

“How Young Children Feel Is as Important as How They Think”

Action Alliance for Children

United Way of the Bay Area

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Executive Summary

California is making exciting progress toward the goal of universally available, quality early childhood development programs. At the same time, public and political pressures to raise academic achievement threaten to overshadow the central message of brain development research: that young children's social and emotional development, based on supportive, responsive relationships, is key to cognitive growth. On March 11, 2005, Action Alliance for Children brought together 48 experts in the fields of early childhood education, elementary education, mental health, and public policy to strategize ways to get messages about young children's social and emotional development out to various audiences.

Prior to the session, they were surveyed regarding (1) whether they are concerned about the lack of attention to early social and emotional development and (2) if so, what should specific groups do. The answer to the first questions was uniformly "Yes, there is real cause for concern." Respondents also had very concrete ideas about what specific groups—including early childhood educators and their trainers, parents, policy makers, schools and school districts, other audiences such as mental health and social service professions, and all groups across disciplines—could do.

A brief review of existing literature yielded the following conclusions:

- Experiences shape the brain.
- Relationships matter.
- Quality early care and education helps.
- Behavior affects school success.

Following small-group breakout sessions and a large-group discussion, participants agreed that four strategies would be key to increasing understanding of the importance of social/emotional development:

Strategy 1: Partnerships Across Education Levels

Development of partnerships between the early education and K-12 systems, linked to teacher training programs, that would emphasize social/emotional development.

Strategy 2: Media/Social Marketing

A comprehensive media/social marketing campaign, including a toolkit that advocates can use to spread the word, that reaches all levels, from parents and grassroots service providers to top-rung policy makers.

Strategy 3: Mental Health Funding

Financial support for early childhood mental health care and specifically inclusion of children's services in county plans for spending funds made available through Prop. 63.

Strategy 4: Combine Resources

Connections built between people and organizations who are committed to working for early childhood programs that foster social/emotional development—these in turn could work through their own professional organizations to increase understanding of this issue.

These top four strategies were developed after discussing a range of possible strategies. All were deemed important; however, the top four were those determined to be the most critical. The original list, categorized by target audience, is as follows:

Strategies for Parents

- In place of the pressure and overly “academic” messages parents are hearing, based on misinterpretations of brain development research, parents need access to understanding that young children learn through play and relationships.
- Marketing and public awareness campaigns should help educate parents about social/emotional development.
- Parents should have safe places to learn, speak, share, and get support.
- Parents should be encouraged to play a strong role in their children’s early learning environments.
- Outstanding pre-literacy programs should be replicated.
- Parents should have access to mental health professionals.
- Health care providers should play a greater role in parent education.

Strategies for Early Care Providers

- Training of early childhood educators should focus on the importance of relationships.
- Child care programs should support families better.
- Kindergarten standards should include social/emotional development expectations and how they relate to other development.

Strategies for Schools/School Districts

- Teachers and administrators need to have a better understanding of the role of social/emotional development.
- Teacher training should put more emphasis on social/emotional development.
- Promotion of social/emotional development should begin in preschool and continue beyond early childhood education.
- The K-12 system should work with pre-K/early childhood education programs as partners.
- Leadership among educators and parents will play a role in promoting social/emotional development.

Strategies for Health/Mental Health/Social Services

- People in all professions that work with children in a local area should know about/refer to each other.
- The state should increase the resources available for mental health care for young children.
- The mental health care system should expand access for young children by changing some of the criteria to enter the system.

- An understanding of early childhood social/emotional development should be integrated into training for all fields that work with children.
- All programs that work with young children should promote positive relationships with and provide better support for parents.
- Mental health care providers should make sure that services are appropriate for the populations served.

Strategies for Public Opinion and Policy Makers

- Plan and implement a broad-based, long-term social marketing campaign.

Strategies for Interdisciplinary/Other Groups

- All groups at the state and local level—including the California Department of Education, county offices of education, First 5 programs, and higher education—need to be talking with one another to find ways to provide support for the social/emotional development of young children.
- The business community needs to get more involved in recognizing that early childhood social/emotional development NOW will help develop the types of employees they want in the future.
- The child welfare system should continue promising first steps to put more emphasis on and devote more resources to prevention of child abuse.
- Law enforcement leaders need to play strong roles in advocacy for early childhood development, such as the efforts of Fight Crime - Invest in Kids.
- Don't forget children!

