

**The Build Initiative**  
Building Early Learning Systems in the States  
A Report on the Third Year

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Child and Family Policy Center  
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# Build and Its Theories of Change: Gaining Traction and Impact in the States

Third Year Evaluation Essay  
Charles Bruner and Michelle Stover Wright  
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## Introduction

The Build Initiative was officially launched in May, 2002, when teams from four states met for a national retreat in Maryland. While many members from each state team knew each other well and even had served on committees and work groups together, this was the first time that they had convened as a specific team. The Build Initiative envisioned a more concerted and comprehensive approach to early learning systems building that brought together state and private sector leaders within states and created a learning community across states. Each team was responsible for first developing, and then implementing, an early learning system building plan. Build has been funded and led by a consortium of national and state foundations supported by a team of technical assistance providers and evaluation partners. In 2004, a fifth Build state and four learning partner states were added to the Initiative.

As an Initiative, Build has been distinct from most other early childhood initiatives in two important respects.

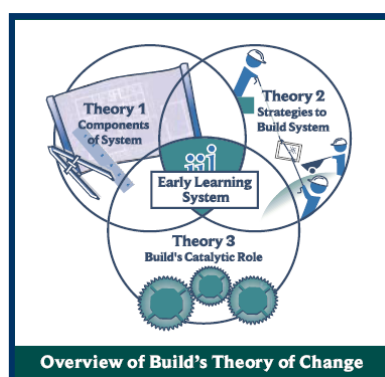
First, while they set a very broad goal of “developing an early learning system,” the Build funders did not further define and delineate specific steps for developing that system, or even precisely define the different components of that system. Build’s goal was not “universal pre-kindergarten” or “health care for all children” or replication of a model program statewide. Build Initiative planners articulated some of the features for building a system – governance, financing, comprehensive services, professional development, public education, and public will – but did not impose a specific system design for use by states.

Second, the Build Initiative invested in a core set of leaders from across the public and private sectors in each state – thoughtful and committed individuals recognized within their own spheres as effective system builders. The Initiative then provided these leaders with the incentive and opportunity to collectively plan and take strategic action. The Build Initiative did not, however, require a specific planning or governance structure for use by states or require that there be such a formal body specifically for Build. Instead, the Initiative provided technical assistance, financial support, and some structure to state planning work, leaving to the teams to determine how best to connect their work with other existing state planning and governance structures.

As the Initiative developed, work also proceeded to construct a “theory of change” by which to describe Build’s underlying assumptions and develop ways to test and measure progress. The current Build theory of change has three separate parts, each with its own set of testable assumptions (also sometimes referred to elements):

1. The structure of the early learning system that needs to be built to achieve better school readiness for children;
2. The actions that states need to take in order to construct or build that early learning system, both political and technical; and
3. The role that the Build Initiative and its funding and support play in helping states construct that system.

These different parts are displayed graphically below. This evaluation essay discusses each of the three parts of the theory of change separately.

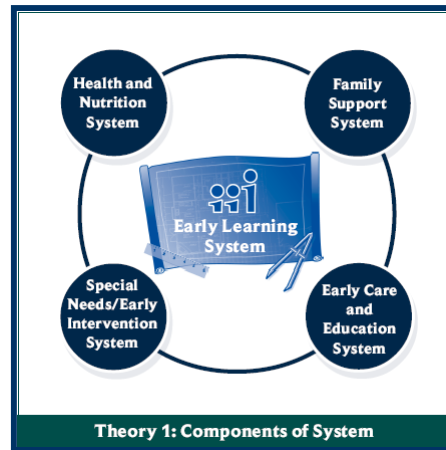


## Theory of Change One: System Building as Key to Improving School Readiness

The first theory of change is fundamental to Build itself – an *early learning system* needs to be built to improve child school readiness and educational and life success. It is based upon the following assumptions:

1. *Need for action.* Significant numbers of young (0-5) children are not being prepared for successful futures. They start school substantially behind their peers and remain behind. An early learning system, with effective and coordinated programs and policies, would improve their school readiness and success.
2. *Primary public role in taking action.* Building such an early learning system requires public effort and will not be fully developed through private actions and the marketplace. The public sector will have to finance and oversee much of that system building and maintenance, as it does for the K-12 education system.
3. *Need for a systemic focus.* Developing an early learning system, rather than simply expanding an array of program options, is key to achieving success. A system represents more than a set of independently operating programs and services. It requires an effective and seamless set of referrals and follow-ups across them. It requires standards of quality and consistency within and across different programs and services.

As Build has developed, the actual components of that system also have been spelled out and generally agreed upon by the partnering states, as shown in the graph below. In fact, the early learning system is depicted as a “system of systems”:



Included in the health and nutrition system are health insurance and access to medical care, as well as Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and other nutrition services. Included in the family support system are home visiting, family support, parenting education and other services designed to support and strengthen parental nurturing and developmental support and ensure economic security and consistency. Included in the special needs and early intervention system are specialized services – special education, mental health, child welfare, etc. – that identify and address conditions for specific children and their families that require attention for those children’s health and development. The early care and education system includes child care (center-based, family home, and family, friend, and neighbor) and pre-school.

The term *system* is defined as “a set of connected elements, forming a complex unit with some overall purpose, goal, or function that is achieved only through the actions and interactions of the elements.”<sup>1</sup>

In effect, an effective system is characterized by having:

- A defined market
- Agreed-upon and measurable objectives
- Specific products/services to meet those objectives
- Product/service standards (consistent practice/curriculum/protocol; qualified staff/personnel; professional development)
- Quality assurance and improvement (monitoring and management; research and development)
- Adequate budgets/financing/resources
- Conscious linkages/referrals to other systems, when needed.

Under these definitions, health and nutrition may represent a system that young children access and use, but measurable objectives largely do not include achieving

developmental health milestones.<sup>2</sup> Special education and early intervention, at least under Part C of IDEA, also may represent a system, but financing falls short of serving those children in the defined market.<sup>3</sup> As part of a system of systems, linkages and referrals across these two systems and with child care and family support generally are weak. Family support and early care and education – except in a few emerging instances, primarily around pre-school – do not constitute systems under any of these elements. Rather, in most states they represent an array of programs and program management elements that often “serve who they can serve,” with very limited resources and very few guidelines and structure or product and service standards.

### Evidence Supporting the Theory

There is growing evidence and recognition regarding the first two assumptions of the theory. While “school readiness” is not a sole determinant of long-term educational and life success, there is increasing consensus that it represents a very powerful one. The editors of the overview essay of the 2005 *The Future of Children* report focusing upon “Closing the Readiness Gap,” Jeanne Brooks-Gunn and Sara McClanahan, draw from the research base to conclude that:

“Up to half of the gap in achievement scores in school can be attributed to gaps already evident at the time of school entry.”<sup>4</sup>

The achievement gap has been received deserved and heightened attention from the No Child Left Behind Act and its requirements to reduce racial disparities in education. Further, this known gap cannot be explained by any innate differences in children; it must be a consequence of environmental and policy factors.

Even apart from the disturbing findings of large gaps, by income and ethnicity, in what children know and can do at the time of school entry,<sup>5</sup> there is further evidence that “average is not good enough” and that, in addition to closing the gaps, there needs to be considerable improvement in “what children know and can do” at the time of school entry generally, if America is to remain competitive on the high skills part of the world economy.

