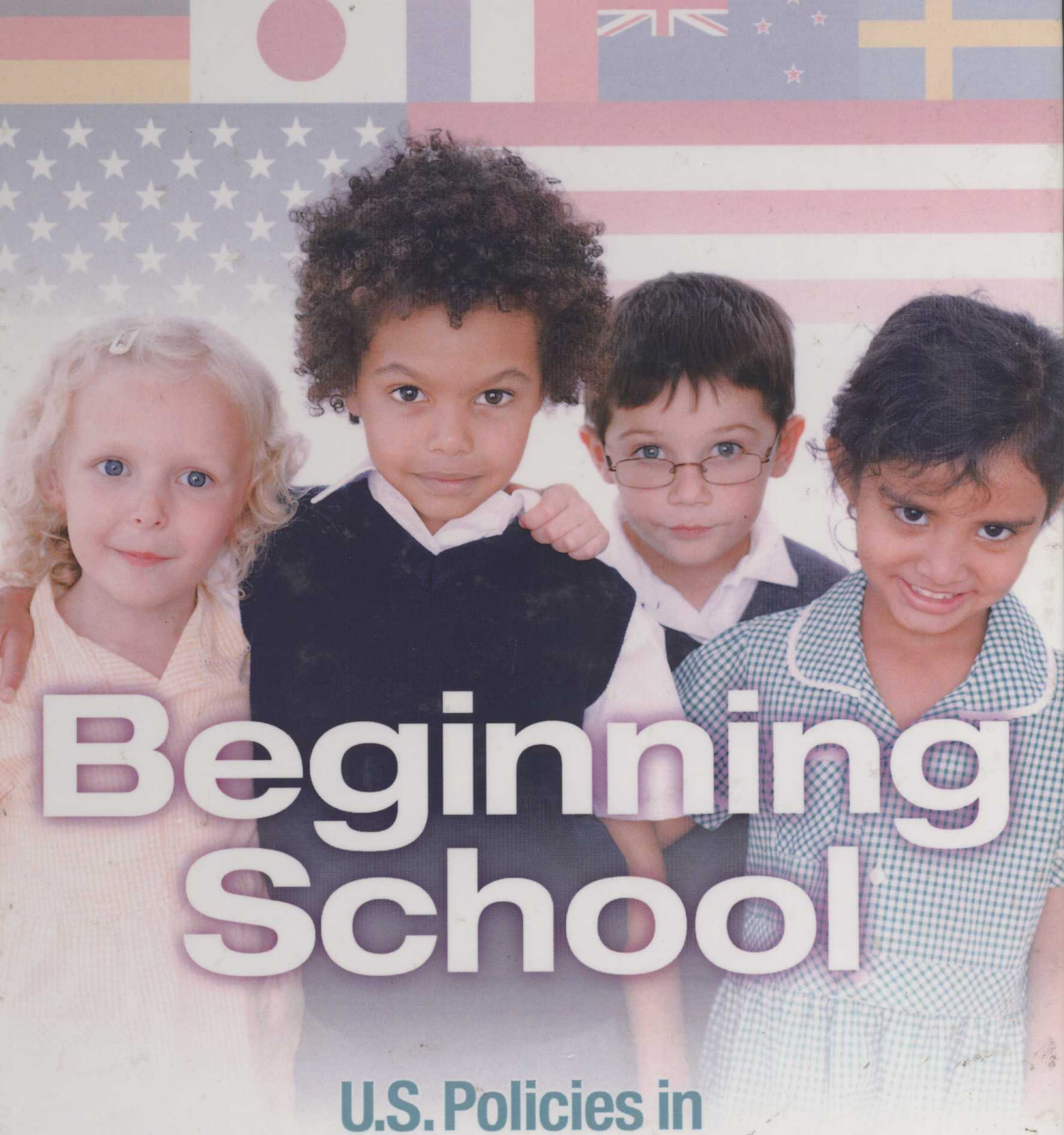

Beginning School

U.S. Policies in International Perspective

EDITED BY
Richard M. Clifford
AND Gisele M. Crawford

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Introduction

In the United States we have experienced an ongoing evolution in the population served in public schools. Since the founding days of the republic, schooling has gradually expanded to serve both boys and girls, as well as children of all racial and ethnic origins. During the last half of the 20th century, public schools gradually increased the number of children who were offered kindergarten placement at age 5. During roughly this same period of time, the United States experienced a major shift in women's participation in the paid labor force and, as a result, a major increase in the need for care for children under 6 (Blau & Currie, 2004; Fullerton, 1999). Private nonprofit and for-profit entities met most of the demand. The public schools, however, also filled part of this need. Combined with new information on the extent of learning that occurs prior to age 6, highlighted by what has become known as "brain research," schools in the United States have increasingly begun serving children prior to kindergarten.