Action Alliance for Children exists to inform, educate, and inspire a statewide constituency of people who work with and on behalf of children by providing the most reliable information on current issues, trends, and public policies that affect children and families. AAC is a resource for policy makers, children's service providers and advocates, and the media. In addition, AAC facilitates dialogue among diverse community groups (child care workers, educators, parents, human service providers, advocates, media, policy makers).

Introduction

California is making exciting progress toward the goal of universally available, quality early childhood development programs. At the same time, public and political pressures to raise academic achievement sometimes seem to be overshadowing the central message of brain development research: that young children's social and emotional development, based on supportive, responsive relationships, is key to cognitive growth. Although many have heard this basic idea, fewer understand its implications for programs and policy.

On March 11, 2005, 48 experts in the fields of early childhood education, elementary education, mental health, and public policy convened to strategize ways to get messages about young children's social and emotional development—and examples of best practices—out to the people who need to know: preschool planners, school district decision-makers, policy makers, preschool classroom teachers, parents, and the general public. The event was hosted and co-sponsored by the United Way of the Bay Area.

Prior to the session, participants were surveyed regarding (1) whether they are concerned about the lack of attention to early social and emotional development and (2) if so, what should specific groups do. The answer to the first question was uniformly "Yes, there is real cause for concern." Respondents also had very concrete ideas about what specific groups—including early childhood educators and their trainers, parents, policy makers, schools and school districts, other audiences such as mental health and social service professions, and all groups across disciplines—could do.

The session on March 11 was structured as follows: Following a keynote talk by child development expert and consultant Wendy Wayne, participants broke into groups to concentrate on five audiences: schools and school districts, parents, public opinion and policy makers, health/mental/social services professionals, and early care providers. Each of the five groups was asked to identify goals, obstacles, and strategies. Then the groups came back together to identify the highest priority strategies that could be pursued by them or other groups and individuals.

The following paper summarizes the key messages about the importance of social/emotional development in existing research; the results of interviews conducted with participants; and the outcomes of the discussion on March 11, including the goals, obstacles, and strategies identified in the session. At the end is a section on resources that can be used to learn more about and educate others on social-emotional development, including a number of best-practices models and research reports.

I. Research shows...social and emotional skills matter.

"How young children feel is as important as how they think, and how they are treated is as important as what they are taught." *Jack Shonkoff, co-editor, Neurons to Neighborhoods*

"Young children's emotional adjustment matters. Children who are emotionally well-adjusted have a significantly greater chance of early school success, while children who experience serious emotional difficulty face grave risks of early school difficulty." *C. Cybele Raver**

*See Resources

It's no secret that children need supportive relationships with caring adults to thrive. Recent research shows that:

- A child's early experiences shape brain development—and those early supportive relationships are key.
- Many children enter kindergarten with emotional or behavioral problems. The rate is almost three times as high for children in low-income communities.

- High-quality programs are effective in helping parents, early education providers, and K-12 teachers nurture healthy social/emotional development.

What research tells us:

Experiences shape the brain.

- Most of the development of the human brain happens after birth—and a child's experiences actually affect the structure of the brain as it develops.
- Emotional development is built into the structure of the brain along with cognitive development (thinking and learning). And they are related—development of one affects the development of the other.
- Nurturing environments promote healthy brain development.

Relationships matter.

- Close, nurturing bonds with parents help children learn social and emotional skills—trust and compassion, self-confidence, and self-control.
- Social/emotional development from birth to age three forms the base for future learning.

The Impact of Experiences

"Emotional development is actually built into the architecture of young children's brains in response to their individual personal experiences and . . . environments. . . . In fact, emotion is . . . 'wired' into multiple regions of the central nervous system. . . . [As] young children develop, their early emotional experiences literally become embedded in the architecture of their brains." *National Scientific Council on the Developing Child**

[There is] "emerging . . . evidence that emotional development and academic learning are far more closely intertwined in the early years than has been previously understood." *Jane Knitzer**

* See "Resources"

- Stresses such as poverty, low educational level, and parental depression make it harder for parents to provide the warm, responsive care that helps children thrive.
- High-quality parent support and education programs including Early Head Start, Parents as Teachers, Healthy Start, and home visiting programs like the Nurse-Family Partnership are effective in helping parents provide good environments for their children. Studies of these and other programs show improvements in children’s emotional health and behavior.

