools. International tests show that by age 9, when the benefits of preschool should be most apparent, American children outscore nearly all of their universally preschoolled peers on tests of reading, math, and science." It is only after 8 or 12 years that American students have completed their fall to the bottom of international comparisons. U.S. fourth graders score higher than 70 percent of their international peers while U.S. eighth graders perform little better than the international average and by twelfth grade, U.S. twelfth graders performed better than students in only three countries out of 21 tested in math and science literacy. None of that decline is due to a lack of preschool.

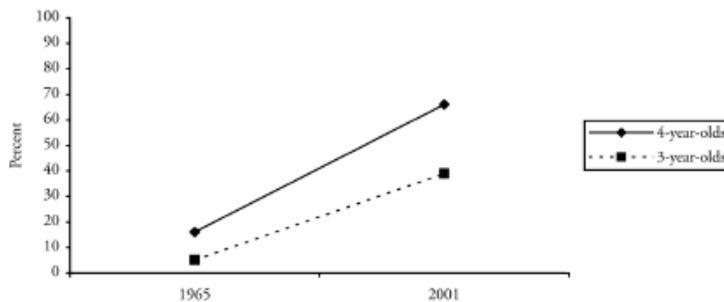
Figure 6: Decline in U.S. Science Performance by Grade Level



Sources: Fourth grade: "TIMSS highlights from the Primary Grades," Boston College, June 1997: 2, Table 2, based on 1994-1995 TIMMS data, available at isc.bc.edu/timss1995i/TIMSSDF/P1HiLite.pdf. Eighth grade: "TIMSS Highlights from the Middle School Years," Boston College, November 1996: 2, Table 1, based on 1994-1995 TIMMS data, available at isc.bc.edu/timss1995i/HiLightB.html. Twelfth grade: "TIMSS Highlights from the Final School Years," Boston College, February 1998: 2, Table 2, based on 1995-1996 TIMMS, available at isc.bc.edu/timss1995i/TIMSSPDF/C_Hilite.pdf.

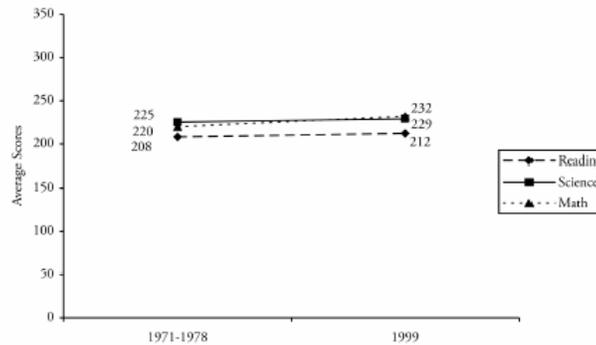
4) In general, these programs do not work. Historically, the percentage of children involved in preschool education and kindergarten has risen dramatically since 1965 for three, four and five year olds. Despite the widespread use of formal early education programs, student achievement has shown little to no improvement. For instance fourth-grade reading, science, and math scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) have been little better than stagnant since 1971, 1977, and 1978, respectively. If preschool was such an important component of a good education, why hasn't there been any improvement in the NAEP scores or any other major indication of student achievement [the International Evaluation of Education Achievement, (IEA), the Young Adult Literacy Survey (YALS), the National Adult Literacy, Survey (NALS), and the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS)]?

Figure 1: Percentage of Three- and Four-year-olds Enrolled in Preprimary Programs, 1965-2001



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics, 2003*, Table 43, available at nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d03/tables/dt043.asp.

Figure 2: Fourth Grade Reading, Science and Math Scores on the NAEP, 1971-1999



Source: 1971, 1977, and 1978 are the initial test years shown respectively in reading, science, and math. See U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Results Over Time: NAEP 1999 Long-Term Trend Summary Data Tables," August 2000, available at nces.ed.gov/nationreportcard/tables/Ltr1999/.

5) The specific programs do not work.

- ECFE –

- “Studies of two-generation programs [like ECFE] have generally found small or no effects on child development, although many have reported some positive impact on parenting skills.”- Joel Alter, Judy Randall, and Leah Goldstein, *The Early Childhood Programs*, Minnesota Office of the Legislative Auditor, report 01-01, January 12, 2001
- ECFE is based on the Abecedarian Project from North Carolina, which was not near as effective as has been suggested
 - For example, by combining the IQ findings of the four cohorts studied, the researchers concluded that the intervention raised IQ. However, they neglected to report that scores improved only for two of the four groups. In fact, for the third and fourth cohorts, the experimental group actually lost 3.68 IQ points more than did the control group, providing no support for the efficacy of the intervention. (Spitz, "Does the Carolina Abecedarian Early Intervention Project Prevent Sociocultural Mental Retardation? pp. 228–29). – Olsen pp. 15-16
 - “For these children, a 4.6–point improvement was approximately a 5 percent increase in measured intelligence, an increase hardly noticeable in the classroom or on the job.” – John Bruer, president, James S. McDonnell Neurosciences Institute, *The Myth of the First Three Years*, The Free Press, New York, 1999, p. 165

