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Pre-K and Parental Work: Emerging Lessons from the States February 25, 2005

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“The Family Squeeze”**

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JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN, CENTER FOR LAW AND SOCIAL POLICY: Welcome everyone to CLASP 2005 audio conference series “The Family Squeeze.” Our topic today: Pre-K and Parental Work Emerging Lessons from the States. Today we have an estimated four hundred to five hundred listeners from forty two states around the country. Who is on this call underscores the breadth of interest in pre-k. We have state workforce agencies listening; for example, at the Texas workforce commission at least five are gathered together at a conference table. Here in DC staff from both sides of the aisle, and both sides of Congress, are tuned in, if the day hasn’t already run away from them. The same is true in California, where ten to fifteen legislative staff plan to convene, and of course there are early child care associations and providers on this call. A special hello to folks at the Thompson Children’s Home in Charlotte, North Carolina, where eight people are gathered around listening today.

My guests are Elizabeth Coulson, a State Representative in the Illinois Legislature. Representative Coulson is a Republican serving her fourth term. Hi Representative Coulson.

ELIZABETH COULSON, STATE REPRESENTATIVE: Hi.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Thank you for joining us. And Rachel Schumacher, who is the Director of Early Education and Child Care Policy at CLASP. Rachel has been working on these issues for nearly 15 years. Hey Rachel.

RACHEL SCHUMACHER, DIRECTOR OF EARLY EDUCATION AND CHILD CARE POLICY: Yes?

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Are you able to join? Great. Joyce Staples, welcome. She’s the Education Consultant from the Connecticut Department of Education. She’s the person in charge of the state’s pre-k program. Hi Joyce.

JOYCE STAPLES, EDUCATION CONSULTANT, CONNETICUT DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION: Hi Jodie.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Welcome. The majority of 3- to 5-year-old children, with employed mothers, spend some time in a child care or early education setting for at least 15 hours each week. Indeed 45 percent of these 3- to 5-year-olds experience non-parental care for at least 35 hours a week. These children are in a range of settings, including pre-k programs. Pre-k is many things: standards, teacher compensation, wait lists, and more. Today we'll be concentrating on pre-k and working families. We'll explore some ways pre-k can be in sync with parents in jobs, how states can pass and package funding for pre-k, and where kids go for pre-k. It's not just school classrooms anymore.

Rachel, let me ask you to help us with getting some basic terminology defined. Is pre-k defined as only 4-year-olds or can pre-k include 3-years-olds, or does it always?

RACHEL SCHUMACHER: Jodie, pre-k can be anything a state decides. It tends to be either for 4-year-olds or sometimes 3's and 4's. Some would argue that the earlier we reach children the better, especially for the most disadvantaged kids.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: When you and others use the term pre-k in child care, Rachel, I hear real differences in how you're communicating this. I have to say, it has sort of confused me from the get go. I didn't know if they were meant to be different things that you were telling me or there, well help me with those basic words?

RACHEL SCHUMACHER: I think it's a good question. The terms have come to mean different things but in some ways those differences are artificial. Pre-k tends to communicate to folks that it's a program that's to promote early learning and development for kids. Child care has become associated with working parents. Something provided usually in a private setting offered year round and for longer hours, not necessarily with the same type of education component. But in reality there's no reason why we can't bring these goals together: supporting early childhood development and working families. The setting really isn't the point, it's the experience of kids and families that count. So, really, schools, child care centers, Head Start all might provide a high-quality program with the right support from resources.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Pre-k has been around for a while, yet there's been a major increase over the last couple of decades in state pre-k programs. Can you just give us a broad stroke picture of how many states have set up programs?

RACHEL SCHUMACHER: Sure, at last count, we had about 38 states and the District of Columbia that have some sort of pre-k type program.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: And are – when you say 38 states, are you meaning 38 statewide programs?