Many public schools are adding pre-kindergarten classes for 4-year-olds, sometimes including 3-year-old children as well. Examining national data sources, Clifford and colleagues (1999) estimated that nearly one million children were being served in school settings prior to kindergarten. This figure represents nearly one-fourth of the 4-year-olds in the United States. In surveys of state officials, the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) found that state-funded pre-K programs served some 943,000 children in 2005–2006, two-thirds of whom were served in public schools (Barnett, Hustedt, Hawkinson, & Robin, 2006). If locally supported programs, programs specifically for children with special needs, and Head Start programs in the schools are counted, clearly many more than one million children are now in school before they start kindergarten.

The result of all these changes is that the United States has been expanding eligibility for public school both to serve a broader spectrum of the school-age population–essentially moving to true universal access for the kindergarten through grade 12 age groups–and expanding the age eligibility downward by at least 1 year. If this trend continues, in the foreseeable future, age 3 may become the typical age of entry into school in this country. The inclusion of younger children in public schools comes at "a time of unprecedented interest in identifying, deepening, and exploiting the connections between early childhood

and elementary education" (Pianta, 2007, p. 5). Educators are paying increasing attention to the alignment of educational experiences for children from ages 3 through 8 in developmental as well as academic terms (Ritchie, Maxwell, & Bredekamp, in press).

Much attention has been paid to the broadening of education services to include the full population of age-eligible children (Urban & Wagoner, 2000), but less has been written about the downward extension of school. This downward extension, while driven by the societal forces described above, has not really been considered broadly as part of the move toward truly universal access to education, and little attention has been given to the philosophical, social, and educational implications of the change we are experiencing in our delivery of education to children starting at age 3. This is not the case in several other economically advantaged countries in the world, where early education is fully viewed as a part of the life-long education of the citizenry.

Early education in the United States has been greatly influenced by philosophers, theorists, and researchers from around the world. Froebel, Montessori, Piaget, and Vygotsky are all names that are well known by professionals in early education here. We have borrowed heavily from these and many others as we seek to provide high-quality early learning experiences for our children. There is much to learn from the rest of the world regarding the age of entry into school and the general historical and social forces that have led to the decisions in their countries concerning the education of young children. To help fill this void, we commissioned five international scholars to describe the situation in their countries related to early schooling, and to place them in the context of the historical and social forces that influenced the current situation.

We chose countries based on several criteria. We restricted our selection to countries that are relatively comparable to the United States in terms of economic development. We then further targeted countries that had recently examined or were in the process of examining the linkages between settings serving children from 3 to 8 years old. Finally, from a pragmatic viewpoint, we selected countries where we were able to identify scholars with competence in the area of interest. We did not provide them with a clearly defined set of points that we wanted covered in their chapters, but chose to let them identify the critical issues and decisions from within their own countries' perspectives. Thus each chapter intentionally covers somewhat different ground.

We are delighted that we were able to identify five eminently capable individuals to prepare chapters and to come to the United States to discuss the forces that have shaped decisions in their countries. Dr. Hans-Guenther Rossbach of Bamberg University in Germany describes the very long tradition of serving young children in Germany, the impact of the fall of the Berlin Wall, and other influences on early education in his country. In contrast, Dr. Reiko Uzuhashi of Kobe Women's University in Japan describes the impact of a changing economic

situation and major changes in the age distribution of the population in Japan on thinking about early care and education. Dr. Michael Gaffney of the University of Otago highlights the issues of culture in the development of early education in New Zealand, and describes efforts to preserve a diverse array of options for families while centralizing aspects of oversight and funding. Dr. Véronique Francis of the Université Paris X–Nanterre traces the history and identity of French primary schools, and describes strategies for preserving the philosophy and traditions of the *école maternelle* (for children ages 2 to 6) while creating stronger linkages with elementary schools and smoother transitions for children. Dr. Inge Johansson of Stockholm University describes Sweden's incorporation of all of education, from birth through adulthood, under one Ministry of Education, preserving age 7 as the start of compulsory schooling but striving for greater linkages between preschool and school to achieve a seamless educational experience.