The Role of Relationships

“For children from birth to three years of age, the development of healthy social/emotional skills is the foundation that supports their emerging literacy and numeracy skills. . . . These skills develop within the context of a close, nurturing bond with a primary caregiver.” *Zero to Three**

“Except when there are issues of safety, in general, the best way to help young children is to help their primary caregivers’ ability to meet the children’s emotional and other needs. This requires a respectful partnership with families, even the most troubled families, as well as a willingness to address the concrete realities that families face (e.g. a difficult transition to work, parental ill health, or housing problems).” *Jane Knitzer**

“Research points to the protective impact of warm, supportive teachers on young children’s success in transitioning to school.” *Jane Knitzer**

“ Children with emotional difficulties are likely to ‘lose out’ academically in a number of ways. First, disruptive children are tough to teach: As early as preschool, teachers provide disruptive children with less positive feedback, so that disruptive children spend less time on task and receive less instruction . . . Second, emotionally negative, angry children may lose opportunities to learn from their classmates . . . Third, children who are disliked by teachers and classmates grow to like school less . . . and avoid school more often” *C. Cybele Raver**

* See “Resources”

Early care and education helps.

- Warm, responsive early care and education providers promote positive social/emotional development and improve children’s ability to learn.
- Teachers’ respect for children’s culture strengthens ties with families, makes children feel supported—and may help them learn more.
- Children’s behavior and emotional wellbeing improves when teachers have access to:
 - Training, such as the Head Start “Incredible Years” training on emotional and behavioral issues for teachers and parents, which cuts behavior problems by almost a third
 - Mental health consultation—when teachers have access to mental health consultants, only half as many children are expelled from preschool, according to one recent study.
 - Adequate pay, which cuts turnover, promoting stable relationships.

Behavior affects school success.

- Children whose behavior is disruptive, angry, or antisocial are less able to get positive feedback and instruction, do worse in school, and attend less.
- 16 to 30 percent of children entering kindergarten have emotional or behavioral problems that pose ongoing problems to teachers.
- Children's behavior improves when teachers have access to:
 - Training on social/emotional development
 - Curricula for teaching social skills, such as Second Step and Resolving Conflicts Creatively.

According to the National Center for Children in Poverty, young children are more likely to succeed in the transition to school if they can:

- Accurately identify emotions in themselves and others. (Children who cannot do this persistently misinterpret social situations and routinely perceive the motivations of others as hostile.)
- Relate to teachers and peers in positive ways. (Children who lack what are often called 'prosocial skills' are more likely to have few friends and negative relationships with teachers.)
- Manage feelings of anger, frustration, and distress when faced with emotionally charged situations (e.g., another child takes a favorite toy).
- Enjoy academic learning and approach it enthusiastically.
- Work attentively, independently, and cooperatively in a structured classroom environment.

(Sources: California Tomorrow, California Healthy Start, Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, Kauffman Early Education Exchange, National Center for Children in Poverty, National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, Neurons to Neighborhoods, RAND, Cybele Raver, Betty Rintoul, Zero to Three, Yale University Child Study Center)

II. Goals

The 48 experts who convened on March 11 first brainstormed and then refined the following broad goals for social/emotional development among young children—these are the ideals toward which participants should be working:

- There is widespread understanding of the importance of social/emotional development for social adjustment and cognitive development (academic achievement).
- This understanding is especially reflected in the systems of care and education serving children of all ages (infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school-age). Social/emotional competence is incorporated into curriculum and standards as an important objective at all levels of education; teachers have instruction and support in teaching social/emotional skills. Preschools, schools, and teachers understand classroom management as education in social/emotional skills and understand the importance of relationship-based work with kids.
- Parents feel their job is valued, respected, honored, and they feel welcome—a sense of belonging—in their children’s care and education systems. They understand the importance of relating well to their children and spend time talking, reading, and playing with them, and they focus on creating nurturing relationships in addition to building cognitive skills. Parents also have access to resources and services that support their own wellness, leading to a reduction in maternal depression, an increase in parent resiliency, a decrease in the number of referrals to social services, and increased engagement.
- More children are socially and emotionally ready for school.

III. Obstacles

Despite almost universal agreement that social/emotional development is a critical aspect of early learning, session participants acknowledged that a number of obstacles prevent this aspect from receiving the amount of attention it deserves, both in elementary school and early learning environments:

Education Policy

Most education funding today focuses on literacy and math skills, and teachers are overwhelmed by the need to teach reading and math. The No Child Left Behind Act and movement for greater school accountability has led to an increased emphasis on drilling kids to succeed at high-stakes testing, not on creativity or individuality (Florida legislation would require children to be tested before kindergarten, with sanctions for programs that don’t meet certain standards of readiness). Second, kindergarten has lost its focus on social/emotional development, creating conflicts with preschool programs that *are* developmentally appropriate and *do* focus on these skills. In the context of the emphasis on performance in narrowly defined academic skills, many children with identified behavior and social/emotional needs are not given the attention they need.

