



# **What Research Is Needed for Effective Policymaking in Early Childhood?:**

## **A Few Thoughts/Suggestions**

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# Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy

- ◆ A nonprofit, nonpartisan organization.
- ◆ Mission: To increase government effectiveness through rigorous evidence about “what works.”
- ◆ Independent assessment found: Coalition has been “instrumental” in advancing evidence-based reforms.
- ◆ Coalition has no affiliation with any programs or program models – thus serves as an objective, independent resource on evidence-based programs.
- ◆ Funded independently, by MacArthur, WT Grant, and Clark Foundations.

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Much of the conventional wisdom about  
“what works” is probably wrong

Specifically:

- ◆ Much of what is thought to work probably does not, or has weak effects.
- ◆ Findings of true effectiveness exist, but tend to be the exception.

This pattern occurs in many different fields  
(e.g., medicine, psychology, social policy).

# Example of rigorous research having a major impact on social policy:

- ◆ **Nurse Home Visitation** –

  - By age 15, produced 40-70% reductions in child abuse/neglect, & criminal arrests of children/mothers, vs controls

- ◆ **President's FY10 budget** – includes \$8.6 billion over ten years to scale up

- ◆ **HHS evidence-based home visitation program** – established by Congress in 2008 (\$13.5 million in 09).

## Examples of medical wisdom overturned by well-implemented randomized controlled trials

- ◆ Intensive efforts to lower blood sugar of diabetics to normal levels (increases risk of death)
- ◆ Hormone replacement therapy for post-menopausal women (increases risk of stroke and heart disease for many women)
- ◆ Dietary fiber to prevent colon cancer (shown ineffective)
- ◆ Stents to open clogged arteries (shown no better than drugs for most heart patients).

## Examples from medicine, continued

- ◆ Having babies sleep on their stomachs (increases risk of SIDS)
- ◆ Beta-carotene and vitamin E supplements (“anti-oxidants”) to prevent cancer (ineffective or harmful)
- ◆ Oxygen-rich environment for premature infants (increases risk of blindness)
- ◆ Recent promising AIDS vaccines (found to double risk of AIDS infection)
- ◆ Bone marrow transplants for women with advanced breast cancer (ineffective)

Same pattern occurs in social policy –  
Examples or randomized trials showing weak or  
no effects (or adverse effects):

- ◆ **DOL's "New Chance" Demonstration Program**, for teenage welfare mothers and their children.
- ◆ **Even Start family literacy program** for low-income families.
- ◆ **Many home visitation programs** (e.g., HHS Comprehensive Child Development Program).
- ◆ **21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers** -- after-school activities in high-poverty schools.
- ◆ **NYC Vouchers for disadvantaged youth** (K-4) for private school.

## Illustrative examples, continued:

- ◆ **15 leading educational software products** -- for teaching K-12 reading and math
- ◆ **4 HHS-funded abstinence education programs,** in grades 3-8
- ◆ **Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE)** – School-based substance-abuse prevention
- ◆ **Many other Substance-Abuse Prevention programs** (e.g., Project Alert)
- ◆ **Job Corps** (academic & vocational training for disadvantaged youth age 16-24).

## Illustrative examples, continued:

- ◆ **Summer Training & Employment Program** (summer jobs & academic classes to 14-15 yr olds).
- ◆ **Job Training Partnership Act** (workforce training for adults and youth). Randomized evaluation of 16 sites that volunteered for the study.
- ◆ **Upward Bound** (provides instruction, tutoring, counseling starting 9-10 grade).
- ◆ **ED's dropout prevention programs** (middle and high school).
- ◆ **A Widely-Used Teacher Professional Development Program ("LETRS")**, incorporating key elements of scientifically-based reading research.

## Illustrative examples, continued:

- ◆ **Two Widely-Used Teacher Induction Programs** (providing new teachers in grades 2-6 with intensive mentoring by experienced, exemplary teachers)
- ◆ **DOL Quantum Opportunity Program** (intensive youth development incl mentoring, tutoring)
- ◆ **Center for Employment Training replication** (training in work-like setting for out-of-school youth)
- ◆ **Scared Straight** (brings delinquent youth into prison for rap sessions with prisoners)

## Possible lessons:

- ◆ Pressing policy need: Research that grows the number of research-proven interventions.
- ◆ Cost-benefit studies: Can play a key role in –
  - n Making a persuasive case for those found highly effective (e.g., nurse home visitation); and/or
  - n Policy decisions about interventions that are effective but costly (e.g., Infant Health & Development Program).