

# IDEA Part C Early Intervention:

## Twenty Years of Making a Difference for Young Children and their Families

### WHAT IS IDEA PART C?

Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was established in 1986 by Congress to ensure that infants and toddlers (from birth to age three) at risk for or with a developmental delay and their families receive appropriate early intervention services.

Congress established this program in recognition of "an urgent and substantial need to:

- Enhance the development of infants and toddlers with disabilities;
- Reduce educational costs by minimizing the need for special education through early intervention;
- Minimize the likeli-

hood of institutionalization, and maximize independent living; and

- Enhance the capacity of families to meet their child's needs."

The Office of Special Education Programs within the Department of Education is responsible for administering this in-

teragency system at the state level.

Every state and territory participates in this unique family-centered, community-based, comprehensive, coordinated interagency system that ensures the availability of early intervention services for eligible children and their families.



### SCHOOL READINESS

Babies are born "wired to learn". The first three years of life are a period of extraordinary growth in all domains of development – physical, intellectual, social, emotional and linguistic growth. The learning that takes place in the early years lays the emotional foundation for future school

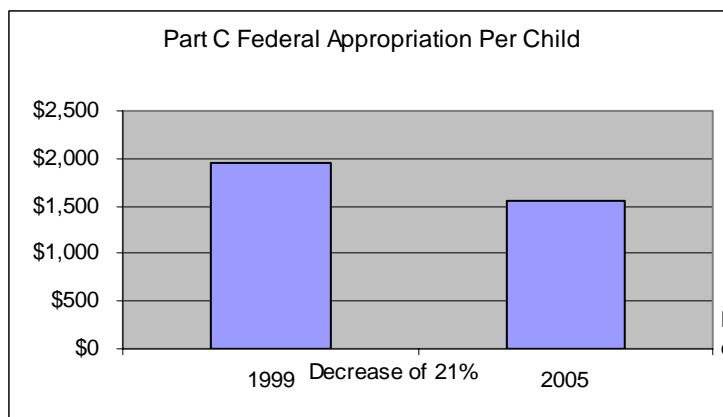
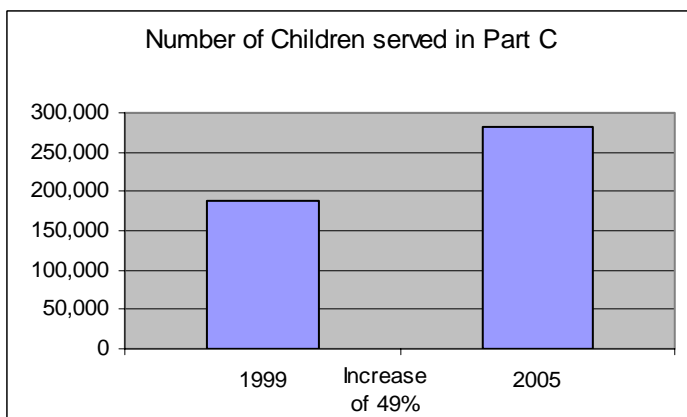
and life success. <sup>1</sup>

From birth until about five years old a child undergoes tremendous growth and change. If this period includes support for growth in cognition, language, motor skills, adaptive skills and social emo-

*"The early years matter not because they establish an irreversible pattern of development, but they furnish us with either a secure or vulnerable stage on which subsequent development is built."*

*Sam Meisels, Ph.D.  
EdWeek (25:20, pp36-44)*

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## WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH TELL US?

◇ The National Research Council's report *Neurons to Neighborhoods* (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000) and RAND's analysis of early childhood interventions, *Investing in Children* (Karoly et al, 1998) indicate that high quality early intervention programs can have very positive results for those children receiving services. These results have included increases in short and long term academic achievement, reduction in grade retention rates, reductions in special education referrals and reductions in teenage pregnancies.<sup>1</sup>

◇ Economics Nobel Laureate James Heckman from the University of Chicago wrote in a recent Wall Street Journal commentary indicates earnings returns from dollars invested in early childhood are as high as 15-17%.<sup>2</sup>

◇ Well designed early childhood interventions have been found to generate a return to society ranging from \$1.80 to \$17.07 for each dollar spent on the program.<sup>3</sup>

◇ Early Intervention programs can improve the odds for vulner-

able young children but those that work are rarely simple, inexpensive or easy to implement.<sup>4</sup>

Sources:

1 – "Investing in Better Outcomes", **The Delaware Early Childhood Longitudinal Study** (2002).

2 – Ibid, p.14

3 – "Labor and Population Research Brief", **RAND Corporation**, (2005).

4 – National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2000) *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development. Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah A. Phillips, eds. Board on Children, Youth and Families, Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Edu-

cation. Washington, D.C.; National Academy Press



## CHALLENGES FACING PART C SYSTEMS

States and territories are facing significant new challenges as they continue to implement Part C of IDEA:

- 2000 census data indicates 22% of children under 5 live in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty. Research has demonstrated these neighborhoods provide more limited opportunities in terms of social interaction, positive role models, quality childcare and playgrounds.
- Many states are struggling to adequately support their state systems and are enacting measures to reduce costs, including restricting eligibility and increasing family participation fees. Over the last 10 years 20% of states have narrowed their eligibility and 75% have enacted family cost share in the form of fee systems.
- Several states have publicly and actively considered withdrawing from the Part C program.
- A recent GAO publication on the IDEA indicated that states report challenges in recruiting and retaining professionals, such as speech pathologists, to provide early intervention services.
- IDEA 2004 and the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (reauthorized 2003) requires referral of children birth to three to Part C when there is substantiated abuse or neglect or illegal substance use.
- IDEA 2004 increases the require-

ment to provide outreach and availability of services and supports to infants and toddlers and their families who are homeless.