In addition, we have prepared chapters documenting briefly the history of early education and care in the United States; describing the forces in our country that are compelling us to examine when, where, and how children begin school; and comparing how the six countries have approached similar challenges, as well as identifying some of the unique features of each. We write this book with the hope that we can learn from the long histories and traditions of other countries as we transform the way we educate and care for young children.

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Contents

CHAPTER 1

Early Education in the United States

Converging Systems, Diverse Perspectives

GISELE M. CRAWFORD
RICHARD M. CLIFFORD
DIANE M. EARLY
STEPHANIE S. RESZKA

> They [Americans] have all a lively faith in the perfectibility of man [*sic*], they judge that the diffusion of knowledge must necessarily be advantageous, and the consequences of ignorance fatal; they all consider society as a body in a state of improvement, humanity as a changing scene, in which nothing is, or ought to be, permanent; and they admit that what appears to them today to be good, may be superseded by something better tomorrow.
>
> —Alexis de Tocqueville, 1945, pp. 409–410

The history of education in the United States is characterized by movements to expand access to a high-quality education to more children (Cuban, 1990). European colonists in the 17th and 18th centuries initiated a wide variety of independent efforts to educate children and establish schools. In the 19th century, widespread efforts were under way to firmly establish public schooling as an institution and to increase access to school for the lower classes, although most schools remained racially segregated. In the middle of the 20th century, the inherent inequities in the "separate but equal" doctrine of schooling for Black children were recognized by courts, which forced the desegregation of schools. In the latter part of the century, activism on behalf of children with disabilities achieved gains in the provision of appropriate and inclusive services. The need to provide equitable education opportunities to diverse populations remains an issue to this day. See Chapter 2 for a historical overview of early education in the United States and a review of the current policy landscape.

Recently, the drive to promote the success of all children in the United States has focused more and more on educational experiences starting at birth. Research demonstrating the power of high-quality early education experiences to bridge the gap in achievement between students of different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds has generated attention from state- and national-level policymakers and resulted in increased government funding and oversight of early childhood programs. In Chapter 2 we document this major shift toward increasing public involvement in education for children under 5, at both the federal and state level. This trend has implications not only in terms of funding and governance, but also in terms of which specific institutions and professionals deliver these services and, ultimately, the experiences of children and families.

While increased public investment may be benefiting families and society through wider access to higher-quality early education programs, it has created a period of transition for the early childhood community. As in many countries, services for preschool-aged children in the United States are provided by an array of public and private providers arising from different traditions and supported by a mix of funding streams, including parent fees (Clifford, 1995) (see Chapter 2). Most parents must pay for their child's preschool or child care; the cost of full-day care can be as much as $1,000 per month. While there have been many disadvantages to this "non-system" in terms of inequitable access to affordable and high-quality services, historically this disorganization has permitted the existence of an early childhood community with a culture rooted more in ideas about human development and family support than in rating the abilities of individuals, and focused more on children's immediate well-being than on promoting future achievement. As the worlds of early childhood and primary school converge, the challenge will be to preserve the best practices and values of each. To do this, we, as a society, must determine what we want schools for young children to do for them and for society as a whole, and how best to deliver, regulate, and finance those services.

ALIGNMENT OF CHILDREN'S EDUCATION FROM AGE 3 TO GRADE 3

Approaches to Alignment

Most children in the United States are spending time in a classroom setting by age 3, in settings that range from private for-profit child care to public school, and that receive various public and private funds and varying degrees of oversight (see Chapter 2; Overturf Johnson, 2005). "At this time, the differences between elementary education and early childhood education are far greater than the similarities. For the most part, the systems have different funding streams,

disparate pay scales, incongruent education and training, and unrelated national support" (Ritchie, Maxwell, & Clifford, 2007, p. 87). A variety of initiatives seek to bridge these systems, with the goal of creating smoother transitions for children and families. This adjustment could be a force for true reform in the public education system in the United States.

