

Policy Matters in West Virginia
Excerpt from the
2006 WV KIDS COUNT Data Book

Where Are We and Where Do We Want to Go?

How can you reach your destination if you don't know your starting point? That's the dilemma KIDS COUNT and other early child development (ECD) advocates faced as we grappled with ways to improve the quality of our children's earliest learning experiences. We all agreed that our ECD quality is fair to poor and must be improved. Yet, there was little consensus about the policies and investments necessary to make those improvements happen quickly. Furthermore, we did not have a complete picture of the ECD policies currently in place for young children or of the investments we were making. In other words, we didn't know our starting point.

To help advocates, policymakers, opinion leaders and the public gain a clearer understanding of the state of our ECD system and, ultimately, reach consensus about how to get from where we are to where we want to go, KIDS COUNT volunteered to spearhead a three-year effort to lay the policy framework for a high-quality ECD system. The KIDS COUNT Quality and Accountability project has its origins in two recent initiatives: an Early Education/Economic Development Summit for West Virginia business leaders and policymakers held in the fall of 2005, and the work of the Partners Implementing an Early Care and Education System (PIECES) Advisory Council, the group responsible for the successful launch of West Virginia's nationally recognized Pre-K system. Using the momentum built by these two successful initiatives, KIDS COUNT has launched a comprehensive strategy to improve quality and accountability in West Virginia's ECD system.

In 2006, KIDS COUNT, in partnership with PIECES and *West Virginia: A Vision Shared*, documented the existing system, assessed the political environment and educated business leaders, parents and policymakers about the importance of high quality ECD programs. In 2007, KIDS COUNT, in partnership with PIECES and *West Virginia: A Vision Shared*, will build support for new investments in ECD programs and propose ECD legislation to develop a comprehensive strategy to improve early education and mobilize grass roots support for new investments in ECD programs.

In 2008, KIDS COUNT, in partnership with PIECES and *West Virginia: A Vision Shared*, will propose a focus on the policy priorities recommended by the Policy Matters Project with Lynn Kagan.



ECD policy.

This unprecedented effort is being funded primarily by the generous support of the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation and facilitated by Dr. Sharon Lynn Kagan, an internationally renowned expert in

Dr. Sharon Lynn Kagan

Sharon Lynn Kagan is the Virginia and Leonard Marx Professor of Early Childhood and Family Policy, Co-Director of the National Center for Children and Families, Associate Dean for Policy at Teachers College, Columbia University, and Professor Adjunct at Yale University's Child Study Center.



Kagan, recognized nationally and internationally for her work related to the care and education of young children and their families, is a frequent consultant to the White House, Congress, the National Governors' Association, the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services, numerous states, foundations, corporations, and professional associations, and serves on over 40 national boards or panels. She has been the President of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the Co-Chair of the National Education Goals Panel on Goal One, Chair of the Family Support America's Board of Directors, a member of President Clinton's education transition team, and National Commissions on Head Start and Chapter 1. She lives early childhood education, having been a Head Start Teacher and Director, as well as an administrator in the public schools and Director of the New York City Mayor's Office of Early Childhood Education.

In addition to these contributions, Dr. Kagan is globally recognized for

her unique scholarship. In over 200 publications including 12 volumes, Kagan's analytic work has helped the field define school readiness, the early childhood system, dimensions of collaboration, and leadership in early care and education. With scores of grants from America's leading foundations and the federal government, Kagan has researched early childhood pedagogy, strategies for service integration, and the evaluation of social programs. She is working throughout the world with UNICEF, assisting developing countries develop early learning guidelines. Perhaps most importantly, however, Kagan may be best known as the only woman in the history of American Education to be recognized for these contributions with its most prestigious awards: the 2004 Distinguished Service Award from the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the 2005 James Bryant Conant Award for Lifetime Service to Education from the Education Commission of the States (ECS), and the Harold W. McGraw, Jr. Prize in Education.



Why the Quality and Accountability Effort is Important

Today's children...tomorrow's economy

Why are children's earliest experiences so important? Because from the moment they are born — and even before — children are being profoundly shaped by the world around them. Their interactions with Mom, Dad, Grandma, Grandpa and all other caring adults are setting the foundation on which their futures will be built. Further, those individual futures create a collective future that will determine the health and prosperity of our entire state. Common sense tells us that how we treat our children makes a big difference in their long-term outcomes. But a number of longitudinal, randomized studies confirm the importance of giving young children at risk the best possible start in life.