Moreover, there is strong evidence that closing the gap and raising overall readiness involves much more than providing enriched pre-school experiences or upgrading the overall quality of child care. In *The Future of Children* volume, different authors point to up to half of the “readiness gap” being related to parental consistency and nurturing and one-quarter to prenatal and other health and development services. The provision of enriched pre-school programs at best is seen as potentially reducing the readiness gap between African Americans and white non-Hispanics by 20%, and between Hispanics and white non-Hispanics by 36%.<sup>6</sup> This analysis is important, because it shows that a sole focus upon the early care and education system, while it may produce significant gains in school readiness, is only part of the needed overall solution to raising achievement and closing the gap. California Tomorrow has produced a very important complement to the *Future of Children* volume, *Getting Ready for Quality*, that also

emphasizes the need to develop a skilled and culturally diverse and culturally competent early childhood workforce, with the policy and practice changes needed to achieve that goal.<sup>7</sup> This report emphasizes the particular need for such attention in poor, immigrant, and minority communities and the role that early learning systems building can play in creating overall opportunities for educational and economic success for people in those communities.

Brain research and child development research often have been overly simplified and sometimes been misrepresented, but they show that nurturing in the earliest years (birth to two) is particularly crucial to long-term growth and well-being. Social and emotional development in the early years is at least as critical to future learning as cognitive development, and attention to vulnerable children is particularly important to setting a strong foundation for healthy growth and development.<sup>8</sup>

In short, there is strong evidence that achieving the First National Education goal, that “all children start school ready to learn,” involves multiple actions across different systems to be realized. Further, there is strong evidence that there are large gaps within each of the systems in providing effective services to those who could benefit from them, although the evidence remains mixed on the degree to which it is possible to identify vulnerable families and strengthen consistency and nurturing within them.

The last assumption – of the need to move beyond programmatic to systemic approaches – has a strong conceptual base, but there is not a great deal of evidence, pro or con, to indicate the relative importance of focusing upon linkages across systems versus building strong individual systems in the first place. The gains made through specific Initiatives such as Help Me Grow in Connecticut do suggest the importance of explicitly establishing those linkages across formal systems and even to less formal and more community-based resources.<sup>9</sup> In addition, there is a very strong evidence base that “quality matters” within all the systems, and that ensuring quality requires moving beyond a programmatic to a systemic focus.

While there remains further work to determine the relative importance of different assumptions within the first Theory of Success, there is strong evidence and research for its overall validity.

### Actions and Developments in the Build States

Actions within all of the Build states have moved toward a broader definition of the early learning system and the inclusion of health, early intervention, and family support as well as early care and education and pre-school. Collectively, the Build Initiative has generally embraced a “system of systems” formulation for an early learning system that will both increase the overall level of “school readiness” and close current gaps by race, ethnicity, and income.

Moreover, this approach has gained broader traction among many of the leaders and technical assistance providers in the early learning field, who are adapting it as a baseline framework for their own work within states.

Build state teams similarly have incorporated the broader early learning system definition into their own theories of change and logic models. While the Build states started at different places in their work and many had an initial focus almost exclusively upon the formal child care and pre-school system, all have broadened their focus to other parts of the “system of systems.” These actions will be discussed in more detail in the next section, but include strategies to expand and build upon research-based family support and home visiting programs, expand mental health and early intervention systems, link pediatric and well-child visits with an early identification strategy for addressing child developmental and behavioral concerns, and provide support for more informal care arrangements (family, friend, and neighbor care) that may or may not be compensated or part of the registered provider community. In doing this, state Build efforts have enlisted greater participation from leaders in other fields serving young children and their families – both at the state level and locally.

### Summary – The Overall Relevance of Theory of Change One

The overall “system of systems” approach to defining an early learning and school readiness continues to evolve. At the same time, it has served as a useful way to convey the complexity of the issues that need to be addressed within an early learning system that will be successful in “improving school readiness and close the gap.” In particular, this “system of systems” approach:

- Has a strong research and evidence base from a variety of fields regarding the contribution effect for each discrete system to improving school readiness
- Helps establish a framework for where system building needs to occur (e.g. that early care and education and family support investments, strategies, and programs do not yet constitute a “system;” that the health care system does not have a sufficient developmental focus to serve in an effective role in promoting child development and school readiness; and that early intervention systems frequently lack resources to meet child and family needs for their services)
- Is helping to provide a framework in the research, policy, and advocacy field that will promote more common messages across leaders in different fields and systems and a better integration of technical assistance and guidance provided to state and community activists in the field.

The “system of systems” approach embodied in Theory of Change One is still evolving, however, and there are several issues that require further exploration and development. As it is used by Build and in other states, the approach need to:

- Strengthen the research and evidence base, pro or con, on the importance of cross-system linkages to achieving overall goals (most research and evaluation has been programmatic rather than systemic in orientation);

- Examine and incorporate any additional role that community natural support systems and the culture of the community toward early learning play in achieving school readiness<sup>10</sup>; and
- Intertwine culture, language, race, and income into systemic approaches, particularly in recognition of the growing diversity of the young child population and the relative lack of diversity in the workforces of many of the systems that make up the “system of systems.”

## Theory of Change Two: Critical Activities in Systems Building

The second theory of change addresses what needs to happen, initially at the state level (but in the end throughout the state and its communities) to build that “system of systems.” This theory of change represents what, through an iterative process, has been agreed to by the Build states as the essential work to be undertaken by each state Build team. While implicit from the outset in most state team activities, the formulation into an explicit theory occurred toward the end of the second year of the Initiative. With the exception of the eighth assumption, there is not a particular hierarchy or sequencing of the different assumptions. In fact, Build state actions in most states are simultaneously addressing different assumptions and are continually going back to review whether there is a particular need to add an additional focus of attention in a particular area. These assumptions have been further categorized under three large themes, shown in the Chart below:

**State Systems Building Theory of Change Assumptions**

Clarity and Ownership

1. *Recognition of need.* There must be a strong recognition of the gaps in the current system (or lack of a system) and the consequences of those gaps on child outcomes in order to produce action and change.
2. *Shared early learning vision.* A broad shared overall vision for the early learning system is needed.
3. *Political leadership.* Leadership is needed at multiple levels, including the Governor’s support and legislative alignment.

Actions and Infrastructure

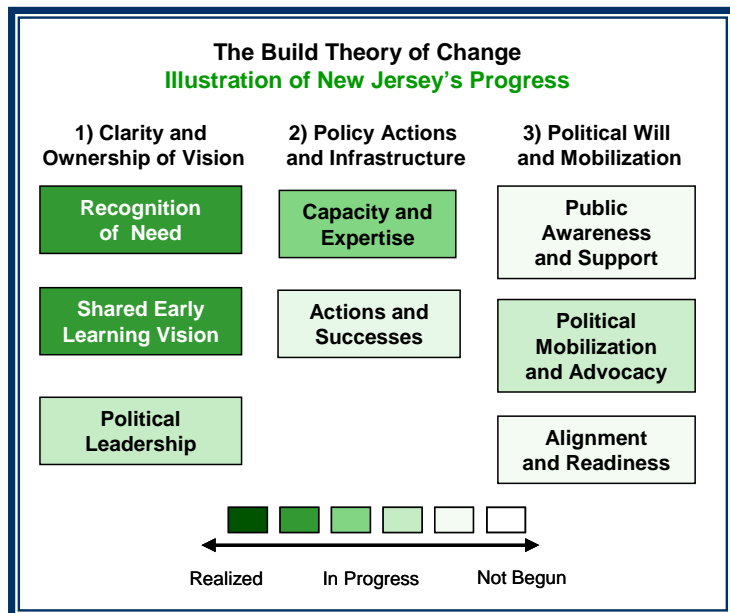
4. *Capacity and expertise.* Capacity and expertise must be developed to effectively implement system building activities and to assure credibility and avoid mistakes.
5. *Actions and successes.* Actions can be taken on elements of systems building as opportunities arise, and early wins are important for maintaining momentum.