Education Philosophy

Early care and education programs are often based on a body of theory about child development, while the K-12 system, including the primary grades, tends to be guided by theories about acquisition of cognitive knowledge. This difference in basic orientation can create conflicts.

In addition, many participants in our strategy session felt that the messages from brain development research have been perverted and manipulated. There were two very strong messages: (1) cognitive development must be based on a child's strong foundation of social/emotional development, and (2) there is a window of opportunity for maximum impact on children's development. In public reporting and discussion about brain research, the message about the social/emotional foundation seems to have fallen off the radar screen, while the message about this very little window of time was not only emphasized, but exaggerated and distorted.

Current policies aimed at improving school achievement reflect a deficit-based model as opposed to a strength-based model of perspective and action ("fix-the-kids" vs. "fix-the-environment"). Social/emotional development is often seen as an "add-on." As such, it is often perceived as too time-consuming when schools are anxious to prepare children to do well on standardized tests.

The lack of emphasis on social/emotional development and the pressure for demonstrated academic skills has led to an emphasis on agency, pride, and competition in the K-12 system. Especially in this context, people and programs that work with young children and their families need to emphasize the development of prosocial emotions like empathy, gratitude, and reverence.

Parental and Public Perception

One unfortunate outcome of publicity about early brain research has been that many parents feel intimidated and insecure about their own abilities to nurture their children. This leaves them vulnerable to any demands by educational and other authorities and to the lures of producers of "educational" toys, programs, etc. A more elite group of parents has responded to publicity about brain research by raising the bar for what they expect their children to be able to do at each age—to make sure their kids are high achievers. The result is that, in preschools, expectations have increased dramatically, instead of closing the gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged.

Too few parents and educators understand that kids are learning pre-academic ideas—counting, measuring, etc.—just by playing. For example, when a child rolls a ball to another child, he is learning that this ball rolls differently from one that is bigger or smaller.

Early Childhood Education Practice

While participants in the strategy session were enthusiastic about the potential of universal preschool programs, they worried that an emphasis on a part-day program the year before kindergarten might have the unintended consequence of drawing attention and resources away from efforts to improve existing child care programs and from support for infant/toddler development. Participants also expressed concern about the possibility that new preschool programs might continue the K-12 system's emphasis on academic skills and

Obstacles cited by the session participants:

"[Society is] not interested in the whole child. We want someone who will fit in perfectly, with academic success and monetary success. That's what it's all about."

"Not everyone is Einstein—we have Picassos and Beethovens and the guy who will fix your car."

"As a society we have forgotten the value of what a childhood is."

"When I show up at school as an educator, people listen. When I show up as a parent, I am ignored until I switch gears and become an educator. Unfair."

"Preschool-for-all efforts need to be driven by and grounded in child development, rather than starting with kindergarten and working backwards."

"The whole idea [of preschool] was to narrow the gap; instead it's making it bigger."

shortchanging of social/emotional development.

Meanwhile a cluster of state policies undermine quality in early care and education: low reimbursement rates for providers who care for children with state subsidies, erosion of licensing regulations and enforcement staff, and low education requirements for licensed child care providers and teachers. In addition, popular quality-rating scales focus on the child development program environment, with too little emphasis on the way caregivers and teachers relate to children—building ongoing bonds, engaging children in appropriate language practices, and introducing activities that help children learn how to deal with feelings and communicate with adults and other children.

Finally, a current trend toward “zero-tolerance” policies for behavior problems leads to more emphasis on punitive measures and exclusion from early care and education programs as ways of coping with social/emotional challenges. A model based on existing “assets” would instead focus on increasing training and mental health screening.

Resources

As is often the case in public policy on social issues, resources—or the lack thereof—account for many of the gaps in the system. For example, even though many professionals agree that preventive action is preferable to reacting to problems, not enough money is allocated for early assessments, which could help identify and address issues before they become more challenging.

For teachers, the scarcest resource is often simply time—a result of the overriding competing interests presented by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in elementary school and the pressure to prepare children for NCLB in preschool. And even if they did have time, educators frequently do not have the knowledge or capacity to reach kids with mental health issues and their parents. Too often there is little opportunity for them to build partnerships with parents, community, mental health organizations, and other groups that could provide support.

IV. Strategies

Given these obstacles, participants agreed on the need to increase the focus on social/emotional development specifically so that it becomes part of the public understanding of early childhood development—and to increase public knowledge of the kinds of practices and programs that support social/emotional development.