- “On the other hand, in their statistical analyses [of Abecedarian], Ramey and Campbell also found that the mother’s IQ was a more powerful factor in explaining a child’s performance than was participation in the program.” – Bruer, p. 166
 - “In the Abecedarian Project, children in the preschool program had IQs 4 to 5 points higher than the children in the control group at ages 12 to 15. Nonetheless, the early enrichment did not result in these children reaching IQ levels comparable to middle-class children in the community, nor did they reach the national average IQ of 100.” – Bruer, p. 171
- Kindergarten Readiness –
 - “Evaluations of the School Readiness Program have not provided definitive evidence of its effects. The department has sometimes declared that School Readiness has a positive impact without acknowledging other possible explanations for the results of its evaluations.” - Joel Alter, Judy Randall, and Leah Goldstein, The Early Childhood Programs, Minnesota Office of the Legislative Auditor, report 01-01, January 12, 2001
 - In other words, the study sample [of those participating in preschool] does not differ from the entire kindergarten population in GKAP capability scores. Reports also show that GKAP scores are essentially the same as they were before Georgia adopted the \$1.15 billion universal preschool program. (Laura Henderson, Kathleen Basile, and Gary Henry, “Prekindergarten Longitudinal Study 1997-1998 School Year Annual Report,” Georgia State University Applied Research Center School of Policy Studies, April 1999: 39)
- Head Start
 - “No large-scale studies have examined the effects of Minnesota's Head Start program on its participants.” - Joel Alter, Judy Randall, and Leah Goldstein, The Early Childhood Programs, Minnesota Office of the Legislative Auditor, report 01-01, January 12, 2001
 - “Head Start is not fully achieving its stated purpose of promoting school readiness ... Indeed, these low-income children continue to perform significantly below their more advantaged peers in reading and mathematics once they enter school.” - “Strengthening Head Start: What the Evidence Shows” – US Dept. of HHS, June 2003

- “In the long run, cognitive and socioemotional test scores of former Head Start students do not remain superior to those of disadvantaged children who did not attend Head Start.” – Ruth McKey et al., "The Impact of Head Start on Children, Families, and Communities," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, HHS 85-31193, June 1985, Executive Summary, p. 1.
 - Once the children enter school there is little difference between the scores of Head Start and control children. . . . Findings for the individual cognitive measures--intelligence, readiness and achievement--reflect the same trends as the global measure. . . . By the end of the second year there are no educationally meaningful differences on any of the measures.”- Ibid, pp. 1-24
 - “The body of research on current Head Start is insufficient to draw conclusions about the impact of the national program.” – “Head Start,” GAO review of over 600 citations, manuscripts, and studies, 1997
- 6) Head Start and the other preschool initiatives are based on the Perry preschool project that has been roundly criticized for a number of methodological and other flaws with the results being highly exaggerated and never replicated.
- “We might marry the large number of nonsignificant and unfavorable findings into a different picture of the Perry Project's outcomes. We might argue that preschool training resulted in no differences in school motivation or school potential at the time of school entry, no lasting changes in IQ or achievement test performance. . . . There were no differences in their average grades as compared to former control-group children, in their personal satisfaction with their school performance or in their self-esteem. Their parents were no more likely to talk with teachers about schoolwork or to attend school activities and functions than control-group parents. Preschool children were more likely to have been placed in remedial education. By age 19, they were unemployed at a rate equal to that of their control-group counterparts.” - Charles Locurto, “Beyond IQ in Preschool Programs?” *Intelligence* 15 (1991): pp. 303-4 as quoted in Olsen, pp. 12-13
 - [The Perry sample] was not only nonrepresentative of children in general; there is some doubt that it was representative of even the bulk of economically disadvantaged children. . . . The Perry Project poses a number of methodological difficulties. . . . Children had to have a parent at home during the day, resulting in a significant difference between control and intervention groups on the variable of maternal employment . . . [and] assignment to experimental and control groups was not wholly random. – Ziglar, pp.30-31 as quoted in Olsen, p. 13