P–3 Education. School systems in the United States adopt various configurations of grades in their schools, based on the population served, the capacities of existing school buildings within the district, and theories about children's development and when best to present them with major transitions. A common configuration for elementary schools is kindergarten (which typically begins at age 5) through 5th grade (which typically begins at age 10). Many public schools are adding pre-kindergarten classes for 4-year-olds, sometimes including 3-year-old children as well.

Schools have a long way to go to adjust to the substantially different needs of these younger children. As schools have added younger children, there has been growing national interest in an organizational arrangement that groups pre-kindergarten classes in the same schools as classes for children up to age 8. This arrangement is known as a P–3 (pre-kindergarten through third grade) school. This arrangement is designed to ensure that the school system integrates these younger children fully into the school, that the facilities, routines, and educational approaches are appropriate for the needs of the young children, and that the program is integrated through a common set of standards and curricula. The shift to such an arrangement is slow, but appears to be gaining momentum (Bogard & Takanishi, 2005).

Alignment Across Systems. Most 3- and 4-year-olds are still served in non-public school settings. Various initiatives exist at the national level to forge improved connections between early care and education providers and the public schools their young students will attend. The National Education Goals Panel, a bipartisan body of federal and state officials and national leaders in education, identified ten keys to *Ready Schools*: "concrete policies and strategies that schools can introduce or expand, in order to create learning climates for young children from preschool through Grade 3" (Shore, 1998, p. 5). These strategies promote continuity for children and families between their early care and education settings and the schools those children will attend, and challenge schools to alter programs and practices that do not benefit children. Private foundations such as the W. K. Kellogg Foundation have invested heavily in community efforts to create these improved connections and in efforts by national organizations to provide technical assistance to schools and communities in implementing these strategies and evaluating their success (Hohmann, 2004; Ritchie et al., 2007). At the state level, there is a growing recognition that "school readiness"

refers not only to the condition of children when they enter school, but also the capacity of schools to educate all children, whatever each child's condition may be (Maxwell, Bryant, Ridley, & Keyes-Elstein, 2001). For example, in 2007 the North Carolina State Board of Education adopted a definition and pathways for Ready Schools, including ongoing communication between the early care and education community and the schools, and alignment of standards and curricula for children from age 3 to grade 3. The Board recommends that elementary schools incorporate a Ready Schools plan into their state-mandated School Improvement Plan, and that representatives from community early care and education providers be included on that planning team (North Carolina Ready Schools Initiative, n.d.).

Implications of Alignment

Pedagogy. The establishment of free, compulsory public schooling in the United States was driven by economic, social, and political goals. The demand for educated workers with the skills and the disposition to be productive is an obvious impetus. Provision of free and universal education is aligned with cultural ideals regarding individual opportunity and social mobility. Early proponents of education also promoted the powerful political arguments that common educational experiences would promote unity in a diverse society, and that an educated citizenry was essential to the functioning of a democratic republic. Horace Mann exemplified the ideological and political faith of this era, placing public education at the center of a secular paradise (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Public school pedagogy has varied considerably in response to these goals, across time and from school to school. Teacher-centered instruction, characterized by lecture- and textbook-based learning, and student-centered instruction, characterized by student discovery and exploration, have both had strong proponents since the 19th century. Dewey promoted respect for childhood and a child-centered approach to learning: "The problem is to unify, to organize, education to bring all its various factors together, through putting it as a whole into organic union with every day life" (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000, p. 220). Political and economic crises have tended to refocus the public and political leaders on children's mastery of content and skills, their "competitiveness." Larry Cuban describes the debate over classroom pedagogy as a clash of "deeply held values about how teachers should teach, the role of content in classrooms, and how children should learn" (1990, p. 3). Current interest in closing gaps in achievement between different racial and socioeconomic groups has ushered in a new era of accountability and to a great degree revived the pedagogy debate (Brooks-Gunn, Klebanov, & Duncan, 1996; Lee & Burkam, 2002; Smith, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1997).