The top four broad strategies identified in the March 11 session were:

Strategy 1: Training and Partnerships Across Education Levels

Development of partnerships between the early education and K-12 systems, linked to teacher training programs, that would emphasize social/emotional development.

Strategy 2: Media/Social Marketing

A comprehensive media/social marketing campaign, including a toolkit that advocates can use to spread the word, that will reach all levels, from parents and grassroots service providers to top-rung policy makers.

Strategy 3: Mental Health Funding

Financial support for early childhood mental health care and specifically inclusion of children's services in county plans for spending funds made available through Prop. 63.

Strategy 4: Combine Resources

Connections built between people and organizations who are committed to working for early childhood programs that foster social/emotional development—these in turn could work through their own professional organizations to increase understanding of this issue.

These strategies were the culmination of an intense brainstorming session and discussion and prioritizing exercise. Following are the original strategies brainstormed by the participants, organized by target audience:

Strategies for Parents

Strategies related to parents focused on how to educate and empower them so they can more effectively promote social/emotional development in their children. Two overriding themes emerged. One was that we need to put parents first: Educators and service providers sometimes make assumptions that parents don't know much about their kids; because they don't speak the language of the education system, parents are too often made to feel marginalized and powerless. On a broader scale, we need a national change in culture, so that not just parents but all of us develop greater skills in relating to children and each other.

- **In place of the pressure and overly “academic” messages parents are hearing, based on misinterpretations of brain development research, parents need access to understanding that young children learn academics through play and relationships.** Education should start right away with home visits from culturally sensitive providers after the birth of every child; pediatricians can also educate parents of newborns. Parent support groups and family resource centers should provide support and information for parents as their children grow. Caregivers and service providers working with parents should model a way of relating that makes children feel safe, protected, and listened to.
- **Marketing and public awareness campaigns should help educate parents about social/emotional development.** Messages should focus on the importance of talking with your child, of giving your child a sense of emotional safety, and of teaching kindness, consideration, compassion, and non-violent communication skills. A media campaign could also convey messages about honoring parents.
- **Parents should have safe places to learn, speak, share, and get support.** Family resource centers can provide such places and help parents connect with mentors, peer support, and cultural sharing. Service providers need training in strengths-based, culturally sensitive approaches to working with parents. Communities should have more family outreach workers and opportunities for positive parent support, such as fun family activities and parent groups.
- **Parents should be encouraged to play a strong role in their children's early learning environments.** Child care centers and preschools should clearly communicate what's expected of parents and teachers, and programs should build in time for parents and teachers to develop relationships. Early learning professionals should be trained to be responsive to parents and see working with parents as part of their job.

- **Outstanding pre-literacy programs should be replicated.** Communities can implement models for improving literacy as well as parent-child and parent-teacher relationships, such as the “Raising a Reader” program.
- **Parents should have access to mental health professionals,** without the barriers created by cost, culture, language, and stigmatizing of mental health issues.
- **Health care providers should play a greater role in parent education.** Pediatric services should be enhanced with advice nurses and child development specialists who can provide information on social/emotional development through workshops, classes, and other resources. Hospital waiting rooms and emergency rooms could play videos about social/emotional development. There should be a “Reach Out and Read” program in every pediatrician’s office, providing free books for every child six months to five years.

Strategies for Early Care Providers

- **Training of early childhood educators should focus on the importance of relationships.** Early childhood education training should include understanding of the importance of the quality of teacher-child relationships and an understanding of social/emotional development as key to what happens in the classroom. The field should incorporate these understandings in staff assessments, follow-up, coaching, planning of classroom activities, etc., and develop tools focused on teacher-child relationships to observe and assess classrooms and individuals. Trainers should develop units that model the promotion of social/emotional development in how they work with teachers and caregivers, and provide more ongoing onsite training. Any new standards and requirements should be matched by higher compensation for early childhood staff.
- **Child care programs should support families better.** Child care sites should promote connections with and among families and support and empower parents to understand and advocate for promotion of social/emotional development.
- **Kindergarten standards should include social/emotional development** expectations and explanation of how they relate to other development.

Strategies for Schools/School Districts

The strategies participants envisioned for schools and schools districts focused on educating the educators about social/emotional development, incorporating this understanding into teacher training, and creating links between the early learning and elementary education systems.