KIDS COUNT's commitment to high-quality ECD programs is grounded in the results of three important longitudinal studies of ECD programs: The Perry Preschool Program, the Abecedarian Project, and Chicago Child-Parent Centers. Each of these studies found that when at-risk children participate in high-quality ECD programs, there are significant long-term benefits to the children and to society. Participating children benefit from higher IQs, less grade retention, fewer special education needs, lower crime rates, higher income levels and higher educational attainment. Society benefits from lower costs for education, public assistance and incarceration, and from greater economic productivity.

One noted study of the economic impact of early education is a report from the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank titled *"Early Childhood Development: Economic Development with a High Public Return."* In this report, two respected economists, Art Rolnick and Rob Grunewald, make the case that public subsidies of high-quality ECD programs have a much higher return than public investments in private businesses, the traditional economic development tool used by states. Rolnick and Grunewald estimate a 12% return on investments in high-quality ECD programs. Similarly, the Marshall University Center for Business and Economic Research (CBER) has confirmed a high rate of return for investments in high-quality programs in West Virginia. CBER estimates a \$5.20 return for every dollar West Virginia invests in good ECD programs.

SOCIETY BENEFITS FROM LOWER COSTS FOR EDUCATION, PUBLIC ASSISTANCE AND INCARCERATION, AND FROM GREATER ECONOMIC PRODUCTIVITY.

The evidence of high return on investment is clear and compelling. But, there is something beyond the dollars and cents: We owe it to our children, especially our most vulnerable children, to give them the best possible start in life. Our commitment to fairness and equity demands nothing less. American culture is rooted in the notion of economic opportunity. We envision a country where every child has the same chance at prosperity and happiness as every other child, regardless of economic status. The clearest path to equal opportunity has always been education. And thanks to decades of brain research, we now know that the most important and fruitful time to educate children, particularly those from low-income families, is during their earliest years.

Of course, parents play the most critical role in this early education effort, but the community also has an important role to play. The fact is, most young children (60%) spend a significant part of their week in the care of adults other than their parents. The key to providing equity and opportunity for young children at risk is ensuring the highest possible quality in our ECD system. Unfortunately, they are not getting that kind of quality. In fact, most of the care that children receive outside their homes is rated fair to poor. Today's working families deserve the support and assurance of high-quality ECD programs that will give their children a fair shot at economic opportunity.

With clear evidence supporting the need for and value of high-quality ECD programs, KIDS COUNT, PIECES and *A Vision Shared* set out to learn more about West Virginia's ECD system and assess whether the political will exists to improve quality and get those high economic returns. The essay below details the findings of our year-long assessment of West Virginia's ECD policies and the political landscape for new investments in quality.

Policy Matters: The State of West Virginia's Early Child Development System

How do West Virginia's policies compare to the national gold standard of quality?

To determine the state of West Virginia's existing ECD policies, KIDS COUNT engaged Dr. Sharon Lynn Kagan of the Columbia University Teachers College to apply her "Policy Matters" approach to assessing and improving a state's ECD policy framework. Policy Matters provides intensive, state-specific support for developing policies that promote a coherent, quality, accessible and affordable system of early care and education.

For each of the 100+ policies represented within these eight domains and 31 sub-domains (see list at right), members of the West Virginia Policy Matters team assessed the state's current policy level, gave it a numerical ranking and established desired policy levels. The policy assessment took place in the summer of 2006. The complete

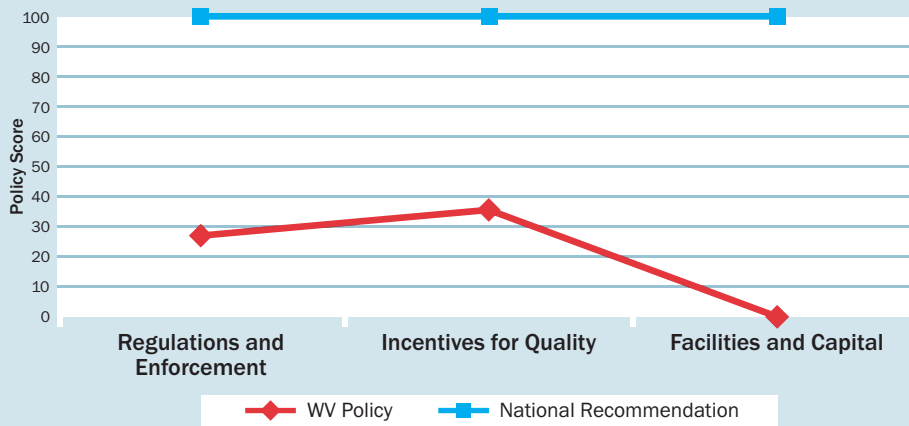
The Policy Matters Domains and Sub-Domains are:

- 1. Quality Early Care and Education (ECE) Settings**
 - A. Regulations and Enforcement
 - B. Incentives for Quality
 - C. Facilities and Capital
- 2. ECE Professional and Workforce Development**
 - A. Qualified Professionals
 - B. Adequate Compensation
 - C. Training System
- 3. Informed Families, Informed Public**
 - A. Family Information and Involvement
 - B. Family Education and Support
 - C. Public Relations
- 4. Accountability & Results Orientation**
 - A. Instructional Assessments
 - B. Program Accountability and Evaluation
 - C. Data on ECE System
- 5. Adequate ECE Financing**
 - A. State-funded Programs
 - B. Subsidy Policies
 - C. Child Care Tax Provisions
 - D. Family Leaves
 - E. Revenue Generation
- 6. Governance and Coordination**
 - A. State and Local Governance Entities
 - B. Family and Community Involvement in Governance
 - C. ECE Planning
 - D. Alignment of ECE with Other Systems
- 7. Education in the Early Grades**
 - A. Kindergarten
 - B. Teacher Certification
 - C. Class Size
 - D. Learning Standards
- 8. Health and Mental Health**
 - A. Health Insurance
 - B. Accessibility of Primary Health Services
 - C. Accessibility of Mental Health Services
 - D. Prevention and Health Education
 - E. Qualified Health/Oral Health/Mental Health Professionals

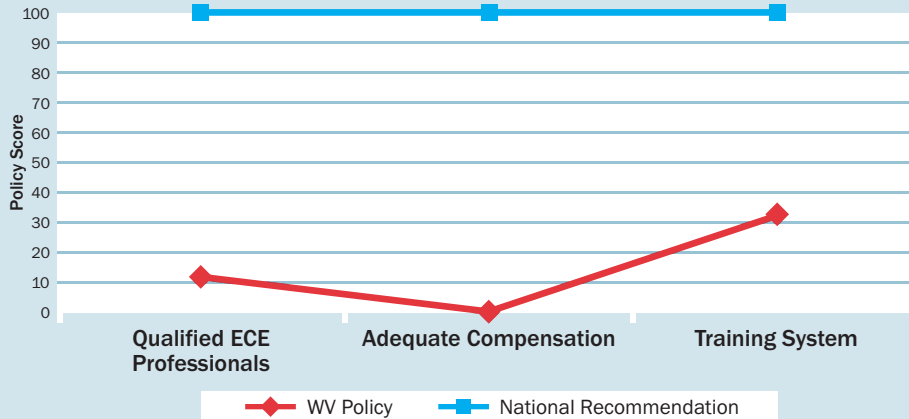
WE ENVISION A COUNTRY WHERE EVERY CHILD HAS THE SAME CHANCE AT PROSPERITY AND HAPPINESS AS EVERY OTHER CHILD, REGARDLESS OF ECONOMIC STATUS.

results are presented below by policy domain. The findings helped bring clarity to areas in which improvement is urgently needed and defined areas in which the state is doing well by national standards. The results of the policy assessment were the basis of the goal- and priority-setting processes and ultimately will be the basis for proposed new policies to improve the quality of West Virginia's ECD system in 2007.

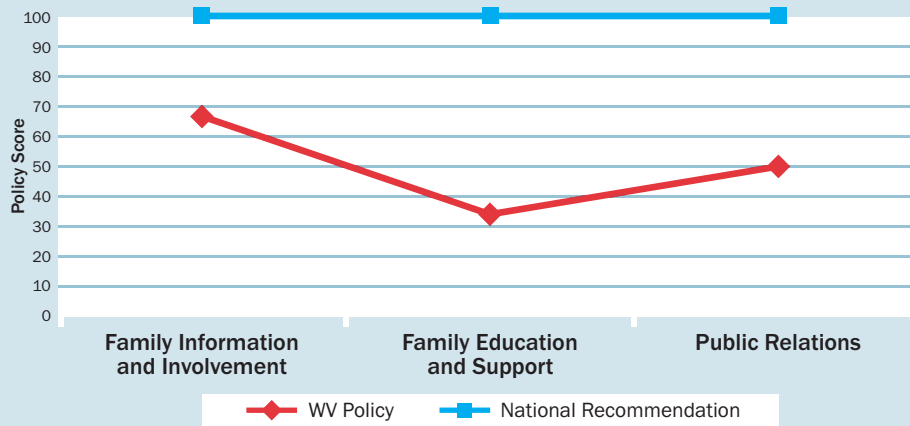
Domain I: Quality Early Care and Educational Settings