Political Will

6. *Public awareness and support.* Public awareness and support are needed both to initiate and sustain system building.
7. *Political mobilization and advocacy.* Gaining sufficient political support extends beyond public awareness and requires political advocacy and mobilization from outside government.
8. *Alignment and readiness.* Sufficient actions and steps forward on the prior seven assumptions/elements will lead to a “tipping point” and nexus for the major leaps forward to build the system.

This theory also has been graphically depicted:

As described in the theory, these represent assumptions that are testable on at least two counts: (1) can Build team actions actually produce change in the area, and (2) do any changes produced have desired impacts in terms of moving toward that early learning system. The eighth assumption, of course, is that the “whole is more than the sum of its parts” and the strongest strides in systems building will occur only through the combined actions and effects from the other seven assumptions – even to the point of “non-incremental” change.



### Evidence Supporting the Theory

The second theory of change clearly can be applied to early learning systems building, but is clearly generic to systems building efforts generally, whether in building a higher education system, a public transportation system, or an environmental protection system.

There is considerable evidence supporting the first seven of these assumptions as interconnected and interdependent elements required both to build and sustain public systems. The testability of these assumptions, as they are applied to early learning systems building, really relates to whether Build team actions (or other actions in the state) can, in fact, produce changes in that area.

There also is some evidence for the last assumption, most recently popularly described in Malcolm Gladwell's *The Tipping Point*<sup>11</sup> but also evident in other research related to the critical mass of activities needed to produce change. While it is clear that most policy changes in American politics are incremental, the literature of the diffusion of innovation,<sup>12</sup> the structure of scientific paradigm shifts,<sup>13</sup> and the description of states as laboratories of democracy<sup>14</sup> also suggest there is a time when there is a significant thrust or moment that moves a practice, policy, or program from being viewed as an interesting venture outside the mainstream to becoming an element that needs to be supported as essential to (or even replacing) the mainstream. Because it also involves the third Theory of Change, a broader discussion of the last assumption is left to the discussion of that theory.

## Actions and Developments in the Build States

The five case studies provide much more detailed accounts of the experiences of each of the five Build states in their early learning system building work, based upon an analysis of their actions and impacts regarding each of the theory of change assumptions. This discussion here draws from these five case studies and also from self assessment reports and information provided from the four learning partner states. The chart on the opposite page provides a synopsis of specific areas of actions undertaken by states.

*Clarity and Ownership – Recognition of Need.* All nine states have taken some strides to defining both the current state of public investments in early learning and contrasting them with the amount of investments needed to produce quality services that can have impacts upon children’s healthy development and readiness for school. Seven of the nine states have participated in the Voices for America’s Children and Child and Family Policy Center’s *Early Learning Left Out* project,<sup>15</sup> producing estimates on the relative investments in young children’s early learning compared with investments in school-aged children’s educational development and college-aged youth’s further education, training, and development. This type of work has helped to make the case that the problem with the early learning system is not solely one of fragmentation or lack of coordination, but one of under-investment.

On a child level, Minnesota’s kindergarten readiness assessment has provided a quantitative estimate of the number of children who are starting school without all the desired skills and there is a need to address this issue, and Ohio and Hawaii have produced similar statewide assessments. Other states have drawn from the ECKL-S reports and other information, as well as use third or fourth grade reading proficiency scores, as part of their arguments for public policy attention to the early learning years.

In general, states have used different arsenals of information in order to raise the issue of early learning to higher public visibility. Further, the development of specific strategies such as quality rating and reimbursement systems (discussed later) in states generally have been based upon data showing that there is a great deal of poor and mediocre quality care in center-based and family home care. Pennsylvania has used its Inter-University Consortium on Early Childhood’s research on child care as a credible in-state confirmation of the need to raise quality in child care settings.<sup>16</sup>

Both New Jersey and Ohio participated in the School Readiness Indicators Initiative and produced state reports providing multiple indicators that could be tracked at the state level to assess progress in early learning and child development.<sup>17</sup> States like Michigan and Pennsylvania also developed state-level benchmarks for early learning, drawing upon multiple data sources available to them and designed to highlight gaps in school readiness and track the effectiveness of strategies to address them. In addition, Minnesota has developed Early Learning Standards or indicators of developmental progress for 3 and 4-year olds and is training early care and education providers on how to use the standards and link them to school readiness assessments.

### Build Cross-State Accomplishments Chart

<i>Note: 2005 unless otherwise indicated</i>	IL	MN	NJ	OH	PA	HI	MI	OK	WA
<b>Infant/Toddler Focus</b>									
Developed infant-toddler strategy	1998				✓				
<b>Preschool Expansion</b>									
Increased funding and children served	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	
<b>Quality Rating System</b>									
Developed frameworks	✓	✓	✓						✓
In pilot process				✓					
Moving to scale					✓			✓	
<b>Child Care Subsidies and Access</b>									
Subsidy rates increased					✓	planned		✓	
<b>Early Learning Standards</b>									
Developed standards birth to kindergarten									✓
Have developed prekindergarten standards	2002	✓	1999	2003	2004	2003	✓	2004	
Infant toddler standards/guidelines being developed		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
<b>Parent Leadership</b>									
Created council or leadership initiative			✓		✓				
<b>Family, Friend &amp; Neighbor Care</b>									
Sites participating in Sparking Connections initiative		✓				✓		✓	✓
<b>Health, Mental Health Services</b>									
Expanded health coverage	✓								
Expanded developmental health services, child mental health	✓	✓			✓				
Cross-sector planning on EC mental health				✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Improved early intervention (Part C) and other services for children with disabilities	✓				✓		✓		
<b>Political Will Building &amp; Public Engagement</b>									
Building on gubernatorial leadership	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Engaged in educating gubernatorial candidates		✓	✓	✓					
Significant business outreach and engagement		✓			✓			2002	
Public engagement, public relations, communications campaigns launched	2003	✓	✓	✓		✓			
Participating in Born Learning Campaign		✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
Developed informational websites	2003	✓	✓	✓	✓				
Implemented advocacy campaigns using web technology	✓	✓	✓						✓
<b>Governance and Leadership</b>									
Created state-level planning/governance structures	2004	✓			2003	✓	✓	2003	✓
Expanded/improved state-local connections	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	
More integrated cross-sector planning in coordination with the MCH Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems grant	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Financial and Data Systems</b>									
Early Learning Left Out studies completed	✓	2004	✓	✓			2003	✓	2003
Statewide Economic Impact Studies published	✓	2003		2004		✓			
Cost benefit studies of ECE programs					✓				
Produced school readiness indicators		✓	✓	✓					
Conducted kindergarten readiness assessments		✓		✓		✓	planned		
Other significant data collection advances	✓			✓					

In general, the Build states have assembled a variety of studies and reports to show the current status of state investments in early learning, the resulting quality, availability, and affordability of current services funded by them, and the implications to children being healthy and prepared to succeed in school. Some of this work has been proactive, supporting new studies and analyses, and some has been in response to questions raised regarding work in the state – by legislators, business interests, and members of newly-formed commissions to address early learning.

Overall, Build work seems to have helped establish a stronger and more integrated base of credible information that shows the need for public investments to improve school readiness. While this is only a first step in securing investments, Build states are in a much stronger position – with policy makers and the public – regarding the level of

understanding of the need for public action and investment if children's kindergarten readiness is to be improved.