- **Teachers and administrators need to have a better understanding of the role of social/emotional development.** Educators need to understand that cognitive and social/emotional development are closely connected, and that supporting social/emotional development will, in the long run, help students succeed in accountability systems—including standardized testing. Participants suggested using conferences, in-services, and “road shows” bringing together early childhood and K-12 educators, as well as more public outreach methods such as advertising and media campaigns. A child development perspective should also be incorporated into K-12 districts’ master plans.

- **Teacher training should put more emphasis on social/emotional development.** Higher education should work collaboratively with school districts and early childhood education providers in developing and revising teacher preparation programs and train teachers to be “early identifiers” of children who may need special support. Both early learning and elementary educators should also be linked to national organizations dedicated to social/emotional learning. (See “Resources.”)
- **Promotion of social/emotional development should begin in preschool and continue beyond early childhood education.** When universal preschool is added to K-12 systems, it is important for these programs to be based on a solid understanding of holistic child development. Beyond preschool, school districts should include social/emotional development in their learning guidelines and standards for every grade level. Schools should treat behavior issues as needs for social/emotional learning. K-12 school reform movements should include increasing emphasis on social/emotional development.
- **The K-12 system should work with pre-K/early childhood education programs as partners.** Joint professional development and training, collaborative projects, and guidebooks could promote this partnership. More importantly, these two sides of the education equation should work together to establish a framework (philosophy and vision) and policies (best practices, etc.) to fully incorporate social/emotional development into pre-K and K-12 education. The two systems should develop continuity and align standards for social/emotional development.
- **Leadership among educators and parents will play a role in promoting social/emotional development.** School systems should provide more leadership development and support for school administrators and directors of early childhood programs. Parents should be seen as resources and be empowered to act as leaders.

Strategies for Health/Mental/Social Services

- **People in all professions that work with children in a local area should know about/refer to each other.** Establish multidisciplinary approaches to social/emotional development, including multidisciplinary teams in pediatric offices, family support programs, and other places that work with families and young children. Conduct cross training between mental health and child development professionals and create an ongoing dialog between mental health and other professionals.
- **The state should increase the resources available for mental health care for young children.** Advocates should get involved in the Prop. 63 process and push for mental health resources for young children. Use a federal waiver to put more child welfare money into prevention. Secure financial support for mental health consulting for everyone who works with kids: early childhood educators, family support staff, schools, police, pediatricians, etc. Encourage child advocacy groups to put more emphasis on social/emotional development.
- **The mental health care system should expand access for young children by changing some of the criteria to enter the system.** Reverse the trend of services closing, which forces service providers to use higher and higher criteria for accessing services, so that problems have to be severe before they can get help. Change Medi-Cal eligibility criteria so young children can get treatment without a standard mental illness diagnosis, and use more appropriate diagnostic criteria for young children.
- **Early childhood social/emotional development should be integrated into training for all fields that work with children,** and these training programs should emphasize hands-on work.

There should be common standards and a statewide system for early childhood mental health professionals. Everyone who works with children should have access to support and reflective supervision as well as onsite, ongoing mental health consultation. In education for all fields that work with children, as well as education for parents, encourage awareness of self—your own role and emotions.

- **Promote positive relationships with and provide better support for parents.** Programs should promote a balanced view of parents' effects on kids—not blaming parents for everything!—and the role of temperament. Support services should make parents feel safe so they can overcome any fear of revealing problems. Families should receive the support they need to enable them to support their kids: paid leave, adequate income, and services for substance abuse, (parental) mental illness, and domestic violence. A 211 system and networks should exist to give parents a place to go if they have a concern about their kids.
- **Make sure that mental health services are appropriate for the populations served.** Develop more user-friendly and culturally appropriate language for early childhood mental health—such as using terms like “emotional wellness”—and talk about what parents and other caregivers are doing right. Recruit more people of diverse backgrounds into early childhood mental health fields with culturally appropriate recruitment materials.

Strategies for Public Opinion and Policy Makers

The public and policy makers are initially audiences for the purposes of this project, but with appropriate outreach should become supporters of the movement to make social/emotional development in young children a priority. The primary objective of efforts to reach these audiences is to effect a “cognitive shift” among politicians to understand the importance of social/emotional learning. Ideally, we can educate legislators so that they know and care enough about social/emotional development of young children that they will advocate for more funding for quality child care, including for training of workers, and paid family leave that matches the needs of parents. One of the most important steps lawmakers can take is reauthorization of Head Start and Early Head Start and preschool special education, making sure those words “social/emotional” stay in the federal legislation.

Participants in the strategy session envisioned a broad-based, long-term social marketing campaign.