RACHEL SCHUMACHER: Oh not, not really, there's really only 6 states that are working towards a universal program and 2 who are about there, Georgia and Oklahoma, but most states don't have a statewide program as of yet.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Now in terms of the focus of this audio conference call, which is on meeting the needs of parents who are working, are the programs that have been established focused on such parents? Are they in fact full-day/full-year programs?

RACHEL SCHUMACHER: That's pretty rare, we found only 5 states that are using the mixed delivery system model and require that the pre-k programs that they're contracting with address working families' needs for a longer day. Although some are, others are also encouraging that working families be considered. But the movement toward putting pre-k in settings that have experienced the full day/full year community-based settings, like we're going to talk about later, is an opportunity for states to really address this issue more.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Excellent, I'm going to ask Representative Coulson a set of questions, again beginning with some basic ones regarding what's happening in Illinois. You sit on the Appropriations Committee in the Illinois House. Representative Coulson could you fill us in on how early childhood became a priority for you? Is that your background, your field work?

REPRESENTATIVE COULSON: Yes, actually I'm a physical therapist and a teacher and so I had knowledge on the research basis for the importance of early learning in early childhood before I got here, so it was a perfect fit and something I wanted to work on even before I came to the legislature.

JODIE LEVIN-ESPSTEIN: And you now sit on the Early Learning Council. What does it seek to accomplish?

REPRESENTATIVE COULSON: Our Early Learning Council is really trying to do exactly what you've just described, Rachel, and that is to build a system for our state. All the stakeholders come to the table and we're trying to work through the issues together rather than having different groups having different issues. We can then be at a table, prioritize what needs to be done first in the system, make some decisions, and then carry it towards the legislature.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Can you give us a quick example perhaps from one of the Early Learning Council meetings as to how it was useful to have all the stakeholders at the table?

REPRESENTATIVE COULSON: Oh absolutely. Just in the last few weeks we're, as most states are, in major budget crunches and we sat at the table. We do know that our next goal from the Early Learning Council is to try to raise child care rates in the state.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: The reimbursement rate?

REPRESENTATIVE COULSON: The reimbursement rates, correct. And we had to sit there and talk about do we go for it this year even though it's a tough budget year, or don't we, and what else do we not try to go after since there's not as much money. So the great thing is you have all the stakeholders in the room and then we can make an effort so we're not fighting over what limited funds there are.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: OK, thank you. The pre-k program in Illinois is the biggest part of what you call the Early Childhood Block Grant. Other parts focus on parental training, birth through 3, through 5, and a zero to 3 coordinated service initiative. Illinois sets aside a percentage of your pre-k funding stream to address services for infants and toddlers, while also expanding pre-k. This is pretty gosh darn unique among states. What's behind the decision to be worried about infants and toddlers who are coming up?

REPRESENTATIVE COULSON: I think it's a lot of that research that I mentioned in my background, and the advocates have tried to educate more legislators on the very sure knowledge that a lot of our learning is in the zero to 3 stage and that we have to build on that. So when we first set up the Early Childhood Block Grant in the late '90s we had a lower percentage for the zero to 3 but then we found after a while that we were actually spending more money on zero to 3. So we were able to—in I think it was 2003—make it 11 percent of the actual block grant going to the zero to 3 program. It probably reflects some of my background.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Then I just want to confirm here that, as Rachel noted, each state defines its program differently in terms of the age group. You've been talking about a zero to 3 cluster, but your pre-k program itself is for 3 and 4-year-olds, or just 4-year-olds?

REPRESENTATIVE COULSON: No, 3 and 4 years and for that very reason we're trying to build on that base. Early learning research shows that you really need to do that, so our program is for 3- and 4-year-olds.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Excellent, excellent. Representative Coulson, let's look at your specialty, money. You sit on the Appropriations Committee, and in Illinois you succeeded in adding \$60 million over the last two years to pre-k. Was it hard to convince your fellow appropriators to add money to pre-k? Did you face opposition to increasing pre-k funding at other points in the legislative process? And how would you advise our listeners to make the case to legislators that making pre-k easy to choose for working families is worth the money?