- There has been a dramatic increase in the diagnosis of children identified with Autism Spectrum Disorder (4 to 6 per 1000) and accompanying intensive needs.

- In order to achieve significant progress in the area of early childhood, *Neurons to Neighborhoods* concludes that major investments must be made to enhance the skills and compensation of early care and education providers.

*"Our daughter has received Early Intervention Services since she was three months old. Early Intervention Services enhanced our family's capacity to meet our daughter's needs. She will be better equipped to enter into school. Our daughter continues to thrive and reach potential far beyond the expectations of Medical Professionals."*

Parent from Sioux City, Iowa

## IMPACT ON FAMILIES

- ♦ At the end of early intervention, families of infants and toddlers with disabilities generally describe themselves as competent and confident in their capacity to support the child, work with professionals and gain access to formal and informal supports.<sup>1</sup>
- ♦ The RAND Corporation's Labor and Populations Report on early childhood (2005) states that programs that focus on the entire family can help parents provide better care to their children and make it less likely that parents will maltreat their children.
- ♦ Healthy child development depends upon nurturing and dependable relationships.<sup>2</sup>
- ♦ Significant parent mental health problems (particularly maternal depression), substance abuse and family violence impose heavy developmental burdens on young children.<sup>3</sup>
- ♦ Early family environments are major predictors of both cognitive and noncognitive abilities.<sup>4</sup>

### Sources:

1- Bailey, D., Hebbler, K., Spiker, D., Scarborough, A., Malik, S., and Nelson, L. (2005) "Thirty Six Month Outcomes for Children who have Disabilities and Participated in Early Intervention". *Pediatrics*, 116(6), 1346 –1352.

2 - National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2000) *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development. Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah A. Phillips, eds. Board on Children, Youth and Families, Commission on Behavioral

and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

3 - Ibid

4 - Heckman, James, "Investing in Disadvantaged Young Children in an Economically Efficient Policy", Presentation at the Committee for Economic Development, New York, January 10, 2006.

## SCHOOL READINESS (CONTINUED)

- ♦ tional functioning, the child is more likely to succeed in school.<sup>2</sup>
- ♦ Early interventions for disadvantaged children promotes schooling, raises the quality of the workforce, enhances productivity of schools, reduces crime, teenage pregnancy and welfare dependency.<sup>3</sup>

### Sources:

<sup>1</sup> **Zero to Three**: The Zero to Three Policy Center Data Book (2003).

<sup>2</sup> Erickson, Martha Farrell and Karen Kurz-Riemer, "Infants, Toddlers and Families: A Framework for Support and Intervention", New York: The Guilford Press, 1999), p.19

<sup>3</sup> Heckman, James, "Investing in Disadvantaged Young Children in an Economically Efficient Policy", Presentation at the Committee for Economic Development, New York, January 10, 2006.



*"We are so grateful for the Birth to Three Program. I knew how to take care of Cierra's daily needs when we brought her home, but I had no idea of how to help her become more active and build up her muscle tone. She will always have Down Syndrome, but Tom and I want to give her every opportunity for advancement of her skills so she can do things to the best of her ability and this program is helping us do this."*  
Parent from Superior, WI

*"The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child points out that the "window of opportunity for development remains open for many years, but the cost of remediation grow with increasing age". Research shows us that starting early has more impact than starting late. As brain circuits are built up and stabilize over time, they become increasingly more difficult to alter. Early Intervention makes sense economically and has greater potential for closing the persistent and pernicious achievement gaps that pre-K is largely about."*

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*" Early Intervention has had a great impact on my life and the lives of my children. When he graduated from preschool, Timmy was using sentences that were eight or nine words long, just like other children his age. Over the last few years, I have seen Timmy's self-esteem and confidence grow and develop, little by little. Timmy is now included in third grade at his local school. Naomi currently attends kindergarten at our local school. Thanks to the services early, Naomi has shown a lot of improvement. Her speech and language skills have improved tremendously. She is thriving emotionally, as well as physically. In addition to providing services for my children, early intervention has helped me handle the stress, frustration, and emotional challenges of raising my unique children."*

Mom from Chester County, Pennsylvania



## The purpose and role of the IDEA Infant and Toddler Coordinators Association is:

- To promote mutual assistance, cooperation and exchange of information and ideas in the administration of the IDEA Infant and Toddler Program, and to provide support to the state coordinators;
- To provide state and national leadership to meet the developmental needs of infants and toddlers in accordance with their families' and parents' request, culture and values;
- To expand the awareness of decision-makers in the public and private sectors regarding the needs of infants and toddlers and their families;
- To develop and recommend policies and programs which will assure the development of all infants and toddlers eligible for services and their families;
- To identify and represent the interests of state infant and toddlers early intervention programs at a national level;
- To develop linkages and coalitions with related national organizations to promote state early intervention programs for infants and toddlers with, or at risk of, disabilities;
- To foster the exchange of ideas and experience among the state programs;
- To strengthen the current leadership and foster new leadership in IDEA early intervention programs; and
- To develop models, standards, and guidelines and to provide technical assistance to promote effective state early intervention programs.

*"My family has adopted three children with special needs, and the services provided by the Birth to Three program have assisted us with helping them to reach their full potential... The prospect of adding three young children with special needs to our family would have been scary to face without knowing we had the support and assistance from the staff at Birth to Three. Even though there aren't solutions to every problem we face, with their help, we explore different options, and together we celebrate success!"*

Parent from Superior, WI