Audiences

- Business (Social/emotional development is exactly the foundation needed to be successful in life and business—to understand and cope with emotions, to establish and maintain relationships, etc.)
- Policy makers, including elected and appointed officials as well as employees, at the local, state and national levels
- Civic leaders, unions, and lobbyists
- Media and the entertainment industry

Messages

The messages of the media campaign should be clear and focus on the positive:

- Social/emotional development prepares kids for life, not just school—it is the foundation for both.
- Celebrate what's going well: Focus on interventions that work.

- Educate about what we should and shouldn't do.
- Investing in social/emotional development now is valuable and can prevent problems later in the education system.
- Need to emphasize the importance of respecting diverse cultures and the role of culture in social/emotional development.

Strategies for Interdisciplinary/Other Groups

- **All groups at the state and local level—including the California Department of Education, county offices of education, First 5 programs, and higher education—need to be talking with one another to find ways to provide support for the social/emotional development of young children.** All players need to be aware of and acknowledge the role of social/emotional development in school readiness and focus on developing quality standards in these areas. We need to integrate a holistic understanding of child development—of people in general, for that matter—that recognizes social/emotional health as critical to healthy and successful educational experiences at any level.
- **The business community needs to get more involved in recognizing that early childhood social/emotional development NOW will help develop the types of employees they want in the future.** (Recent ads for preschool featured the Boeing chairman talking about what kinds of employees they want: people who are smart, cooperative, and inquisitive.)
- **The child welfare system should continue promising first steps to put more emphasis on and devote more resources to prevention of child abuse.**
- **Law enforcement leaders need to play strong roles in advocacy for early childhood development, such as the efforts of Fight Crime - Invest in Kids.** At the same time, participants were concerned that recent TV ads featuring police officers talking about how kids become criminals may be too negative and offensive to some.
- **And don't forget children!** They need to be part of the dialogue, too!

V. Next Steps: Yours

Participants in the March 11 strategy session came from a wide range of organizations and professions. Rather than attempting to start yet another organization, they hope that their discussion will serve as a rallying cry encouraging people to push for policies and practices that support the positive social/emotional development of young children, wherever they are.

What can you do?

- **Learn** about the central role of social/emotional development in early childhood and about the kinds of programs and practices that promote it
- **Spread this message** to co-workers, parents, community members, and policy makers.
- **Ask yourself** whether you could help bring about any of the recommendations in this report.

- **Connect with others** who share an understanding of the importance of social/emotional development.
- **Get involved** in current California discussions affecting young children—county-level planning for spending mental health funds created by Prop. 63, county efforts to develop Preschool for All programs, the statewide Preschool for All initiative campaign, ongoing First 5 planning in counties and statewide—bringing to all of these discussions a perspective on the importance of supporting young children’s social/emotional development.
- **Act** in whatever way you can to help build communities, schools, social and health care institutions, and state and national policies that give our youngest children the kind of support and learning they need to thrive.

See “Resources” for ways to get started.

Appendix: Resources

The following resources were suggested by participants in the strategy session; this list is not comprehensive.

Professional Development and Technical Assistance

▪ California Association for the Education of Young Children	www.caeyc.org
▪ Community college child development programs	Check your local community college.
▪ WestEd	www.wested.org
○ Program for Infant/Toddler Caregivers	www.pitc.org
○ Project Relationship, training for child care teachers about handling behavior problems	www.wested.org/cs/we/view/pg/16 916-492-4011
▪ Los Angeles Child Guidance Clinic's Statewide Early Intervention Mental Health Services Conference	www.lachild.org
▪ Orange County Universal Readiness Assessment that integrates social/emotional development	www.f5ac.org/item.asp?id=2658
▪ Sonoma State Desired Results Curriculum	www.sonoma.edu/cihs/desiredresults/training
▪ The Northeast Foundation for Children Responsive Classroom program (publications and videotapes)	www.responsiveclassroom.org
▪ Zero to Three	www.zerotothree.org
▪ Child Care Health Program statewide hotline	800-333-3212, www.ucsfchildcarehealth.org
▪ Center on Social and Emotional Foundations for Learning	www.csefel.uiuc.edu/modules.html
▪ Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning	www.casel.org/projects_products/earlychildhood.php
▪ Center for the Child Care Workforce	www.ccw.org
▪ National Association for the Education of Young Children	www.naeyc.org
▪ National Association of Family Child Care Providers	www.nafcc.org
▪ Child Care Health Program statewide hotline	800-333-3212 www.ucsfchildcarehealth.org
▪ Center on Social and Emotional Foundations for Learning	www.csefel.uiuc.edu/modules.html
▪ Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning	www.casel.org/projects_products/earlychildhood.php