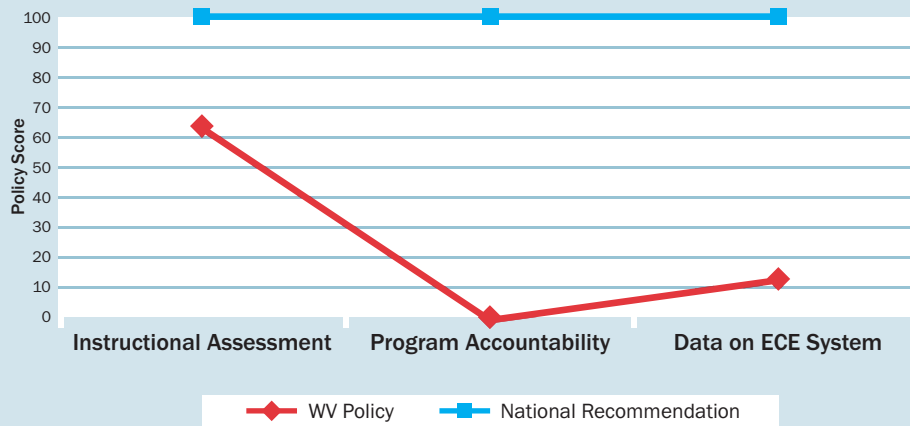
Domain II: Professional & Workforce Development



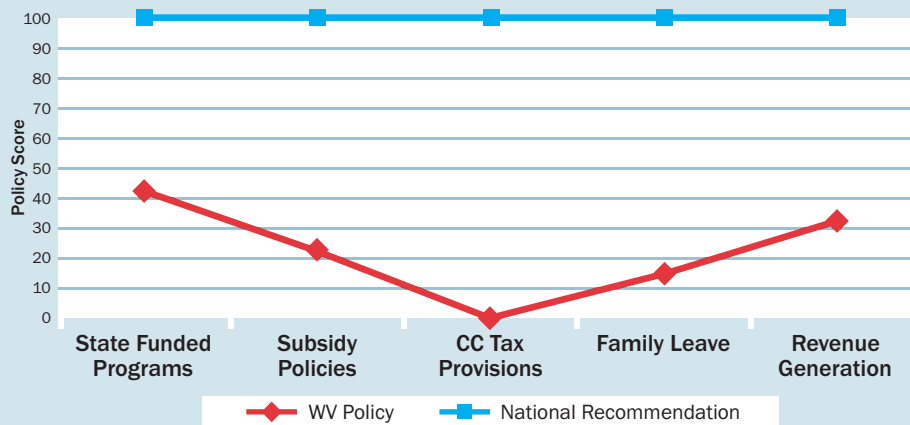
Domain III: Informed Families, Informed Public



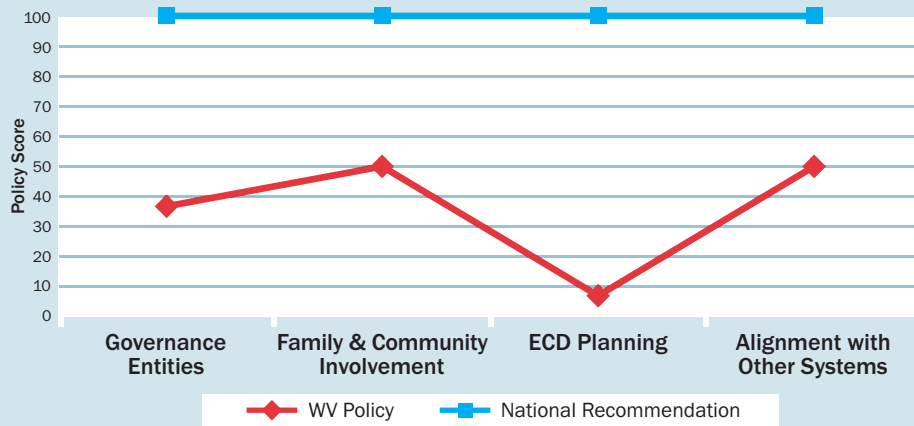
Domain IV: Accountability & Results Orientation