The convergence of the early childhood and public school communities also adds fuel to this debate. Early childhood pedagogy in the United States

has been influenced by many of the same influential scholars whose work has shaped early care and education around the globe, such as Froebel, Pestalozzi, and Montessori, but also bears the strong imprint of U.S. ideals and values. The social reformers of the 19th century influenced not only the supply but also the nature of early childhood services. The Progressive-era reformers promoted the provision of early education to lower-income and immigrant children as social responsibility, and also as a means of directing social evolution (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Early education was largely associated with poverty until the kindergarten movement introduced a new point of view. "The identification of the kindergarten as a voluntary supplement to upper- and middle-class child rearing rather than a remedial intrusion into lower-class family life had much to do with its acceptance in this country" (Beatty, 1995, p. 52).

The pedagogy and instructional materials of Froebel provided a credible philosophical alternative to academic instruction for young children. Since the 19th century, early childhood educators have promoted the adoption of the same child-centered principles and methods in primary schools as were originally employed only in kindergartens and nursery schools. As free kindergartens became incorporated into public schools, "some school reformers hoped that the kindergarten, with its emphasis on the development of children, would influence the rigid curriculum and instruction prevailing in the elementary schools of the late nineteenth century" (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000, p. 252).

Today, many educators fear that the reverse trend is occurring, that didactic instruction and a focus on content mastery are dominating in kindergarten and reaching into pre-kindergarten and other early childhood settings. Research indicates that the developmental appropriateness of instruction and children's environments decreases from kindergarten to 3rd grade (Maxwell, McWilliam, Hemmeter, Ault, & Schuster, 2001). As a response to this curricular push-down, there is a growing movement to promote the same learning principles valued by early childhood educators–children actively constructing knowledge through hands-on activities, participation in decision-making, and active engagement with peers and teachers–in the primary grades (Palsha et al., 2007).

Teacher Preparation and Credentials. Some teacher preparation programs in the United States are beginning to focus on the developmental continuum experienced by children through age 8 and a recognition that teachers of young children should be prepared to respond to children in developmentally appropriate ways while helping them meet challenging learning goals. Teachers in the United States are licensed by their state to teach specific ages or subjects, and there is growing interest among educators in offering licensures that combine pre-kindergarten with early elementary grades. Pennsylvania, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin offer a pre-K to grade 3 license; Arkansas offers a pre-K through grade 4 license (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2008).

Teachers who work in child care centers and most other settings for children prior to kindergarten have typically not been required to have a 4-year or even a 2-year degree, but in recent years the expectations for these teachers' qualifications have risen dramatically (see Chapter 2). There continues to be some degree of controversy surrounding higher education requirements for early childhood teachers. Teachers who have worked with young children for many years may not possess the resources or the inclination to pursue a formal degree, and while state and local initiatives do exist that support professional development for early childhood teachers, a vastly greater investment would be required to raise the education level of this workforce nationwide. Proponents of this trend argue that children stand to benefit and that ultimately early childhood professionals will benefit through higher pay and status. Critics worry that raising minimum education requirements will exclude many dedicated teachers and, in particular, decrease the diversity of the early childhood workforce. While some research on child care has shown that a higher level of teacher education is linked to better classroom quality when other factors are not controlled (Tout, Zaslow, & Berry, 2005), more recent work has not presented as clear a picture of the role of teacher education, "indicating that policies focused solely on increasing teachers' education will not suffice for improving classroom quality or maximizing children's academic gains" (Early et al., 2007, p. 558).

Current Issues and Public Discourse on Early Education

Issues surrounding the education of young children intersect with other highly charged social and educational issues confronting the United States, such as immigration, accountability, and the roles of individual choice and the private sector in the delivery of public services.

English Language Learners. Immigration is bringing increasing diversity to schools throughout the United States. With immigration comes the need to appropriately serve multicultural and multilingual school populations. Twenty percent of children from birth to age 17 have at least one foreign-born parent, and the proportion of children in immigrant families is over 5% in all but 11 states. At least 25% of children in immigrant families are considered to have limited English proficiency (Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2007). English language learners, particularly from low-income families, are at particular risk for school performance problems, so access to high-quality and appropriate educational experiences is critical for this large and growing segment of the student population (Espinosa, Castro, Crawford, & Gillanders, 2007). The evidence base is accumulating, but more research is needed to allow educators to understand how best to promote English proficiency, home language development, adjustment to school, and academic success for diverse children across an

array of contexts (Espinosa, 2007). Educators and families must pursue these goals in the context of an ever-growing English-only movement in the United States. Twenty-nine states have now adopted English as their official language (Winton, Buysse, & Zimmerman, 2007). These laws often prohibit or limit the use of children's home languages in public school and pre-kindergarten. Some advocates argue that this is a reason to preserve the diverse array of private early childhood settings, each existing within particular cultural contexts, rather than move to "a one-best system of preschooling, largely attached to the public schools" (Fuller, 2007, p. xii).