REPRESENTATIVE COULSON: To first answer your question, we were very lucky that we had this Early Learning Council and advocates spending a lot of time educating appropriators for many years. So it's not something you can do in one year. But with that said, we also have a conference of women legislators that we brought into the process and had as advocates in the early years of trying to get more child care money, and we have continued with that with the pre-k money. In Illinois—and I'm sure we'll

get to this—we have two very separate budgets for those. As far as did we face opposition? Of course we did and we are this year, too. We hope to add another \$30 million to make it \$90 million.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Wow.

REPRESENTATIVE COULSON: But of course there are so many other interests in education, and in a bad year that's a tough row to hoe. But we're very lucky we have a governor who has made it one of his priorities. So you know the advocates have done their job well. They've gone to every caucus, as well as the governor, and therefore it's at the top of everybody's list. If it's not number 1 it's in the top 3 or 4 and that really makes a difference when you get to the bottom line.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: I want to get back to this Early Learning Council because you've come back to it and it's clearly made a difference in your ability to move forward on this agenda. When you say stakeholders come to the table of broad array, can you give us an illustration of how broad those different stakeholders are? Are we talking about really breaking down silos?

REPRESENTATIVE COULSON: Absolutely, we have educators, we have – and it's hard because we use different terminology – but we have people from Head Start, we have people who are in child care and may not be doing “early childhood education.” We have myself and other legislators there, we have people from each of the agencies in our government that provide services or helps to pay for those services. The last meeting that I was at there were probably forty people in the room around a big table.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Wow and is this a legislative counsel or did the governor set it up through executive order or?

REPRESENTATIVE COULSON: We passed a bill – a Task Force Bill – and, you know, requested the people on it, and don't ask me the details on it.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: No, no, no I've got it. I just wanted to get the basics out there. Now you talk about how you already got \$60 million and you're planning on trying to get another \$30, and at the same time as you added that \$60 million, already the program changed itself to allow delivery of pre-k in community-based child care settings. Delivering pre-k in child care settings that can also offer full day/full year services could really help working families. Was legislature, when this change was made, thinking of working families as the reason for making this change?

REPRESENTATIVE COULSON: Oh absolutely. I think because of the Early Learning Council that was our goal in that year. As you can tell, a working family can't just have 3 hours of pre-k education; they need to have the wrap-around of child care for whatever hours they might need. And so one of the ways we were able to put a variety of legislators on the issue is because we targeted some of the business issues of, you know,

you have less turnover in your employees if they feel good about where their children are, and we brought them to the table and talked about that.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Excellent. Now while Illinois has clearly made expanding pre-k a priority and making sure that working families are a part of that priority, you have at the same time expanded pre-k and been able to maintain a commitment to the child care subsidy program for low income working families. Let me ask, how did you manage to increase pre-k and sustain funding for child care assistance for low-income working families at the same time, since often in states the funding for one is sometimes viewed as a trade off of the other?

REPRESENTATIVE COULSON: We actually started out 8 or 10 years ago, with the concept of as TANF was decreasing we had to improve the child care system, and so now it looks like we've been able to increase both. We really did it in a more linear fashion in that as child care grew we probably took quality education into the background because we wanted to commit to child care and work support first. Then we developed the Early Learning Council, and now we're trying to really build on the pre-k and the more quality aspects of the program. So this has been almost a decade-long process of laying the groundwork, working on it for many years. The other thing about Illinois that's interesting that I point out to people is we actually have two separate budgets, the pre-k's in our education budget, which is a separate committee, child care is in the human services budget, which is a separate committee. Very few people serve on both so you don't have the people saying, "Oh look at all that money in child care; let's put it over here." I think I'm the only person who serves on both of those committees but I do that for this very, one of these, this is one of the reasons I do that.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Ah huh, interesting. Now stepping back, when you're back in your district, do you hear from working families about the benefits they've seen from their increased access to these programs?