- “First, in more than 40 years, no other program or study has produced results as dramatic as those found for Perry. (Ron Haskins, ‘Beyond Metaphor: The Efficacy of Early Childhood Education,’ *American Psychologist* 44, no 2
 - [February 1989: 279). That suggests that there may have been unique conditions at the Perry Preschool that simply cannot be duplicated.... Second, benefits were obtained only for severely disadvantaged children at risk of "retarded intellectual functioning"; it is simply inappropriate to generalize the effects of Perry to all children... Third, Perry children may have outperformed children in the control group, but they still fared poorly compared with mainstream children. For example, nearly one-third of participating children dropped out of high school, nearly one-third of the children were arrested, and three of five participating children received welfare assistance as adults.⁶⁷ That has led many researchers to be more level-headed about the likely effects of early intervention: ‘Policymakers should not assume that the widespread enrollment of low-income children and families in early childhood programs will enable children living in poverty to perform later in school and life at the levels reached by more advantaged [mainstream] children.’ (Deanna S. Gomby et al., "Long-Term Outcomes of Early Childhood Programs: Analysis and Recommendations," in *The Future of Children* 5, no. 3 (Winter 1995): 14.)”.... Finally, Perry differed significantly from regular preschool programs or what we could expect to see in universal preschool programs. According to Zigler, ‘It is very unlikely that a preschool program mounted in the typical public school will be of the quality represented by the Perry Preschool Project.’” – Olsen, pp. 13-14.
- 7) There are harms of these programs that are not calculated in the rosy cost benefit analysis of preschool programs or at all, including infectious diseases, behavior, psychological, and development problems.
- There is no evidence that such early instruction has lasting benefits, and considerable evidence that it can do lasting harm...If we do not wake up to the potential danger of these harmful practices, we may do serious damage to a large segment of the next generation...(David Elkind, *Miseducation: Preschoolers at Risk* (New York: Knopf, 1997): 4).
 - There is a large body of evidence indicating that there is little if anything to be gained by exposing middleclass children to early education... Those who argue in favor of universal preschool education ignore evidence that indicates early schooling is inappropriate for many four-year olds and that it may even be harmful to their development. (Edward Zigler, co-founder of Head Start and director of the Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy at Yale University, *Formal Schooling for Four-Year-Olds? No* in *Early Schooling: the National Debate*, ed. Sharon L. Kagan and Edward F. Zigler (New Haven, Conn.:Yale University Press, 1987):

- “Children who experience long hours of child care over the first four years of life are more at risk for showing behavior problems, particularly aggression. Not only were these children more likely to engage in assertive, defiant, and even disobedient activities, but they were also more likely to bully, fight with, or act mean to other children.” - The NICHD Early Child Care Research Network as quoted on the Society for Research on Child Development website at <http://www.srcd.org/pp1.html>
- “For the average child, these stable, reliable, tension-relieving inner images [of parents] are not in place much before 36 or 45 months of age...In the meantime, the child will be prone to feelings of abandonment, accompanied by some degree of anxiety or even panic, when the parents are not available and the inner images he has of them cannot be summoned up...The stability and availability of the child’s inner parent images make an indispensable contribution to the child’s self-image.”- Donald Rinsley, MD as quoted in *Who Will Rock the Cradle?* (Eagle Forum Education and Legal Defense Fund, 1989), p. 46
- “Since the 1960’s a vast body of research has stressed the importance to the developing child of the physical presence and emotional accessibility of both parents. ...the loss of a parent through death, divorce, illness, or a time demanding job contributes to many forms of emotional disorder, especially the anger, the low self esteem, and the depression that accompany adolescent suicide.” – Armand Nicholi, MD, *The Harvard Guide to Psychiatry*, 3rd edition, Belknap/Harvard Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1999, p. 623
- This last quote ties in quite well to the studies showing the enormous increase in the prescription rates of antidepressants and stimulants for preschool aged children. These include the Journal of the American Medical Association study showing the prescription of psychotropic drugs, particularly Ritalin, for 2 to 4 year old children, increased 300% between 1991 and 1995. (Zito, J., et al. (2/23/00) Trends in the prescribing of psychotropic medications to preschoolers. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 283:1025-1030) A study published in January 2003 in the *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine* by the same author found a 300% increase in psychotropic drug use in children between 1987 and 1996, that 6% of ALL children in the study were on psychiatric medications, and a sharp rise in use of antipsychotic in poor children. The latter finding led the author to theorize that medications were being used as a social control tool in low-income populations. (Zito, J., et al, (1/13/03) Psychotropic Practice Patterns for Youth A 10-Year Perspective. *Archives of Pediatric & Adolescent Medicine*, 157:17-25)

- Parental authority is usurped and the psychological latency period is invaded when controversial topics which are in the documents referenced by the State of Minnesota in the Anti-Bias curriculum, such as gender identity, homosexuality, etc. and tax dollars are used to train children to become activists for what ever causes the institution thinks correct.
 - **Witchcraft:** “Kay sets up...a 'witch-healer' table, where the children can make their own potions.” (p. 9)
 - **Homosexuality:** Definition of “Homophobia: A fear and hatred of gay men and lesbians backed up by institutional policies and power that discriminate against them.” (p. 3)E
 - **Sexual Identity:** “...the purpose of these activities is to enable preschoolers to develop a clear, healthy sex identity through understanding that their being a girl or boy depends on their anatomy, not on what they like to do....“Make copies of an outline of a body as drawn by a preschooler, and in small groups, ask children to fill in all the body parts, and to show if the person is a girl or boy.” (p. 53)
 - **Activism with Young Children:** “Young children have an impressive capacity for learning how to be activists if adults provide activities that are relevant and developmentally appropriate.” (p. 77)