Accountability. Schools and early education programs are contending with strong pressure for accountability, from all levels of government and from the general public. There is an increasing emphasis on academic achievement in primary grades, accompanied by, at times, controversial shifts in how achievement is measured. "Standardized achievement tests are the most common measure used to assess school performance across all 50 states and the chief indicator of progress of state legislation and the No Child Left Behind Act. The public supports more extensive test use, wider reporting of results, and accountability for progress" (Walberg, 2007, p. 9). The federal government is exerting financial pressure on schools to bring up student test scores in math and reading, and in particular to close the gap in achievement between students of different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001).

Accountability is reaching into classrooms for 3- to 5-year-olds in terms of school readiness, and is driving the increased public funding, delivery, and oversight of these programs. Kagan and Kauerz (2007) point to the current "research-driven focus on critical measurements of quality that have traditionally been associated with K–12 education" (p. 12), and efforts on the part of states to "coordinate and align child care, Head Start, prekindergarten, and other programs and policies that have been traditionally incongruent and categorical" (p. 17). A number of high-profile studies have shown that attendance in a child care or preschool program that is deemed developmentally appropriate according to traditional early childhood pedagogy predicts better outcomes for children in the early years of elementary school and, in some cases, into adulthood, especially for children at risk for school difficulties (Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling, & Miller-Johnson, 2002; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2005; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001; Schweinhart & Weikart, 2002). Ironically, these studies, which seem to affirm the developmental philosophy and approaches of early childhood, have brought early childhood programs to the forefront of national and state political agendas, which in turn may be contributing to an increased focus on assessing the cognitive skills of younger and younger children, in order to help them meet "grade-level" academic expectations as young as kindergarten (Fuller, 2007).

Appropriate Assessment. Appropriately defining success for children, educators, and programs and identifying appropriate assessment measures and strategies are central to both increased accountability and serving the needs of diverse populations. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS-SDE) produced a joint position paper on assessment for children from birth to age 8 (2003). In a national climate of increasing reliance on standardized test scores, their recommendation is that if we wish "to assess young children's strengths, progress, and needs, [we must] use assessment methods that are developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, tied to children's daily activities, supported by professional development, inclusive of families, and connected to specific, beneficial purposes" (NAEYC & NAECS-SDE, 2003, p. 2). They urge the use of multiple sources of evidence gathered over time when assessing children's progress or program effectiveness and conclude that use of individually administered norm-referenced tests with children should be limited to situations in which such measures are potentially beneficial to the child, such as identifying potential disabilities. Moreover, they contend that "calls for better results and greater accountability from programs for children in preschool, kindergarten and the primary grades have not been backed up by essential supports for teacher recruitment and compensation, professional preparation and ongoing professional development, and other ingredients of quality early education" (NAEYC & NAECS-SDE, 2003, pp. 4–5).

School Choice. While the notion of extending public school downward may be "a new front in the culture wars" (Fuller, 2007, p. xii), publicly funded prekindergarten may prove to be a test case for the school choice movement. The vast majority of children in the United States age 5 to 18 attend public school (see Chapter 2), and typically children are assigned to a specific school by the administration of the school district where they live. In some cases, children are assigned to the school that is closest to their home. In other cases, districts may try to balance the racial or economic distribution in their schools through student assignment. The United States has seen a growing movement to allow parents a greater degree of choice in where their children can attend publicly funded school. "Strong majorities of parents favor programs that enable parents to choose the schools, public or private, that their children attend, with public funding following the student" (Walberg, 2007, p. 8). Advocates for increased school choice point out that middle- and upper-class families already possess significant power to choose their children's public schools, by choosing where to live (Goodman & Moore, 2001). The ability to choose private school or to influence public school placement–"and the options from which to choose–are strongly shaped by the wealth, ethnicity, and social status of parents and their