REPRESENTATIVE COULSON: When I go to child care centers, yes. I don't get a lot of calls, working families are very busy, but I do get much more information about one of our quality enhancement programs and that's the Great Start Program. Child care workers who receive some of those funds actually do call us and talk to us.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Excellent. Tell us a little bit more about the Great Start Program. It uses the state and federal grants to provide salary enhancements to child care directors, teachers, and assistant teachers as I understand it. Is that a critical piece of the program do you think?

REPRESENTATIVE COULSON: No, we put it together 4 or 5 years ago, modeled after a North Carolina bill, to help with the turnover issue, because so many people can't stay in the early childhood or child care because they just are not making enough money. And for recruitment and retention purposes and therefore to improve quality of education, we developed the program and it's been very well documented and we have some outcomes data this year that we've actually decreased the turnover level by a considerable

percentage. We're enthusiastic about it, because it provides for incentives for people to stay more than 6 months; it also provides for some dollars to go for their continued education, and it's been a really effective program based on our outcomes.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Excellent. Now you were mentioning before how you've used some arguments tailored to business interests, so that that community can appreciate why dollars invested in pre-k for working families is important. A recent report just came out in the state entitled *The Economic Impact of the Early Care and Education Industry in Illinois*, and it makes just this point. That caring for very young children is an industry just like the health care industry, and it notes that currently about a quarter of children under the age of 6 are served in Illinois through pre-k and other kinds of programs. The report also notes that early care, in addition to being a business that creates jobs and revenues, helps Illinois businesses over the long-term. When you discuss spending state dollars on pre-k, what kinds of business angles do you raise? You mentioned one earlier; can you also expand on that and give us some other angles that you make with businesses when you talk with them about pre-k?

REPRESENTATIVE COULSON: And we do it with businesses but we also talk about it to legislators, because in order to bring the vast variety of legislators on board we use things like the cost benefits analysis that show that for each dollar you invest in early learning, that yields \$7 in reduced public expenditures for things like special ed, truancy, criminal justice, and that's from a study at the University of Wisconsin.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: That's a pretty potent number.

REPRESENTATIVE COULSON: Yeah \$1 to \$7. So we've found that those really help the legislators especially on approps who are really looking at cost benefit, how much were they going to save. Early childhood development yields economic benefits too. There's a study that shows that there's a 16 percent rate of return on the economic benefit.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: I want to close with a question that you helped raise earlier, which is: is the longer range financing secure for the pre-k program? You mentioned that you hoped to be pursuing another \$30 million. Do you foresee the capacity to get that \$30 million through or something near it, even in this particular climate where I'm sure you're pressed? And what do you see the message is for folks out there who need to get more money for their pre-k programs in an environment where finances are tight in states and there's growing need for pre-k services?

REPRESENTATIVE COULSON: I would say we are very lucky. The governor last week said that the \$30 million is still his priority so we've got a top-down budget. So it's in there, but now we're going to have a 4 or 5 month discussion of that. So those of us who care about that issue will have to be vigilant. We were also very lucky there was not a cut in the child care budget, so we really can focus on that increase and not have to worry about protecting as much. Now, of course, we're going to have to protect, but the other, the main priority issue—and I think one of the ways we were able to do a lot of this

in Illinois—is to get business groups on board. This isn't just a children's issue, it's not just a women's issue, this is an economic business issue and we – you know as a woman I wish that everybody voted just based on let's help families, let's help the children get a better education, but if you can bring it home to other legislators on the business support. We actually had some business groups come in and testify for the bill. Every time I go to a business they say to me, "You know we really need better education," and I explain to them it starts as early as zero to 3. So we're doing cross-training I guess is the word.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Now let me just press this a little bit further, because you're saying to us that getting businesses aboard is a really key factor, and are you yourself are bringing businesses into the fold? I think you're speaking to them but who's taking the lead in getting businesses aboard on the pre-k issue?