Illinois also has found that its efforts in data collection and analysis have resulted in identification of specific gaps and needs, when investments are secured. In particular, Illinois' new investments in pre-school have resulted in finding that not all areas of the state require substantial additional investments while other areas did identify very substantial needs in this part of the early learning system due to the focus in Illinois to reach at-risk children first as they move toward universal preschool. Illinois is developing a more sophisticated assessment of the actual need for and distribution of investments.<sup>18</sup>

*Clarity and Ownership – Shared Early Learning Vision.* All Build state teams started with an implicit vision for an early care and education system that involved affordable, accessible, and quality early care and education services for children, including pre-school. States varied in the degree to which they incorporated health, family support, and early intervention services into their systems work. As Build has grown, however, states have generally broadened their overall vision and become more explicit in recognizing the need to address a broad array of child and family needs and ensure that health, family support, and other prevention and early intervention services are at least linked to the strategies they pursue.

Moreover, Build states have enlisted new allies and partners in their work through this expansion. All Build states have developed some relationship to the Comprehensive Early Childhood Service (ECCS) System grant planning work in their states, in some instances making use of those resources as part of the Build work. This broadened vision has enabled Build to play a coordinating and networking role across different state initiatives. In Washington, Build partnered with both the ECCS grant and the Head Start Collaborative office in developing a comprehensive state early childhood plan that is provided a unifying vision for strategic actions in the state.<sup>19</sup>

Build states have broadened their focus and their state's actions in other ways, as well. Minnesota has focused attention upon the important role that family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) care givers have in supporting early learning and incorporated support for FFN care into their work, also using this as a vehicle for raising important issues of building on cultural strengths and diversity in providing support.<sup>20</sup> The FFN care focus not only requires new, nonregulatory approaches to supporting caregivers but also offers ways to recognize and include FFN caregivers in the overall vision for early learning. Hawaii has been a leader in developing publicly-supported strategies to support FFN care, through Play and Learn groups, and has contributed to the work in other Build states as a learning partner and leader on this issue.

Illinois Build, in part because of its roots in the Ounce of Prevention Fund, has taken a lead in supporting development of child mental health services at the same time it has supported expansion of pre-school. This broader vision has enabled Illinois to move

forward with a broader base of support for its set of investments in different aspects of early learning.

While all Build states have worked to develop a shared early learning vision, the work has been continuously unfolding in the states and is likely to continue to do so. As important, Build states have made their vision more concrete and measurable over time, as they have worked with partners and found the need to avoid ambiguity, particularly as it comes to developing priorities and deciding on particular strategies to emphasize.

*Clarity and Ownership – Political leadership.* Build states have been particularly active in their work to support and educate Governors and state legislators on the value of early learning and the need for greater attention and investments. Because it has involved both public and private sector stakeholders, Build has served as a communications bridge that often has fostered coordination of message and strategy from inside government and outside government. The private sector leaders and advocates have been able to develop specific messages and recommendations for action with state policy makers, while the public sector leaders have been able to respond to those same policy makers with information about the current system and potentials for positive change.

Build states have both worked to raise early learning higher on the policy agenda with sitting Governors and to raise early learning to prominence during Gubernatorial elections. Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Oklahoma are three of the leading states in the nation in placing early learning on the front burner of state policy issues that Gubernatorial candidates in both parties felt they had to address. They have demonstrated the ability to make early learning a “must do” part of a Gubernatorial platform. Ohio and Minnesota are building upon those experiences and successes in their own work preparing for Gubernatorial elections in their states.

Build states also have worked to solidify and strengthen the number of champions for early learning within their General Assemblies. During the past year, in part through active work of Ready 4 K, Build in Minnesota has been successful in doubling the number of legislators on the bipartisan early childhood caucus to 117 legislators. Ohio organized, with state and local partners, a legislative briefing to present their Economic Impact study to 50 participating legislators and/or their staff.

Build has found that there are multiple ways to reach and influence Governors and legislative leaders, and there is not a “one size fits all” approach. At the same time, they have found significant success, particularly through an inside-outside strategy that has a consistent overall message, in increasing the salience of early learning significantly. Moreover, active support from the Governor and from legislative champions, while it can “politicize the issue,” also has produced more public visibility and public recognition of the issue.

While political ownership is seen in all Build states as essential to securing needed investments, it is not treated as a “given,” something that either exists or does not exist.

Build states are taking strategic actions to create and nurture that leadership, both through the general policy making process and through the electoral process.

*Actions and Infrastructure – Capacity and expertise.* The definition of system components provided earlier stresses the need to develop system capacity and expertise in setting service standards and constructing professional development and regulation systems to ensure quality, effectiveness, and coordination with other services and system. This is particularly true in the areas of family support and early care and education, where current standards are often minimal and those that exist relate primarily to basic health and safety.

All Build states have taken on the task of developing early learning standards, with Build teams often taking a lead and system coordinating role in this effort. These have involved developing standards applicable to pre-school and to infant and toddler care. They also have sought to ensure consistency between these standards and standards developed for the early elementary grades. In 2005, eight of the nine Build states took significant strides toward defining or expanding early learning standards in their states.

In addition, all five Build grant states either developed, piloted, or expanded quality rating systems for early care and education. In fact, both Pennsylvania and Oklahoma's tiered rating systems (whose early development preceded Build) have been used as exemplary models by both Build and other states in developing those systems with Pennsylvania especially focusing on putting together a coordinated professional development system in addition to a rating structure. Ohio has also worked on workforce and professional assessment, registry activities and system planning to provide a clearer understanding of where they are in this area and what additional investments would be helpful when impacting quality.

Development of both early learning standards and quality rating systems has involved broad vetting with stakeholder groups, both for political and policy reasons. In Pennsylvania, a very structured community engagement and vetting process through Build helped to ensure eventual adoption and use.

Build states also have continued to identify and then tackle issues as they emerge. New Jersey and Illinois, for instance, have taken a lead on developing strong articulation between community colleges and four year institutions so that students gaining community college child development associates degrees have shorter pathways to undergraduate degrees in child development.

One feature of the Build work has been the alignment of inside- and outside-government efforts to create this expertise and infrastructure.

*Actions and Infrastructure – Actions and successes.* In addition to developing the infrastructure, different Build states have been able to secure additional public funding for early learning, with Build teams sometimes in leadership and sometimes in partnering roles. Six of the nine Build states secured increased state funding for pre-

school, and four states expanded developmental or mental health and Part C services for young children. While there were funding setbacks as well as advances, Build teams have been leads or parts of coalitions in six states over the last three years that have resulted in over \$200 million in new investments, largely in pre-school but extending to child care and other children's services as well, including a number of innovations that can serve as models to others.

Oklahoma, and Washington have developed explicit public and private partnerships in funding, particularly to create the infrastructure and research and development resources needed for systems building. Washington is working with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation on a comprehensive initiative focusing upon two communities that will test the impact of approaching scale in investments in early learning.<sup>21</sup> Minnesota enlisted the support of private sector leaders in establishing the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation with a 2.5 million dollar investment by corporate and foundation donors. Illinois has advanced work on children's mental and developmental health, through a set-aside for infant and toddler care, through separate funding for child mental health services, and through work with the Commonwealth Fund and its ABCD Initiative in broadening the use of Medicaid to support pediatric practices identifying and addressing children's developmental needs.

The case studies indicate that these actions and successes have helped to sustain momentum within Build teams. There is a reason for team members continuing to be involved. In fact, Build has tended to progress farthest and build momentum when it has been able to demonstrate its value in terms of these concrete gains.

*Political Will – Public awareness and support.* There has been a good deal of national polling on early childhood issues, particularly on public attitudes toward child care and pre-school. This polling has shown general support for the value of voluntary pre-school for three- and four year olds, although this does not generally show up high on the list of priorities for state action. Majority public sentiment remains that parental care for very young children is the most desirable option, while also recognizing that many parents must work and that they do need safe and dependable child care. Public recognition of the importance of nurturing of children in the first years of life is growing, but this is not equated with educational settings, instruction, or trained child development staff for the earliest years (birth to two). At the same time, ensuring health care coverage for children ranks very high on the policy priority list among the public.

