

Early Childhood Development: Issues and Lessons from the U.S.



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Points to discuss

- U.S. context for ECD
- Issues/Lessons
 - Integration of care and education
 - Birth to Five system development
 - Comprehensive ECD services
 - Changing definition of standards
 - Appropriate role of assessment
 - New Messengers
 - Leadership development



Children under age five

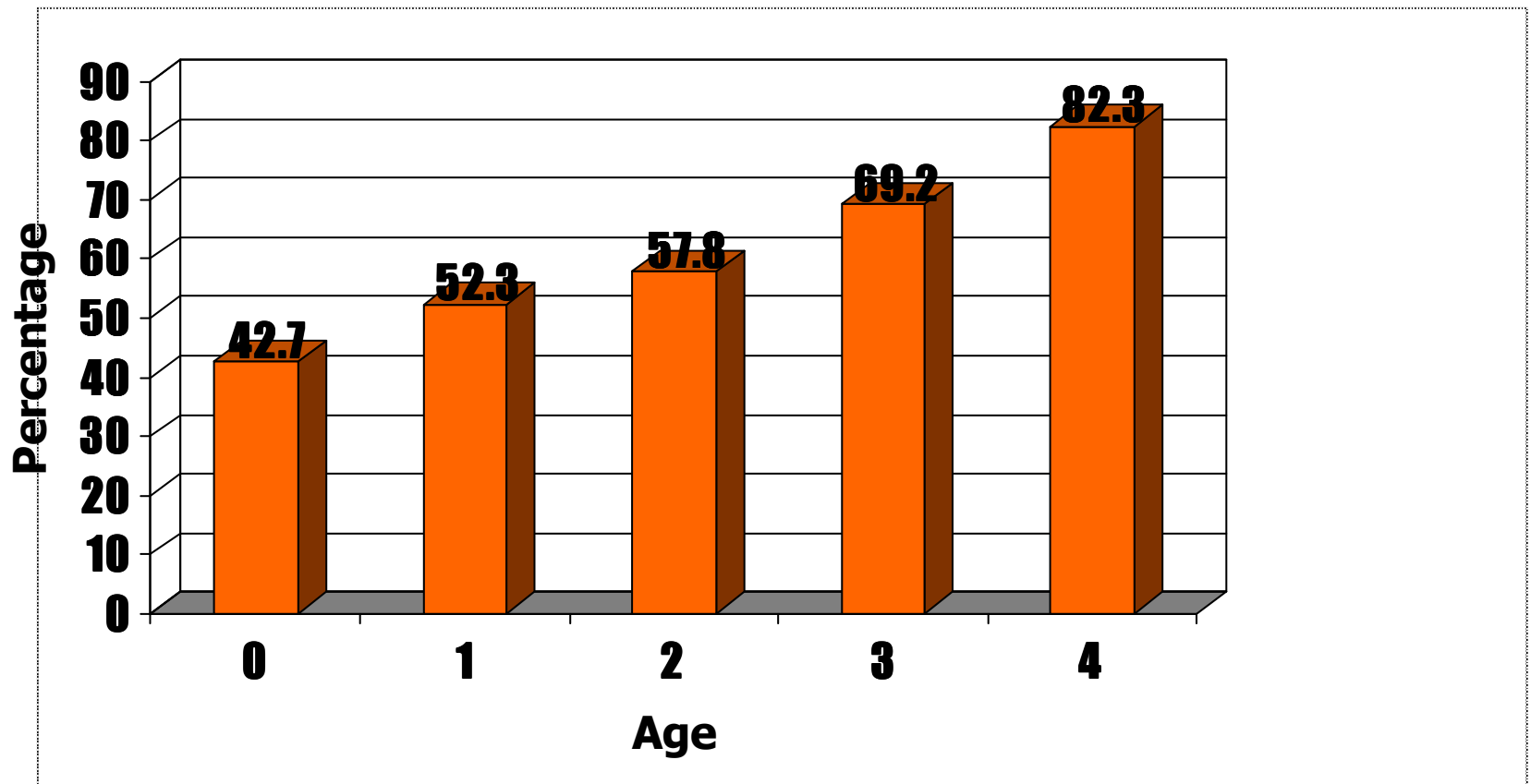
- 4 million births a year
- 19 million young children
- Approximately 3.5 million young children live in poverty
- Increasingly diverse population
- Approximately 2 out of 3 young children spend time in child care on a regular basis



What is ECD in the U.S.

- Head Start (federal grants to programs, mostly 3-4 year olds, comprehensive services, targeted to low income)
- State Prek (grants to programs, 3-4, education focused, some targeted, some universal)
- Child Care (0-13-vouchers)
- Home visiting/parenting programs