REPRESENTATIVE COULSON: I think it was grappling with advocates and talking about how we bring in other legislators who might have other focuses. I also have another background in business. I have an MBA, and sometimes when you talk their language you then can get them to talk about the issue in another way. So I would say it was a joint effort by advocates and myself to talk to the Chamber, to talk to some of our large business groups in the city of Chicago, to say this is very important. It takes me all the way back to 1985 when I tried to do my Masters Degree in business and said, "We need to have child care in this business because it will decrease turnover, it will improve absenteeism, et cetera," and I am just reutilizing that information, probably back to the '80s.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Representative Coulson, we want to thank you for taking the time. We know you're very, very busy, you're in session, and we want to let you get back to work.

REPRESENTATIVE COULSON: I appreciate it and if there's any questions or comments or ideas, please let me know.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: We'll be back in touch. Thank you so much for joining us.

REPRESENTATIVE COULSON: Thank you.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Take care now. I'm going to turn now to Joyce Staples who runs Connecticut's pre-k program, where the needs of the working parents and the provision of full day/full year has been a focus of the state's pre-k program. In Connecticut the pre-k program is called the School Readiness and Child Daycare Grant Program. Joyce, can you tell us some basic information upfront. First off, how old is the program?

JOYCE STAPLES: It will be 8-years-old this summer. We started in 1997.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: I bet you know the day. You're going to have a party right?

JOYCE STAPLES: That's right.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: How would you describe the primary goal of the program?

JOYCE STAPLES: There are basically 3 goals. One is to increase the number of accredited programs in Connecticut; increase the access to high-quality programming; and then meet the needs of children and families.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: And what's the program's current total funding, and let us know whether the amount is static. Has it been growing in recent years or has it been a stable flat amount all the years, and what is your prognosis for the future on funding?

JOYCE STAPLES: OK, when we started we had about \$20 million in 1997. It did grow incrementally but it became stagnant for about 3 years at about \$37 million; however, last year for, for this coming, for this year, the 2004-2005 year, it was increased by about \$8 million and we currently are sitting at about \$46,800,000.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Now of the total, how much is state monies, when you're saying \$46 million, and how much is federal. Is this glommed together?

JOYCE STAPLES: It is. It's a state appropriation that comes into the Department of Education's budget line items. And it's actually in 2 lines items. One is for priority schools, which is kind of our entitlement and the other one is for communities that have what we call severe need schools, in which maybe one school in a community with about 40 percent of it's children eligible for free or reduced lunch. Those programs, those communities are eligible for a competitive grant system, which is less money.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Now you've just been talking about the schools. Are the children more served by this program just in schools?

JOYCE STAPLES: It isn't really a grant, it isn't really money that goes to the schools. It is a community effort. They're very unique in that it requires the mayor and the superintendent to sign off on a plan, and the money goes to whomever they designate as the fiscal agent. So we have it pretty well split. In some communities it goes to the Board of Ed, who administers it, and in other communities it goes to the town that administers that money, but it is done with the advice of the School Readiness Council which is made up of community members.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: And the kids themselves can be in school settings and in other settings?

JOYCE STAPLES: We're pretty evenly divided there too. They are in community settings: for profit, not-for-profit, they're in Head Start...

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: OK.

JOYCE STAPLES: Family resource incentive and (inaudible) to schools.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: OK, now broadly, not in detail, what types of program standards must a program meet in order to participate?

JOYCE STAPLES: There are about, there are 3 really. One is accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children or in a pool system such as Head Start or NEASA, which is New England Association for School Accreditation, and American Montessori. They must meet the staffing requirements for, there must be someone present for all hours in the classroom who meet our minimum staff requirements, which is a CDA plus 9 credits, and in July it will be 12. Or you can have an Associate or a Bachelor Degree with these credits or you can be a teacher, a certified teacher in Connecticut.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: OK.