In general, this can be characterized as growing public awareness and positive, but soft support for the early learning systems building agendas set forth within Build states. New Jersey, for instance, has conducted and then used recent opinion polling that shows encouraging attitudes toward early childhood programming and investments among the public in their state.

Different Build states have sought to increase public awareness of the importance of early learning generally and for specific policy proposals. In a few instances, these have included actual media campaigns, such as an extensive media campaign in Illinois

stressing the importance of early learning environments in child care. The research from Illinois' media effort showed a significant movement in public views toward the role of child care in child development and well-being, which was seen as helpful to securing new investments. In 2005, Minnesota also launched a major public relations campaign through Ready4K, a state advocacy organization, which focused on a variety of public audiences and media outlets. Ohio has started this process with focus groups across the state to identify the best ways to raise the public awareness of early childhood. New Jersey's "Building the Future: A Blueprint for Early Learning in New Jersey" is a new piece aiming for the communication of a shared vision to the public and other stakeholders.

Much of the work on public awareness and support in Build states, however, has been through the development and use of different resource materials and studies that make the case for early learning. These have been transmitted to opinion leaders and the public through forums and presentations, as well as through general dissemination strategies, through websites as well as print materials.

While it is not possible to gauge their actual impact upon public opinion as a whole, in most Build states these efforts have produced a repository of resources that are accessed and used by different groups within the state. They have been reported in news articles and in editorials. Partners and participants in Build work report that there is a broader foundation of information about and awareness of early learning in their states.

*Political Will – Political mobilization and advocacy.* In addition to general public support, Build states have enlisted opinion leaders and "unusual suspects" in their work to generate support for public investments and policies in early childhood. Minnesota, Oklahoma, and Washington have enlisted champions from the business community to promote early learning investments, in part as an economic growth tool. Ohio has developed an explicit grassroots and grasstops campaign for early learning in preparation for its Gubernatorial election.

A majority of the Build states have established networks at the community level to support early learning – often to leverage both state and community investments. Minnesota, Ohio, and Oklahoma, in particular, are aided by specific funded local early learning initiatives that are also creating an advocacy base for state-level change. New Jersey is newly focused on ways to expand its local system capacity, infrastructure and advocacy base through specific actions being recommended by Build New Jersey.

Build states have found it possible to enlist allies using different but complementary themes – from return on investment arguments for corporate leaders to crime prevention arguments for law enforcement personnel. Parents are a key focus in New Jersey where parental leadership and advocacy are high goals in their newly formulated Blue Print.

This mobilization has required Build teams to establish relationships with leaders and champions who come from different organizational cultures, requiring two-way learning. Early learning advocates have had to adjust to these different cultures, while leaders and champions have had to learn the complexities and nomenclature of the early learning world. It has sometimes been a challenge determining the particular ongoing role that leaders and champions from other fields can play and how their engagement and advocacy sustained.

The value of this mobilization, however, has been apparent in the access and leverage it can provide at the top policy levels. Again, corporate leaders were successful in securing public sector funding to match their own investments in Minnesota, and corporate leaders were instrumental in creating Oklahoma's state-level Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness.

Community mobilization also has been used in Build states to influence local elected officials and state legislators. In some states, this work also has helped to coordinate and unify messages to these policy makers, reinforcing rather than fragmenting advocacy efforts.

### Summary – The Overall Relevance of Theory of Change Two

The Build Initiative within any of the nine Build states cannot take sole credit for the positive steps taken in that state on early learning. Build sometimes took a lead role in promoting change and sometimes a partnering or contributing role; but even when Build played a lead role, success usually involved actions beyond those taken by Build. The discussion provided above does not seek to attribute causality to Build or to any one action for the gains made in states on any of the assumptions.

At the same time, however, Build's presence undoubtedly contributed to overall state actions. On each of the assumptions in the Build Theory of Change, at least some states showed significant progress and evidence that change is possible and that:

- Data can be used to demonstrate the need for early learning system building;
- A vision for such a system can be developed that can align key stakeholders;
- A broadened and deepened leadership base for change, including Gubernatorial and legislative support, can be orchestrated;
- New funding and take strategic steps forward in systems implementation can be secured on at least a demonstration basis;
- Greater expertise and capacity to create, implement, and manage effective services can be constructed within public systems;
- Broaden public awareness and support can be secured; and
- Important constituencies can be mobilized to support that system building.

Whether these individual actions collectively can combine to produce more than the sum of their parts or what build up is needed to produce a possible tipping point (the last assumption of the theory) remains an open question. At this point, at least, there is

nothing that would disconfirm the Second Theory of Change, and much to point to its utility.

As for assessing the overall impact and leverage that Build has been able to achieve, the most quantitative measure is its leveraging of new resources for early learning programs and services. On this count, Build work, even if it can be credited with only a small share of the investments made in the states, has leveraged new resources well in excess of the Build investment. These investments are only part of Build's overall influence, however. Its creation of a greater commitment to and ownership of building early learning services and supports is likely to continue even if Build as an Initiative ends.

### Theory of Change Three: The Build Initiative's Role as Catalyst for Change

The third theory of change speaks to the specific contribution that outside investors, through the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative, can make – through strategic investments and technical assistance and support – to efforts to build state early learning systems. Like the other two theories of change, there are a number of assumptions related to the particular role and “value added” of Build investments specifically:<sup>22</sup>

1. *State Readiness.* States can be identified who are in the position to innovate and move forward early learning systems building in a concerted way.
2. *Leadership.* A team of committed leaders, from inside and outside government, can be identified, brought together, and developed to work as a team and become a driving force for this systems building.
3. *Learning Capacity.* The Build process can accelerate learning and use of best practices and evidence in developing the system.
4. *Feedback and Evaluation.* The incorporation of a national and state evaluation partner will result in more systematic assessment of progress and a better continuous learning environment needed in systems building.
5. *Declarative impact.* The designation as a Build state itself can produce an impetus for change and additional visibility and credibility with key partners.
6. *Contribution to Knowledge and Evidence.* Build state actions will contribute to the national knowledge base and the core of effective strategies and practices that are required to develop effective early learning systems.
7. *Tipping Point and Sustainability.* At some point, sufficient momentum will develop that Build actions to construct early learning systems will be sustained even without ongoing outside funding.

The Build Initiative constitutes an extremely ambitious effort on the part of the funders, one with a recognized long-term time horizon. The already multi-year funding commitment speaks to this time horizon, but funders also are seeking evidence that Build investments are producing important impacts along the way, one reason it is

important to examine the experiences of Build investments according to the theory's assumptions.

### Evidence Supporting the Theory

The first two assumptions in the third theory relate to the ability to identify states and leaders who can serve as change agents. The remaining five assumptions relate to the impact that investing in such states and leaders can produce.

The research of systems reform and comprehensive community change both add significant confirmation to the Build strategy in relationship to the first two assumptions. States and communities are laboratories of democracy and there is a diffusion of innovation across them, with states adopting effective/politically popular programs and strategies from one another. While not perfect, it is usually possible to identify those states most likely to be leaders and early adopters of new strategies and systems building efforts. Similarly, the research is clear that leadership and passion play a critical role in the adoption of new programs and practices and the development of systems. Producing change is much different than “managing the status quo” within public systems, and takes dedicated leadership, not only at the top level but throughout systems. One of the first “lessons learned” in most analyses of foundation efforts to change systems is that “leadership is essential to producing change.”<sup>23</sup>

The evidence from the impacts of outside investments to produce systems change, however, has not that of full success, whether in efforts to produce service integration or comprehensive community change.

