

Dear Colleague,

In a shifting world of educational agendas, community needs, and scientific discoveries, it can be hard to keep abreast of all the new developments. In this issue of NHSA's *News and Research Blast*, you'll read about how Common Core standards and direct instruction are influencing early education; how hunger and stress in the communities we serve affect children's development; and how research continues to demonstrate powerful long-term effects for Head Start children. I hope you find these articles meaningful and informative and welcome your feedback as to how we might make it even more useful; contact Emmalie Dropkin (edropkin@nhsa.org) with your thoughts.

We've also had a request for Head Start staff involvement in some preliminary research to help the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America create a national education program around classroom environments to meet the needs of preschool children with asthma. We invite you to tell the Asthma and Allergy Foundation (AAFA) what you think in their brief, anonymous online survey. Click the following link to respond: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/WY2F6RB>. The survey will close February 3rd.

And now, on to the research!

#### Common Core Poses Challenges for Preschools

*by Jaclyn Zubrzycki in Education Week*

In recent years there's been a push throughout early childhood to make preschool more academic, and this article from Education Week takes a look at a range of opinions on the Common Core Standards that are being introduced for K-12 education and what their impact on early childhood education might be. Even as the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework has been aligned to the Common Core, there are many perspectives on how best to interpret and apply Common Core elements for young children. In this piece, experts from across the field of early childhood education comment on the difficulties of creating developmentally appropriate academic curricula for 3 and 4 year olds, as well as the problems with using teaching and testing styles designed to fit older children.

#### The Death of Preschool

*by Paul Tullis in Scientific American Mind*

In a scientific response to many of the issues raised in the *Education Week* article, this piece explores research on children's learning through play and how that learning is impacted by increases in direct instruction that leaves no room for creativity and exploration. Of particular note is the mention that among the children in the HighScope early education study, there was a dramatically higher rate of emotional problems, arrests, and special education needs for students

in an academic preschool compared to one that focused on play. Both the science and the history in this article are important keys to the conversation about where Head Start and the field of early childhood education is heading.

### Early Childhood Intervention and Life-Cycle Skill Development: Evidence from Head Start

*By David Deming in American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*

This 2009 article by David Deming of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard has some very powerful data about the long-term outcomes of Head Start participation. Deming uses a set of data collected from the National Longitudinal Mother-Child Supplement collected from 1986-2004. To find the effects of Head Start he compares children within families to their siblings who did not attend the program. While the statistics are complex, Deming's conclusions are powerful: Head start increases outcomes by .228 standard deviations compared to no preschool, which closes the bottom to median income gap by a third and the racial achievement gap by three quarters. Such outcomes occur in spite of fadeout in academic test scores and are strongest for the most disadvantaged children.

All in all, Deming finds that Head Start provides 80% of the effects of the well known early childhood programs Perry Preschool and Abecedarian at 60% of the cost.

In terms of particular benefits, Deming's results showed Head Start students are:

- 8.5% more likely to graduate high school (and 17% more likely for children of mothers with low cognitive scores)
- 6% more likely to go to at least one year of college
- 7% less likely to be "idle" - meaning out of school and unemployed
- 7% less likely to be in poor health

### Household Food Insecurity: Serious Concerns for Child Development

*by Barbara H. Fiese, Craig Gundersen, Brenda Koester, and LaTasha Washington for the Society for Research in Policy Development Social Policy Report*

It is no surprise to anyone working with low-income communities that food insecurity among households with children has increased over the last few years, but the data is still staggering: more than 1 in 5 children were food insecure during 2009, and those numbers have no doubt climbed since. In this policy report, the authors explore the physical, psychosocial and academic outcomes for children who live with hunger, over the course of their lifetimes. The first three years, They also identify three mechanisms for these effects: (1) direct health effects of inadequate nutrition, (2) increased maternal stress and depression leading to poor child development and (3) persistent chaos and stress. The report goes on to thoroughly explore the various forms of public and private food assistance programs in a summary that may be a useful tool for presenting the range of resources to staff or parents.

In the Commentaries that accompany the report, Gladys Haynes, Executive Director of Educare of Omaha, describes her program's response to food insecurity rising in the community. This commentary and the report as a whole offer a starting point for brainstorming for Head Start programs looking for new ways to address issues of hunger.

Social regulation of the cortisol levels in early human development

*by Megan Gunnar and Bonny Donzella of the Institute of Child Development, University of Minnesota in Psychoneuroendocrinology*

While the journal title may be difficult to pronounce, work being done in the field of neuroscience is becoming more and more relevant to early childhood education. In this article about the circumstances in which infants' and toddlers' brains produce the stress chemical cortisol, findings provide undeniable scientific support for long-held best practices of working with young children. The authors found that for babies with stable parental relationships, production of stress hormones was far lower than in adults, but for babies without stable environments production was higher--especially when those children were with unresponsive childcare providers or large classrooms that called for social skills the children hadn't developed. This paper reveals the foundation of why children, especially at-risk children, are more successful in childcare and education settings with high adult-child ratios and smaller numbers of children. While these practices seem intuitive to Head Start providers, having the science to justify them makes an even stronger case for what we do.