JOYCE STAPLES: And the last thing is the adherence to our policies, which are on our alerts, which are on our website. And you must adhere to the Connecticut curriculum framework and you must be in compliance with our quality components, which are listed in the legislation, as well as include children with special needs.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: So fill us in on who's responsible for monitoring that these standards are met?

JOYCE STAPLES: It's actually a dual monitoring system; it's a state and a local. As a state we're, the state agency is responsible, we do a paper review for the RFP and the Preschool Program Evaluation System they do annually and then we do an in-depth onsite monitoring visit and we're on a 3 year cycle; we're completing our first cycle this year. And then on the local level, we have a liaison who is kind of the intermediary between the community and the department, and they must monitor at least once every 3 months each of the programs in the community, both programmatically and fiscally, so to ensure that they are adhering to the requirements and the policies.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Joyce, your program is one of the very few in the nation where the structure of the pre-k program itself reflects the needs of working parents. In other words, the legislation mandates that the majority of the programs must be full day/full year. Now without some legislative or regulatory requirement, pre-k programs may turn out to serve full day/full year and help working parents but there's no assurance that will happen from the get go. There is in Connecticut. Can you fill us in on what led up to the legislative provision for this assurance?

JOYCE STAPLES: I think...

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: That mandates that the majority of the programs be full day/full year?

JOYCE STAPLES: I think if you looked at, I think there are a number of things and I think if you looked back in 1997 part of it grew out of our Sheff versus O'Neil, which was a desegregation case. We also had a lot of the work of the welfare-to-work initiatives and this is actually a joint collaboration between the Department of Education, who was looking at the low percentage of kindergarteners who had no preschool experience, and then the Department of Social Services, and they are the agency that deals with the TANF and the child care subsidies et cetera. So it kind of grew out of there.

And in addition, I think we, Connecticut, is a very small state but there are a number of advocacy groups. The Department of Ed had published a blueprint for action, the Gloveseen (ph) Foundation had funded some Children First initiatives, which are kind of like planning grants and an initial School Readiness Council types. And then we had many, many legislators who were proponents of early childhood and many child advocacy groups who also championed the cause. It was not an overnight success; it had taken a number of years to lead up to legislation.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: And do you know, I think this was before your time, but do you know if the business community in Connecticut also got involved as they did in Illinois?

JOYCE STAPLES: I think at that time they had not been as involved as they are now. We have a very active, you know we have a new appointee in the Governor's office, and she has engaged the businesses, and there are a number of initiatives going on right now in our state in which businesses are very actively engaged in this.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Interesting. Let's get those specifics now, the program. On the full day/full year requirement, how exactly do you all define full day/full year?

JOYCE STAPLES: Programs that have a full-day program must be open 10 hours a day, 5 days a week.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Ten?

JOYCE STAPLES: Ten hours because it was, we assume that parents have to travel.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Right.

JOYCE STAPLES: You not only have to work a day but you have to get there and get home.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Right.

JOYCE STAPLES: So we say that programs must be open 10 hours a day, 5 days a week and 50 weeks, with a plan for alternative care if families needed care during the

weeks they're closed. And then children must need the services for a minimum of 7 hours a day, 5 days a week, for the 50 weeks for the full day.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Now are, is that the only kind of program that gets funded? What percent of the funded programs have to meet this full day, all year requirement?

JOYCE STAPLES: In our state, in the community, in each community, at least 60 percent of the slots must be full day/full year. Currently about 73 percent of our 7,621 slots are the full day.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: So you're above the requirements?

JOYCE STAPLES: Yes.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Wow, and so that means a single site can provide full day/full year as well as shorter time frames?