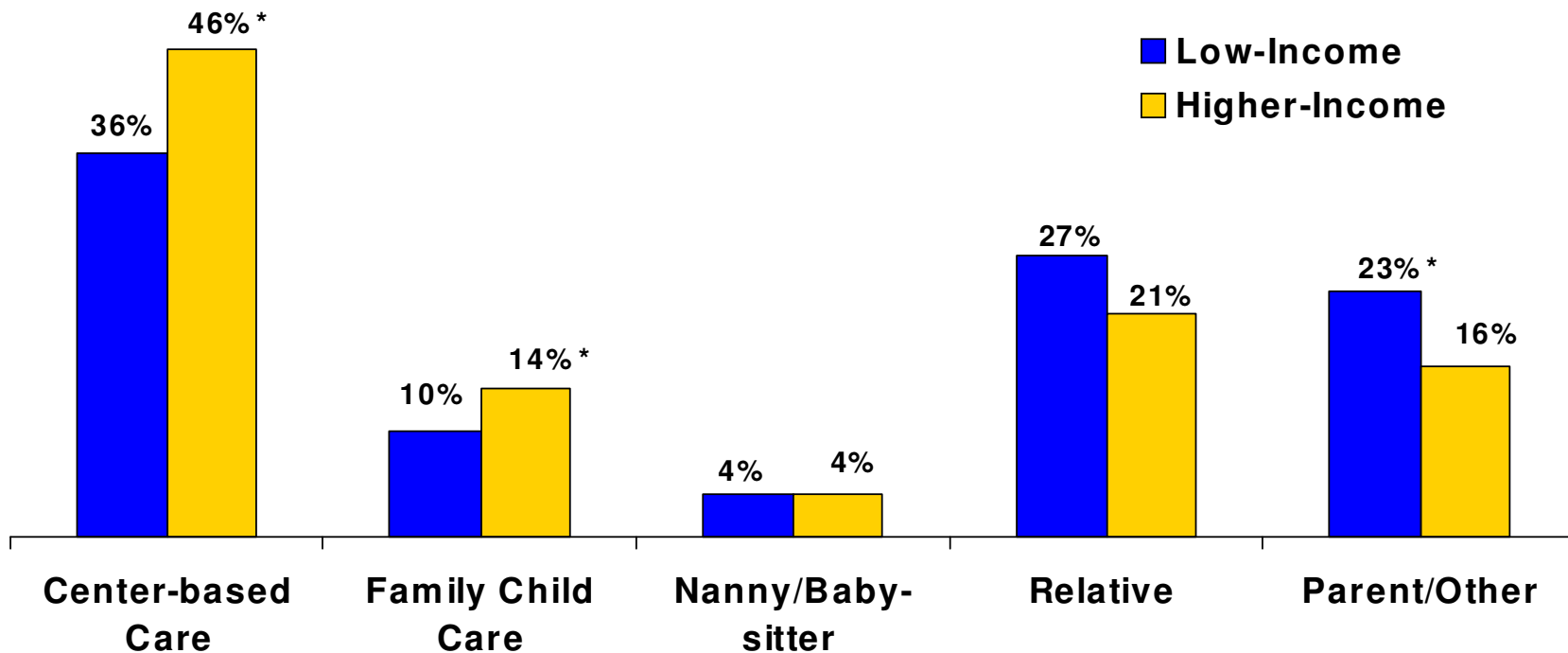
Percentage of children in care



SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, (2001). *National Household Education Survey of 1999 Data Files*.

Primary Child Care Arrangements of 3- and 4-Year-Olds

Primary Child Care Arrangements of 3- and 4- year olds with Working Mothers by Income, 2002



Low-income is defined as below 200 percent of the poverty threshold and higher-income as 200 percent or above.

*Estimate for low-income children is significantly different from estimate for higher-income children.

Source: Urban Institute calculations from the National Survey of America's Families.



Issues and Lessons

1. **Integration of *care and education***

These have been seen as separate in the U.S. historically, although changing

- parents / children
- fee / free
- targeted / universal

Lesson

Develop program and services that address both the needs of working families and the developmental needs of children



2. Birth to five

Two approaches have been taken

Pre-k 3-4

0-5 community planning (North Carolina Smart Start; California; First Five)

Lessons:

- For low income children, must start early to prevent the achievement gap
- Community 0-5 initiatives Increases involvement of a range of players, allows you to address a wide range of settings. However must ensure some intensity of service or you will not get strong results.



3. ECD as a hub of support for comprehensive services

Too often early education programs have not been designed to provide for the comprehensive needs of children and families (health, education, family support)

Lesson: Either build comprehensive programs that meet standards for health, education, and parent involvement and family services and/or develop a hub in a community that can link health and family services to ECD providers



4. Changing definition of standards

What we mean by standards has been changing

- licensing (health and safety)
- program standards (inputs)
- learning standards (outcomes)

Lesson: *Standards should address both what the program looks like and expectations for children*



5. Assessment

The role of assessment has been changing, but much confusion and debate continues

Screening

Assessment to guide curriculum

Assessment as one piece of information in program monitoring

K readiness assessment as one indication of how communities are doing

Lessons: Address all domains; provide clear guidance on various uses of assessment; avoid high stakes: placement, funding decisions.



6. New champions

New champions emerging: business, law enforcement, health, faith community, elders, parents

Lessons: New allies are effective messengers-
Examples from the U.S

Committee for Economic Development

Corporate Voices for Working Families

Economists

Individual business leaders (Federal Reserve, PNC Bank)

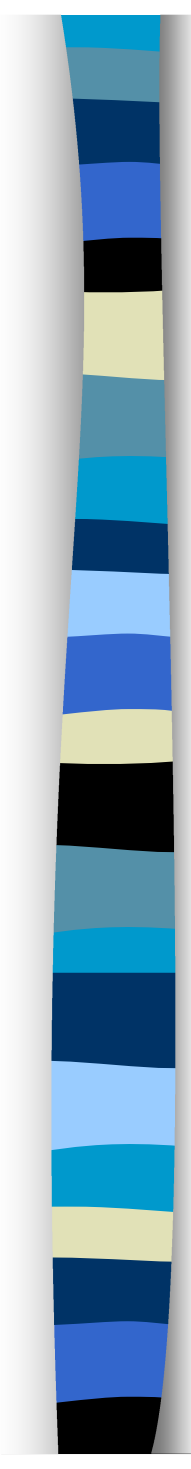


7. Leadership development

Leadership needs continues as the field grows and people retire

Lesson: plan for leadership development

- Young leaders
- Diverse leaders
- Leaders across program types
- Leaders that understand practice, policy, research, communication



“The real question is how to use the available funds wisely. The best evidence supports the policy prescription: Invest in the Very Young”

James J. Heckman, PhD

Nobel Laureate in Economic Sciences, 2000