

National Head Start Association (NHSA)
“Research Nuggets Update”
June 1, 2009

Research Nugget #1: Chicago School Readiness Project (CSRP) Intervention Model Reduces Children’s Behavior Problems

In their recent [article](#) in the Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, C. Cybele Raver, Christine Li-Grining, Molly W. Metzger, Stephanie M. Jones, Fufua Zhai, and Bonnie Solomon report that their CSRP intervention model implemented in 35 Head Start classrooms had large statistically significant reductions in the children’s behavioral problems. In comparison to the children in the control group classrooms, children in the CSRP classrooms showed significantly fewer indications of sadness and withdrawal and exhibited large reductions in their symptoms of aggression and defiance. These findings should be of great interest to early childhood researchers and practitioners, especially teachers and teachers aides, because behavioral problems in the classroom may negatively affect a child’s school readiness.

Research Nugget #2: Health Consultations, Screenings, and Services in Head Start and non-Head Start Child Care Centers

The May/June 2009 issue of the Journal of Pediatric Health Care contains an [article](#) comparing the extent to which Head Start and non-Head Start child care centers provided health consultation and screenings. From their surveys of 2,753 child care directors in five states, the authors of this article found that children in Head Start centers were at a higher risk for dental problems and were more likely to receive health consultations and screenings than children in non-Head Start centers were. These findings highlight the importance of the health services provided by Head Start programs.

Research Nugget #3: The Impact of a Part- and Full-Day Prekindergarten Programs on Student Academic Performance

The Montgomery County Public Schools’ Office of Shared Accountability published a [report](#) which evaluated the impacts of the MCPS pre-kindergarten and Head Start programs on student performance in reading and math. The report found that students in full-day Head Start classes made significantly larger gains in reading skills in comparison to their peers in half-day Head Start classes. It also reported that certain subgroups of students in full-day Head Start classes made significantly larger increases in math skills. This report is significant because it answers the question of whether full-day Head Start provides larger educational benefits than part-day Head Start. This question is of great interest to policymakers.

Research Nugget #4: Special Issue of the NHSA Dialog: A Research-to-Practice Journal for the Early Intervention Field on Positive Behavior Supports and Interventions in Early Childhood Education

Edited by Andy Frey, the Volume 11, Number 2 [issue](#) of the NHSA Dialog: A Research-to-Practice Journal for the Early Intervention Field contains a collection of articles related to the implementation of positive behavior supports in early childhood settings. According to Frey, the positive behavior support framework has emerged as a possibly useful one to establish positive, productive, and prevention-oriented environments for children in early childhood settings. This special issue is important because it presents a framework that can assist Head Start practitioners in the provision of mental health and social emotional programming.

Research Nugget #5: A Brief Examining Relationship between Program Quality and Child Outcomes

Research questions concerning the strength of relationships between the kinds of quality of early childhood programs and child outcomes are of paramount interest to practitioners, parents, policymakers and researchers. Funded by a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services contract, a team of researchers from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Child Trends, and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services provides some answers to these questions in a recently published research-to-policy and research-to-practice [brief](#). These researchers conducted a meta-analysis of 20 early education and care projects and performed secondary analysis of data from several major studies. Among their many findings, they found that children attending higher quality early care and education programs tended to have modestly higher academic and language outcomes and exhibited more favorable social skills.

Research Nugget #6: Report of the National Early Literacy Panel, a Scientific Synthesis of Early Literacy Development and Implications for Intervention

The National Institute for Literacy published a [report](#) examining the types of programs, parenting activities, instructional approaches, and other variables correlated with early literacy skills for children through age 5 that can be used to improve the children's literacy skills and academic performance throughout their academic careers. Researchers identified six variables that represent early literacy skills and are predictive of later literacy development: alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, rapid automatic naming of letters or digits, rapid automatic naming of objects or colors, writing or writing name, and phonological memory. They also identified five skills that show moderate levels of correlation with later literacy achievement: concepts about print, print knowledge, reading readiness, oral language, and visual processing. Researchers categorized instructional practices that enhance early literacy skills into five categories: code-focused interventions, shared-reading interventions, parent and home programs, preschool and kindergarten programs, and language-enhancement interventions. Researchers conclude by arguing that many of the teaching methods are most effective in one-on-one or small groups, and that many of the instructional practices that are effective in preschool are also effective in kindergarten. Head Start practitioners can use these findings to help inform their literacy instructional practices.

Research Nugget #7: Mental Health Problems in Early Childhood Can Impair Learning and Behavior for Life

The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child at Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child released [working paper #6](#). This paper explains that a child's mental problems can impact his or her development – including the physical development of the child's brain and later cognitive, emotional and social aspects of a child's development. Researchers argue that persistent, toxic stress – frequently occurring from the impacts of levels of poverty or poor home environments – has a profound, negative impact on the development of a child's brain and later development outcomes. This working paper contends that therapeutic assistance for young children with emotional or behavioral problems can be addressed through the provision of a combination of home- and center-based services which involve family members, home visitors, early education and care providers and/or mental health professionals. This paper should be of interest to early childhood teachers and teacher aides who are seeing a rise in the number of children who present challenging behaviors in the classroom.

Research Nugget #8: Promoting Academic and Social-Emotional School Readiness: The Head Start REDI Program

In their November/December 2008 [article](#) in Volume 79, Number 6 issue of Child Development, Karen L. Bierman, Celene E. Domitrovich, Robert L. Nix, Scott D. Gest, Janet A. Welsh, Mark T. Greenberg, Clancy Blair, Keith E Nelson and Sukhdeep Gill randomly assigned 44 Head Start classrooms to either “usual practice” conditions or enriched intervention conditions. The enriched intervention is the Head Start REDI – Research-based, Developmentally Informed intervention, and it is focused on the promotion of specific school-readiness competencies in social-emotional development and cognitive development. The researchers found that children in the enriched classrooms showed significantly greater progress on measures related to cognitive and social development than the students in the “usual practice” classrooms. From policy and programmatic perspectives, these findings are of great consequence because they indicate that Head Start’s impacts on child cognitive and social-emotional development can be increased through the incorporation of research-based teaching practices into existing high quality curricula.

Research Nugget #9: The Cost of Doing Nothing: The Economic Impact of Recession-Induced Child Poverty

First Focus published [Turning Point: The Long Term Effects of Recession-Induced Child Poverty](#). From their analysis of national data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, First Focus researchers found in this study that children who only experienced recession-induced poverty are more likely to experience long-term unfavorable effects on their educational attainment, work status, and health outcomes than similar children who did not fall into poverty during a recession. The results of this study suggest that policymakers need to provide a stronger safety net for children and their families to prevent them from falling into poverty.

Research Nugget #10: The Serious Need for Play.

Melinda Wenner discusses the crucial role of free play in a February 2009 [article](#) in the Scientific American. Wenner discusses the relationship of free play in the healthy development of a child – and its impact on social, emotional and cognitive aspects of a child’s development. She concludes that play with peers helps children to develop more effective social skills, effective problem solving skills, better language skills and the ability to cope or resolve unpredictable social situations. For parents, educators, and policymakers, her conclusion provides evidence that having young children engage solely in structured school and after-school activities would be a mistake and could limit a child’s long-term development.

Research Nugget #11: Child Well-Being Index 2009 and Special Focus Report Released

The Foundation for Child Development published its annual Child Well-Being Index, a comprehensive measure of how children are doing in the United States. This [index](#) showed that children’s quality of life has oscillated between 2002 and 2008 but has been declining since 2008. The [special focus report](#) found that the current recession will erase progress made by children in the area of economic well-being since 1975.