The Build Initiative has set as its “eye on the prize” the development of a comprehensive early learning system within states that can dramatically improve children’s school readiness. That is also the goal of the Build teams in each of the states, and therefore might seem to be the appropriate outcome measure for the Initiative.

Experience from service integration initiatives and comprehensive community initiatives, however, indicates that supporting such strategic planning and actions can leverage significant energy and action, but that this does not necessarily leverage sufficient investments to develop the comprehensive services and supports identified as necessary to produce community change. In fact, investments in such planning may leverage substantially more action and new or redirected public funding than the planning investments themselves (and therefore more than justify them). Still, they have not, by and large, produced sufficient actions and funding to produce community-wide change.

In the 1990s, the Pew Charitable Trusts initiated and then abandoned a Children’s Initiative designed essentially to first build comprehensive early learning systems within selected poor neighborhoods in seven states and then expand them statewide. An outside assessment commissioned by the Trusts determined that the 10-year, \$70

million investment set-aside for the effort would not be sufficient to produce the desired level of change on a community or statewide basis.<sup>24</sup> The efforts to produce service integration and systems reform have been variously described as “unfulfilled”<sup>25</sup> or “found difficult and left untried.”<sup>26</sup> The efforts to produce comprehensive community change frequently have asked leaders to plan comprehensively but then provided the access to resources that only enable small-scale demonstrations that, even if very successful for the families served, scarcely impact community results.<sup>27</sup>

While the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative is making a very significant investment in systems building, it is likely unrealistic to hold up the yardstick against which that investment should be measured as a completely realized early learning system.

The third theory of change, however, offers a number of other measures of progress and impact upon which to determine the value added from the investments made by Build investments.

The challenge such outside investors in public systems building face is that their ultimate goal is to produce statewide change that results in better outcomes for children and to do so within a finite time horizon of outside investment. While they need to market their efforts in this manner, both to their Boards and to their grantees, they are unlikely to be able to fully deliver on this goal, particularly in ways that can be attributed back to their own investment role. That is one reason it is particularly important to spell out the assumptions behind the theory and their more direct and proximate potential impacts.

### Actions and Developments from Build Initiative Investments

The following is the most subjective part of this evaluation essay. It is based to some degree on the state evaluations and the perspectives of state evaluation partners. In greater part, however, it is based upon work with the national Build staff, interactions and discussions at the annual Build conferences, meetings with other technical assistance providers and organizations working in the early childhood field, and discussions with Build funders (both individually and in briefings to the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative).

*State Readiness.* Over the last decade, early learning has come onto the political landscape as a much more important public policy issue than it has been in the past. Whether a consequence of changing family work patterns, brain research, or desires to produce greater impact on children’s development than educational reforms have been able to produce, the attention provided to school readiness has increased, even after the National Education Goals themselves have expired. Most states now have some interagency task force, blue ribbon commission, or other governmental structure charged with developing recommendations on building a more integrated early learning system.<sup>28</sup> Build’s timing has been good in this respect, coming in as a national initiative at an early point in this discovery, with a broader and more comprehensive focus than most other initiatives. As such, it has been regarded as a significant force within most

Build states, even as most of these same states have developed their own new task forces, commissions, or interagency governance structures.

Shortly after Build began, all states also had an opportunity to secure funding through the Early Childhood Comprehensive Services (ECCS) Initiative funded by the federal Maternal and Child Health Bureau of the Department of Health and Human Services. ECCS has a very similar focus to Build and, if established before Build, might have created challenges to Build in establishing Build's own place in the early learning systems building field. Generally, Build states have been able to recognize and weave ECCS work into their own.

A final confirmation of the presence of ready states is reflected in the number of states that have sought to become part of the Build Initiative, even given the modest overall direct funding support provided them. The number of states initially seeking Build designation and those applying for Build expansion and learning partner status exceeded funder expectations.<sup>29</sup> In short, there appear to be a number of ready states in the country to begin to tackle comprehensive early learning systems building, and Build has identified (although doubtlessly not perfectly) a strong array of such states.<sup>30</sup>

*Leadership.* In each Build state (and probably in any state in the country), there are leaders and champions for early learning. The array of expertise of these leaders may differ in different states, and the interest and skill of different specific leaders toward collaborating toward a comprehensive agenda itself varies. Still, the experience from Build states is that, with facilitative leadership, cross-system and public and private leaders can be identified and enlisted into a common cause. While Build teams may not enlist all important leaders or directly connect with all spheres of political influence on early learning, their start with a strong core has generally enabled them to successively reach out.

Moreover, the Build Initiative itself has given them the reason – as well as the time, space, and opportunity – to meet and plan with one another to at least some degree. While there are turf issues that must be addressed among virtually all Build teams, the fact is that – absent Build – there have been few resources available to actually bring passionate leaders together for sufficient time to plan and work together. It still remains a challenge to provide the needed follow-through between meetings and get-togethers to move beyond networking to joint planning and decision-making – but the funding and support provided through Build has really strengthened this planning and follow-through.

Often, there has been discussion of fragmentation and lack of coordination in service delivery. The same certainly holds for service design and planning. The investments Build has made in identifying and bringing to the table the diverse but strong leadership in the state has created time, space, and opportunity for that joint planning and strategy development that – without Build's intentionality and funding support – otherwise rarely occurs and certainly is in no one's job description.

*Learning Capacity and Feedback and Evaluation.* The third and fourth assumptions of the third Theory of Change relate to how Build resources have been used specifically to impact state strategies and actions. They are discussed together. The individual Build case studies provide some indication of the degree to which states have drawn upon Build technical assistance, learning opportunities with other states, and evaluation assistance in taking effective action. For instance, work on such issues as Family, Friend, and Neighbor care in states was directly stimulated by Build and its learning community. The presence of state evaluation partners and Build's requirement to develop baseline information on all aspects of the theory of change have increased the use of data and evidence to inform strategy development. While individual state leaders usually have access, through their own professional networks, to some information about innovations and best/promising new practices, Build has provided an additional avenue to obtain such information and also to provide exposure to a broader and more inclusive team.

Clearly, this is one of the roles that nationally- and foundation-funded initiatives are most accustomed to performing. Done well, these efforts can be very effective in diffusing new practices to other states, although the greatest experience in this respect is around more discrete programmatic innovations than broader systemic ones.<sup>31</sup>

*Declarative impact.* The fact that so many states sought to become Build states or learning partners in the initial and first round expansion of Build (much more than anticipated by Build funders and national staff), deserves discussion. This interest probably is a reflection of several factors: (1) the desire of those passionate leaders within states to be recognized for their own work, which receipt of a grant award sometimes provides; (2) a seeking by those same leaders of any additional scarce resources for planning and networking and information acquisition that they can obtain; and (3) a belief that selection and participation may provide them and their agendas with greater political access and influence over state policy making and funding around early learning.

The latter represents the “declarative impact” that Build as a national and joint-foundation funded Initiative may have. Independent of anything that the funding actually provides to states in the way of increased planning or programming, the designation as a Build state can place early learning systems building higher on the policy agenda. Requirements for Gubernatorial support for the application for Build designation is reflective of the recognition by funders of the potential declarative impact of their initiative. The declarative impact has been offered as one explanation for the decline in teenage pregnancy in the United States; the fact that attention was called to the crisis in teenage child-bearing in America and that it became a public policy concern caused changes in youth culture and behavior to reduce it.