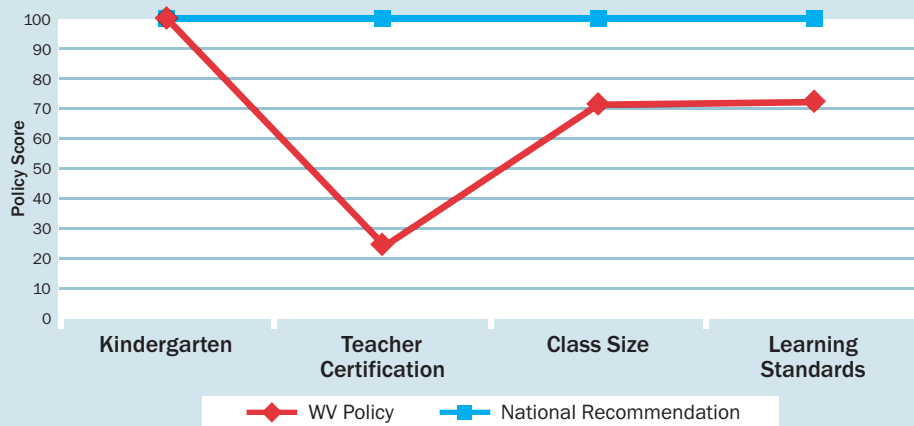
Domain V: Adequate ECE Financing



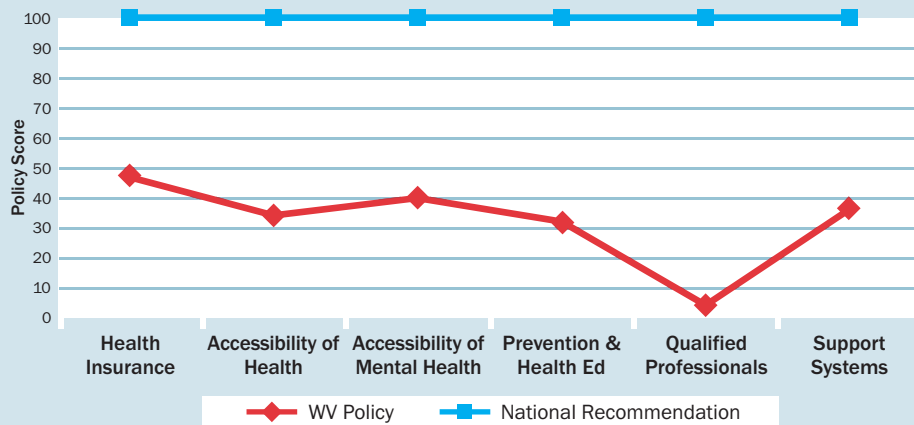
Domain VI: Governance & Coordination



Domain VII: Education in the Early Grades



Domain VIII: Health and Mental Health



Analysis of Findings

There were a number of key findings from the subdomain policy analysis. First, the subdomains in which West Virginia's ECE policies ranked highest were (from highest to lowest):

- Kindergarten
- K-3 Learning Standards
- K-3 Class Size
- Family Information and Involvement
- ECE Instructional Assessment

The relatively higher rankings of these policies likely reflect the state's long history with, and an ongoing investment in, the quality of K-3 education, as well as recent investments in the Pre-K program for 4-year-olds and 3-year-olds with special needs.

The lowest rankings were in the areas of:

- Facilities and Capital
- Adequate Compensation
- Program Accountability
- Child Care Tax Provisions
- ECE Planning
- Qualified Health Professionals

In each of these sub-domains, the current policy level score averaged ten or below on a scale of 100.

There was some good news. West Virginia met the national policy standards on 10 individual policies:

- Resource and Referral Capacity
- Investment in ECE for 3- and 4-year-olds
- Drawing Down Federal ECE Funds
- Alignment with requirements for children with special needs
- Public Provision of Kindergarten
- Full-Day Kindergarten Funding Parity
- Funding for Kindergarten
- Primary Health Services Coverage
- Mental Health Parity
- Drawing Down Federal Health-Related Funds

The state neared the national recommendations on eight policies, including:

- Differential Reimbursement to ECE Programs
- General Parenting Information
- Public Information Reporting and Dissemination
- ECE Instructional Assessment
- Exemptions from TANF Work Requirements
- Class Size in Grades 1-3
- Kindergarten Learning Standards
- Grades 1-3 Learning Standards

In each of the eight domains, current policy scores varied widely across the sub-domains. This variation likely means some sub-domains have been easier to address (due to federal or state priorities, available funding, stakeholder interest, etc.) The variation also means it will be difficult to work toward uniform policy change across the entire system.