Model Programs That Emphasize or Promote Social-Emotional Learning in Young Children

▪ community college child development programs	Your local community college
▪ Jewish Family and Children's Services	www.jfcs.org
○ Early Childhood Mental Health Project	www.jfcs.org/Services/Children,_Youth,_and_Families/Parents_Place/Early_Childhood_Mental_Health_Consultation/default.asp
○ Parents' Place	www.jfcs.org/Services/Children,_Youth,_and_Families/Parents_Place/default.asp
▪ Infant/Parent Program and Day Care Consultants, University of California at San Francisco,	Kadija Johnson 415-206-5082
▪ First 5 California and county First 5 programs, the First 5 School Readiness Initiative and Preschool for All programs	www.cafc.ca.gov
▪ Foster Kinship Care Education Program—at every community college	Check your local community college.
▪ Early Childhood Mental Health Department, Children Hospital, Oakland	510-428-3407 mheffron@mail.cho.org
▪ New course on social-emotional development at Chabot and Las Positas community colleges	Edna Rodriggs 510-723-7431
▪ Reflective Parenting (works with at-risk parents in Southern California)	www.wila.org/wila_pages/wila_reflective.html
▪ Promising Practices Network on Children, Families, and Communities, <i>Syracuse Family Development Research Program</i>	www.promisingpractices.net/program.asp?programid=133

Educational Materials

▪ Zero to Three	www.zerotothree.org
○ Zero to Three journal	www.zerotothree.org/ztt_journal.html
○ Tips for Practitioners, especially:	www.zerotothree.org/cpe
▪ July 2002: What Does School Readiness Mean to Programs Serving Infants, Toddlers and Families?	
▪ May 2002 tip: Discussing Infant Mental Health and School Readiness with Funders and Policymakers	
○ <i>Healthy Minds</i>	www.zerotothree.org/search/index2.cfm
○ “Getting Ready for School Starts at Birth” English/Spanish parent education booklet	www.zerotothree.org/schoolreadiness/main.html
○ <i>Discussing Infant Mental Health and School Readiness with Funders and Policymakers</i> and <i>Promoting Mental Health in Child Care</i>	Zero to Three, 800-899-4301, www.zerotothree.org/prof_az.html#I
○ BrainWonders for parents	www.zerotothree.org/brainwonders/parents.html
▪ “Born Learning,” United Way public education campaign on early childhood development	www.bornlearning.org
▪ <i>How You Are is as Important as What You Do</i> , Jeree Pawl and Maria St. John	Available from Zero to Three, 800-899-4301
▪ <i>Emotional Connections: How Relationships Guide Early Learning</i> Perry McArthur Butterfield and Carole Martin	Available from Zero to Three, 800-899-4301; summary online at www.zerotothree.org/bookstore
▪ <i>Encouraging Healthy Social and Emotional Development</i> , Sarah Landy	Available from Brookes Publishing, 800-638-3775; summary online at www.brookespublishing.com/store/books/landy-577x/index.htm
▪ <i>Building Positive Teacher-Child Relationships</i> , Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning, What Works Issue Brief 12	www.csefel.uiuc.edu/whatworks.html
▪ “No Emotion Left Behind,” New York Times oped, August 16, 2005, Timothy P. Shriver and Roger P. Weissberg	www.nytimes.com (editorial may be purchased)
▪ <i>ReadyWeb</i> , a resource on school readiness for parents and educators, Early Childhood and Parenting (ECAP) Collaboration, College of Education, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	readyweb.crc.uiuc.edu
▪ <i>15+ Make Time to Listen . . . Take Time to Talk</i> , parent education campaign by the Substance	www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/15plus

Advocacy/Policy

▪ Preschool California	www.preschoolcalifornia.org
▪ Senate Bill 1703: State legislation to promote inclusion of children with special needs with social/emotional emphasis	www.leginfo.ca.gov/bilinfo.html Search in 2005-06 session for SB 1703.
▪ Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, “Public Safety Can’t Wait: California’s Preschool Shortage, A Missed Opportunity for Crime Prevention,” February 2005	www.fightcrime.org
▪ Jhumpa Bhattacharya, Laurie Olsen and Amy Scharf, “Ready or Not? A California Tomorrow Think Piece on School Readiness and Immigrant Communities,” 2005	www.californiatomorrow.org/publications/cts.pl?pub_id=35
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