While varying across the Build states, the Build appellation is judiciously employed both as a reason for paying attention to recommendations and planning processes and as a call for further action and effort in the state. The declarative value appears to be greater in some states than others. States with multiple foundation and federal initiatives and

designations may not view Build status as an independent impetus to the degree that states do who are less likely to be selected by national initiatives.<sup>32</sup>

*Contribution to Knowledge and Evidence.* The Build states are undertaking a variety of new program practices and strategies, as well as working to build overall systems. Clearly, some of the former efforts can and will contribute to the knowledge base about “best practices,” if not “evidenced- or research-based programs.”<sup>33</sup>

In addition, the efforts are contributing additional real-world examples of efforts to change and build public systems. The literature of systems reform generally has moved more to a “lessons learned” approach to capturing knowledge than a “research findings” approach, and the case studies and Build evaluation essays are in this “lessons learned” model. Hopefully, they will contribute to future strategic discussions among investors interested in improving school readiness results for children – suggesting more rather than less promising approaches to achieving that goal.

*Tipping Point and Sustainability.* The final assumption (or hope) in the third theory of change is that Build’s investment will produce significant change – more than marginal and incremental gains. The eye on the prize is to develop a system that truly improves school readiness and closes the gap across different child populations in what children know and can do at the time of kindergarten entry.

As discussed in the 2005 Build evaluation essay,<sup>34</sup> building an early learning system is equivalent to building a K-12 educational system or a higher education system, systems building work that has taken most countries decades to develop. The experiences in Build and other states also suggest that this building is likely to require federal as well as state policy attention and public investment and that the proper role and contribution the private sector can make needs to be spelled out.

As Build continues, there is a particular value in funders seeking to determine what role Build states can play in developing or advocating for a federal policy strategy as well as a state policy strategy, based upon their experiences. In addition, funders may be able to draw from Build state experiences a better perspective on what role the private sector (and foundation support) can best play in such state and community systems building. Several Build states have been leaders in developing new public-private investment partnerships and Build could play a role in identifying and promoting specific roles for private sector partnerships, particularly around investing in infrastructure and accountability and in research and development.

### Summary – The Overall Relevance of Theory of Change Three

The third theory of change really is about how and whether (or more properly, the degree to which) significant and strategic investments by outside funders can be employed to leverage exponentially larger public sector investments in an early learning system. This is, of course, not an all-or-nothing, success-or-failure, proposition.<sup>35</sup>

To date, the Build Initiative itself has placed its emphasis upon:

- Creating the time and space and opportunity for strategic thinking among early learning leaders in selected states;
- Providing them access to an learning community and best practices, along with encouragement, support, and recognition to continue their efforts; and
- Offering occasional outside stimulus and visibility to help them move forward their agenda with others.

Overall, a summary of the results from the presence of Build in the states has been:

- Increased levels of activity both within and across systems on early learning; including a more common and less fragmented voice and message;
- Heightened recognition of the need for action and a systemic focus, coupled with a belief that the state can be a leader among states;
- An increased and stronger advocacy and will-building base, both among traditional advocates and unusual suspects (enabled particularly by the public and private partnership); and
- Newly leveraged but primarily programmatic and strategic investments in early learning, coupled with greater definition of quality and accountability within those pieces of early learning systems.

In terms of a benefit and cost analysis, the specific actions undertaken and investments made in early learning in the Build states probably more than warrant the actual funding providing through Build. Less tangible, Build has sustained and broadened the leadership base within the states to do the ongoing day-to-day work on improving early learning systems, including providing learning opportunities that have increased the knowledge and skills of those leaders. This increased skill and knowledge will continue to be employed and used in the future.<sup>36</sup>

As Build continues forward, the discussion of the third theory of change becomes even more pertinent – not only because it relates to Build’s ongoing funding as an Initiative but because it deserves review for modification and change in the type of investments that Build funders might choose to make. In particular, this essay suggests that Build funders and Build state teams together work to identify next emerging opportunities and needs for outside support to move early learning agendas forward – with a particular attention to how they inform the third theory of change. This includes specific discussion of the federal financing role in early learning systems building and how Build can be affect that financing and the particular role within states that private sector investments and influence on policy development can play.

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<sup>1</sup> Bruner, C. et al. (2004). Building an early learning system: the ABCs of planning and governance structures. Des Moines, IA: State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network.

<sup>2</sup> Schor, E. & Bruner, C. (2003). Health care and school readiness: The health communities role in supporting child development, new approaches and model legislation: Chapter four: Children’s development health model act. Des Moines, IA: State Early Learning Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network.

<sup>3</sup> Estimates are that 15-18% of very young children have developmental or mental health issues that could benefit from early intervention, but the federal early intervention program (Part C of IDEA) only serves 2% of all children, below its goal. National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (2004).

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Annual appropriations and number of children served under Part C of IDEA Federal Fiscal Years 1987-2003. <http://www.nectac.org/partc/partcdata.asp?text=1> and

<http://appropriations.house.gov/files/2005LHHSConfTable.pdf> and Knitzer, J. (2001). Promoting the emotional well-being of children and families: Building services and systems to support the healthy emotional development of children: An action guide for policymakers. National Center for Children in Poverty. Policy Paper #1. New York, New York.

<sup>4</sup> Rouse, C., Brooks Gunn, J. & McLanahan, S. (Eds.) (Spring 2005). School readiness: closing ethnic and racial gaps. *Future of Children* 15:1.

<sup>5</sup> Lee, C., & Burkam, D. (2002). Inequality at the starting gate: social background differences in achievement as children begin school. Washington DC: Economic Policy Institute.

<sup>6</sup> Rouse C., Brooks Gunn, J. & McLanahan, S. (Eds.) (Spring 2005). School readiness: closing ethnic and racial gaps. *Future of Children*.

<sup>7</sup> Chang, H. (2006). Getting ready for quality: the critical importance of developing and supporting a skilled ethnically and linguistically diverse early childhood workforce. Oakland, CA: California Tomorrow.

<sup>8</sup> The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child has produced some of the best and most readable materials regarding the scientific research and its implications to policy. See: Young children develop in an environment of relationships. (2004). National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, Working Paper No.1 and Children's emotional development in built not the architecture of their brains. (2004). National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. Working Paper No. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Dworkin, P. & Bogin, J., (Eds.) (February 2006). Help me grow roundtable: promoting development through child health services. *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics*: supplement. Vol. 27. The Commonwealth Fund.

<sup>10</sup> See: Bruner, C. (2006). Village building and school readiness; Closing opportunity gaps in a diverse society. Des Moines, IA: State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network.

<sup>11</sup> Gladwell, M. (2002.) *The tipping point: How little things can make a big difference*. Back Bay Books.

<sup>12</sup> Rogers, E. (1995). *Diffusion of innovations*. Fourth Ed., New York, New York: The Free Press.

<sup>13</sup> Kuhn, T. (1962). *The structure of scientific revolutions*. University of Chicago Press.

<sup>14</sup> Osborne, D. (1990). *Laboratories of democracy: A new breed of governor creates models for national growth*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., McGraw-Hill.

<sup>15</sup> The first report Bruner, C., Elias, V., Stein, D., & Schaefer, S. (2004). *Early learning left out: An examination of public investments in education and development by child age*. Des Moines, IA: Voices for America's Children and the Child and Family Policy Center. focused on the following states: Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Kansas, Michigan, Missouri, South Dakota, Vermont, Washington and Wisconsin. A second edition Bruner, C., & Stein, D. (2005). *Early learning left out: Closing the investment gap for America's youngest children*. Des Moines, IA: Voices for America's Children and the Family Policy Center. focused on: the District of Columbia, Illinois, Kentucky, Mississippi, New Jersey, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, Texas and Virginia

<sup>16</sup> Fiene, R. et al. (2002). *Pennsylvania early childhood quality settings study*. Prevention Research Center. The Pennsylvania State University and the Universities Children's Policy Collaborative. Prepared for the Governor's Task Force on Early Childhood Care and Education.