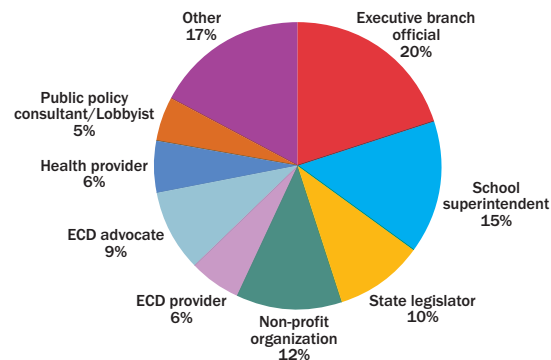
Six of the 10 policies that met national recommendations are in Domain 7, Education in the Early Grades, and Domain 8, Health and Mental Health. Three of the five sub-domains with the highest current policy scores are in the Education in the Early Grades domain. This clustering of high scores reflects a stronger policy effort in non-ECE systems and demonstrates how resource allocation directly affects system quality.

Understanding The Political Landscape

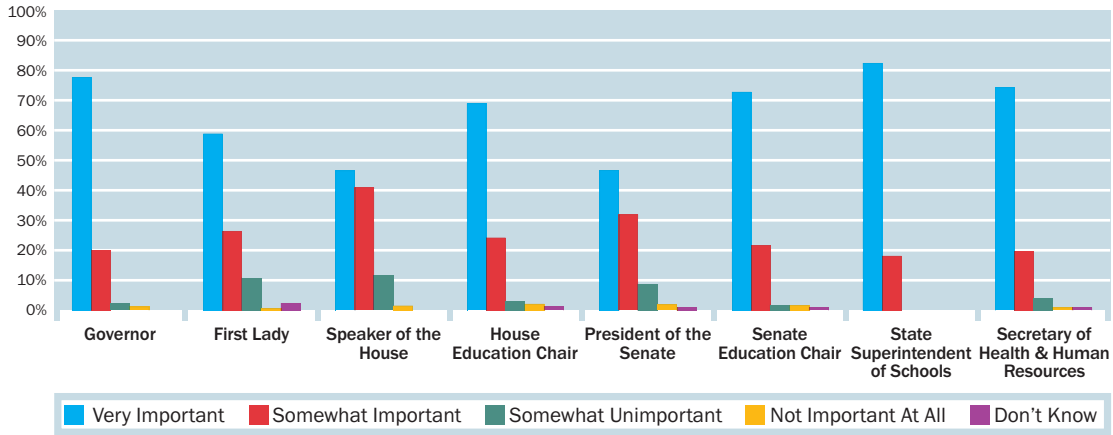
Knowing where you stand on the policies is only the first step in the journey toward ECD quality. To truly know the starting point, it is also critical to understand the political landscape. Successfully moving the issue into the public agenda requires an intimate understanding of the way advocates, policymakers, opinion leaders and the public think about early child development. Do they believe it is important to the state’s future? Do they agree that **every** child needs the best possible start? Are they willing to make public investments in quality? The answers to these questions will dictate how far we are able to move forward and exactly what it will take to move public opinion from where it is to where it needs to be. Toward that end, Dr. Kagan and her team at Columbia conducted an assessment of West Virginia’s political landscape. Their purpose was to analyze the unique capacity of political institutions; assess strengths, capacities, and potentials of individuals, organizations, and resources; and identify promising strategies for achieving politically and economically feasible policy change.