<sup>17</sup> These state reports, as well as the national report, Chang, H. (2006). *Getting ready for quality: The critical importance of developing and supporting a skilled ethnically and linguistically diverse early childhood workforce*. Oakland, CA: California Tomorrow. are available on the web site: [www.gettingready.org](http://www.gettingready.org).

<sup>18</sup> While estimates can be made of the need and demand for individual service elements, there is limited real-world experience to be very precise regarding "take-up" rates and what would constitute saturation even for pre-school, given the choices that parents will be making in the context of their other child care needs, their own work situations, and what is available to their children in terms of learning environments apart from a publicly-financed pre-school program.

<sup>19</sup> Kids Matter: Improving outcomes for kids in Washington state. (2005). Available at: [http://www.washingtonlearns.wa.gov/el/documents/Kids\\_Matter\\_final.FULLREPORTpdf.pdf#search=%22Washington%20Build%20Head%20Start%20Collaboration%20office%20ECCS%22](http://www.washingtonlearns.wa.gov/el/documents/Kids_Matter_final.FULLREPORTpdf.pdf#search=%22Washington%20Build%20Head%20Start%20Collaboration%20office%20ECCS%22)

<sup>20</sup> On cultural values and the role of family, friend, and neighbor care, see: Emertia, B. (2006). *Family, friend and neighbor care preliminary best practices: How families are teaching their children to succeed*. Minneapolis, MN: Development and Training Institute. For a good description of the characteristics of

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family, friend, and neighbor caregivers and recommendations for action that extend to providing voluntary supports, see: Chase, R. et. al. (2006). Family, friend and neighbor caregivers: Results of the 2004 Minnesota statewide household child care survey. St. Paul, MN: Wilder Research.

<sup>21</sup> Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. (2005). Investing in young children: An early learning strategy for Washington state.

<sup>22</sup> While both the first and second Theories of Change were vetted and developed with the Build states, the third Theory was constructed based upon discussions with Early Childhood Funders Collaborative members in the context of the evaluation, but it has not been an explicit part of the Collaborative's work to refine and adopt this specific set of assumptions.

<sup>23</sup> Mattessich, P. & Monsey, B. (1992). Collaboration: What makes it work: A review of research literature on factors influencing successful collaboration. St. Paul, MN: Amherst H. Wilder Foundation. Kagan, S. L., & Neuman, M. J. (2003). Back to basics: Building an early care and education system. In F. Jacobs, D. Wertlieb, & R. M. Lerner (Eds.), Handbook of applied developmental science: Vol. 2. Enhancing the life chances of youth and families. Contributions of programs, policies, and service systems (pp. 329-345) . Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Kagan, S.L. (2001). Back to basics: Essential components of an American early care and education system. Manhattan, NY: Teachers College, Columbia University.

<sup>24</sup> The estimated investment needs in a single poor set of neighborhoods (100,000 population) would have required \$5-10 million in new or redirected funding.

<sup>25</sup> Kagan, S. L. & Neville, P.(1993). Integrating services for children and families: Understanding the past to shape the future . New Haven: Yale University Press.

<sup>26</sup> Nelson, D. (1992). Found difficult and left untried: The governance necessary for service integration. A.E.C. Focus. Vol. 3, No.1. Winter.

<sup>27</sup> Bruner, C. (1995). Where's the beef: Getting bold about what comprehensive means. Des Moines, IA: Child and Family Policy Center.

<sup>28</sup> Bruner, C. et al (2004). Building an early learning system: The ABCs of planning and governance structures. Des Moines, IA: State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network Resource Brief and the Build Initiative.

<sup>29</sup> Clearly, however, the ability of states to secure resources to participate in Build has proved challenging.

<sup>30</sup> A great deal of work went into the initial selection of Build states and the subsequent selection of Learning Partner states. Multiple factors weighed into selecting states, including geographic representation, diversity of political cultures, and access to additional foundation and funding support, but the main criteria related to ability to construct a strong core leadership team. In the end, the Build Initiative's nine states are geographically well-distributed and include both smaller and larger states and states with diverse populations. While they lack a New England state, a deep South state, or any of the four largest states and have an overrepresentation of "Midwestern" states (Illinois, Minnesota, Ohio, Michigan) and "blue states" (seven of the nine), they still represent a rich array of state political cultures and compositions.

<sup>31</sup> Over an eight-year period, the Clark Foundation invested nearly \$10 million in promoting family preservation as a new child welfare programmatic approach to improving child safety and well-being for some of the country's most vulnerable children. This effort included identifying and promoting "best practices," supporting research and developing a learning community in establishing those practices, and focusing upon policy makers to create the political will and investment in those practices. While research has remain mixed on the overall impact of family preservation services in averting out-of-home placements, the Clark Foundation initiative was successful in securing over \$100 million annual public investments in the eight states where it devoted its primary attention to building family preservation services, enacting a federal initiative that promoted and provided seed funding to expand such services to many more states, and helping change to at least a small degree the culture and thinking regarding child removal in the child protective service system. Clearly, by any measure of influence, leverage, and impact, the Clark Foundation's investments were wildly successful in achieving their goals in relationship to the actual resources they committed. At the same time, the limitation of the Clark Foundation's effort was that it did not tackle some of the systemic issues in the overall child welfare system that were needed in order for family preservation to have its fullest impact. The Pew Charitable Trusts pre[k]now initiative has many similarities in its approach to that of the Clark Foundation's Initiative, again, about a specific program within a larger system.

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<sup>32</sup> This may be particularly true for very large states like California, New York, and Florida, who often have access to multiple outside funding sources and frequently are courted for initiatives. Further, a state such as California may be easily able to find a few million dollars within its \$40 billion annual budget (with minimal need for public or policy maker discussion) to finance an innovative program, which the same few million dollars would require a Gubernatorial initiative and full legislative action to occur in a smaller state with a \$3 billion annual budget.

<sup>33</sup> The distinction drawn is that “research-based programs” generally relate to programs that incorporate well-financed research into their design, generally including randomized controlled trials. Implementing such research designs can easily run into the hundreds of thousands, if not million of dollars, and there are a relatively small number of social programs that have been seriously evaluated in this manner. In most instances, publicly-financed programs – let alone changes to practice or system (much more challenging to assess through research) – do not include the type of research support to provide this level of attribution of causality.

<sup>34</sup> Bruner, C. (2005). Building an early learning system in the states: A report on the second year: Build at 2 ½. Des Moines, IA: Child and Family Policy Center.

<sup>35</sup> British researcher Michael Little has indicated that, while American research has contributed greatly to the knowledge base regarding program efficacy through its emphasis upon randomized trials as the “gold standard” of research, that approach has its limitations as well as its strengths. Moreover, he indicates that Americans often want answers from research in all-or-nothing terms: “Did it work or didn’t it?” The true answers often are much more nuanced. Generally, with human subjects, rather than “yes/no” conclusions on program effects, the impacts are more likely to be “to what extent,” “under what conditions,” and “with what types of presenting concerns.” Bruner, C., Greenberg, M., Guy, C., Little, M., Schorr, L., Weiss, H, & et. al. (2002). Funding what works: Exploring the role of research on effective programs and practices in government decision-making. Des Moines, IA: National Center for Service Integration Clearinghouse and Center for Schools and Communities.

<sup>36</sup> The “Build at 2 ½” Essay discussed this benefit in some depth. Too often, efforts at such professional development are measured primarily in terms of their immediate benefits. For instance, a programmatic initiative that seeks to improve the skill level – through professional development of its early childhood staff – may be measured against the gains of the students in the early childhood program. At the same time, those staff are likely to use their new skills for the remainder of their early childhood careers, as well as with their own children and in other roles they may assume. Only a small part of the impact from their development will be reflected in their most immediate teaching of young children. The same holds for team leaders in the Build Initiative.



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