In terms of population demographics, West Virginia has a number of notable indicators that influence the political landscape. The state is 95% non-Hispanic white and has the lowest percentage of immigrant families in the nation. The median household income ranks 50th, and the poverty rate among children is the 5th highest in the nation. West Virginia has the lowest percent of adults over age 25 with a bachelor’s degree (17%). The state has the most powerful governor in the nation, in terms of both constitutional power and personal influence. On the other hand, the part-time nature of the West Virginia Legislature ranks it below the national average in terms of its level of professionalization. With respect to economics and taxes, West Virginia’s personal income tax ranks 36th; its corporate income tax ranks 10th; its property tax ranks 45th; and state and local sales taxes rank 43rd in the nation. *(Note: West Virginia has amended its sales and corporate tax rates and that change will affect these rankings in future years.)* In fiscal year 2006, general revenues were \$67 million higher than expected. Finally, regarding the state’s annual investment in children, West Virginia spends \$6,000 per child enrolled in K-12, \$4,323 per child enrolled in pre-K, and \$33 per child on programs for birth to three.

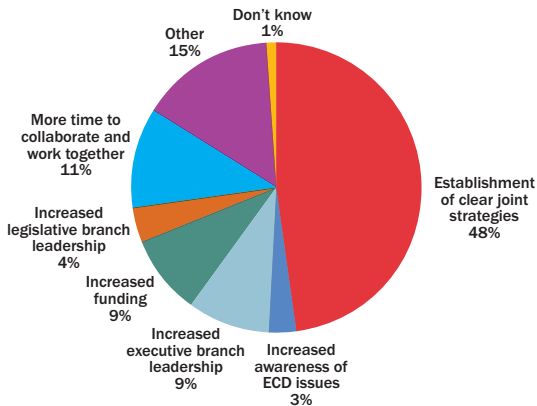
In addition to identifying the structural political influences, Columbia University conducted a web-based survey of key ECD stakeholders in West Virginia. The survey was e-mailed to 373 recipients with a 25% response rate. The diverse categories of respondents, by percentage, are presented in the chart to the right.



When asked about the importance of the active involvement of political officials and state department leadership to the advancement of new investments in ECD, respondents identified the State Superintendent of Schools, the Governor, the Secretary of Health and Human Resources and the Senate Education Chair as being most critical. The full results are presented in the chart below.



ECD policy often crosses state agency lines, most often in the form of collaboration between the Department of Education and the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources. When asked what would most strengthen the working relationship between these two agencies, 48% of respondents said the establishment of clear joint strategies. The complete results of that question are presented in the chart below.



When respondents were asked about the level of involvement of other key stakeholders in the effort to improve the ECD system, the majority said ECD is not a priority for business groups (71%), legislators (69%), civic groups (66%), organized labor (62%) or law enforcement (61%). Turf issues were identified as the biggest barrier for getting ECD providers involved in the effort, while child advocates and foundations were seen as very involved in the effort (42% and 38% respectively).

A key component of the survey addressed potential funding sources for new ECD investments. When asked to identify potential funding sources, 82% of respondents said federal funding, 79% said dedicated sources (such as lottery revenues), and 73% said investment from the private sector. When asked to identify preferred funding sources, 26% said non-tax sources, 24% said federal funding, and 17% said new general public revenue. Re-allocation of existing state resources was the least preferred funding option among those surveyed.

In terms of the political context for improving the quality and accountability of West Virginia's ECD system, the Policy Matters Team concluded that:

- 1) the Governor can and should play a central role in influencing ECD policy;
- 2) successful interagency collaboration will require clear strategies for joint priority setting;
- 3) there is a clear need for a public communications strategy targeted to key stakeholders;
- 4) it is important to identify sources of funding, particularly new and alternative sources; and
- 5) pre-Kindergarten has great momentum, but West Virginia needs to find ways to expand attention to the broader scope of ECD, particularly in the years from birth to three.

Figuring out the starting point – in terms of both policy and politics – was a difficult but important first step in the journey to ECD quality. The next critical step is deciding exactly where we want to go. With an unprecedented commitment to teamwork and consensus, advocates, policymakers and opinion leaders are identifying the key policies that will quickly and efficiently get us from where we are to where we want to be in terms of the quality of our children's earliest learning experiences. In 2007, KIDS COUNT, PIECES and *A Vision Shared* will build support for new investment in ECD programs and propose ECD legislation to develop a comprehensive strategy to improve early education. Finally, in 2008, we will propose a focus on the policy priorities recommended by the Policy Matters Project with Lynn Kagan.

If you are interested in joining the effort to improve the quality of West Virginia's ECD system, contact KIDS COUNT at 1-888-KIDSCOUNT (1-888-543-7268) or visit our website at www.wvkidscountfund.org. Getting from where we stand to where we want to be will require the commitment of **every** West Virginian. We look forward to having your support as we make the journey toward a high-quality ECD system.