JOYCE STAPLES: There is, with the approval of their School Readiness Council, who does the approval of the plan. Yes they can mix; we have a number of programs that have all 4 kinds of slots or two types of slots.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Excellent. Joyce let's look at some other ways that the program could help working parents, or does help working parents, in addition to the length of time children are in the pre-k program. You described a little bit, I think you mentioned earlier, your council in connection with the monitoring standards?

JOYCE STAPLES: Yes.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Are those in any way structured to focus on working parents?

JOYCE STAPLES: Part of the legislative responsibilities dictated by the law puts them in to make advice and so for the mayor and the superintendent. So they advise them on the number of children that are not served. They must submit reports to the State Department of Education on the number of spaces and the estimate of the need in their community.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: The need for working parents?

JOYCE STAPLES: For, yes, the need for working parents and the need for all kinds of slots. But we have, we do have some communities that have only full-day slots and other communities that have a mixture.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Now on the councils, I forget if you alluded to whether or not there's a specification that the councils have to include a community-based child care provider. Are they required to?

JOYCE STAPLES: The way the legislation is written it says the mayor and the superintendent, or their designee, parents, and then other people who are involved, such as child care, Head Start, and then it lists a whole lot of other types of agencies. So all of our programs do have School Readiness Councils, or all of our communities rather do have School Readiness Councils that do have early care providers on them.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Now how do the local programs that are providing pre-k collaborate with the child care subsidiary program for low-income working families? Can the pre-k funds, for example, be supplemented with child care subsidy monies?

JOYCE STAPLES: Yes, actually we have a fee policy, and under that fee policy the programs are required to help parents identify whether they are eligible for child care subsidies and then to help them through the process. Once a parent or family is identified and if they are eligible that payment goes, the child care subsidy goes, directly to the School Readiness provider.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: To the pre-k program?

JOYCE STAPLES: Yes.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: To make up a gap in the total amount that the provider needs?

JOYCE STAPLES: When this program was designed it was originally designed as a kind of a combination, it was never meant to only be a state subsidy. So it was looked at as a state, as a state contribution, a child care subsidy contribution and a family fee contribution if the family does not have a child care subsidy.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Then, Joyce, another way to help working families is to realize what you made me realize a moment ago, which is that they have to get to work, you know, so they need help for longer than their working day because they need to get there, they need to get back home, and that takes time and that takes money because transportation costs money. Does the program, the pre-k program, have some help it can offer families with transportation costs?

JOYCE STAPLES: They can use, they've had a grant award based on the number of children they're going to serve and they can use their grant award to transport children.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: To transport the kids?

JOYCE STAPLES: Yes and some of them do, but most of them do not, and because these are working families most of them have a transportation in which they're getting to and from work. So we do not have, I could probably count on my hands the number of programs that do provide transportation.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: So it's allowable but it's not really (inaudible)?

JOYCE STAPLES: Exactly.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: OK, and a basic, basic question is, you know it's one thing to set up a pre-k program, it's another for parents to be able to find out about it. How do you embark on building awareness of pre-k in a particular community, that it's there just in the offing?

JOYCE STAPLES: Right it is part of the responsibility of the School Readiness Council and what they usually do is they have public relations such as health or informational affairs; they do flyers, open houses. Many of them do it through their local cable, they're very creative. Many of them have enlisted the help of the pediatricians or the health clinics in the community. Then we do have quality enhancement money that goes to the communities, and they must use that to provide education and information to non-School Readiness providers and talents in family daycare and kith and kin care. And then we have a few programs, or a few communities that use the single point of entry and they publicize that around town.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: What do you, what do you mean by that?

JOYCE STAPLES: It means that there is one number in the community and that's the School Readiness number that's publicized. You call the School Readiness number and they tell you which programs are School Readiness Programs, which programs have openings, and then a parent can go and choose from that program. In addition, we have a statewide informational line called Info Line which also provides information on School Readiness.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Is it an automated system or is there somebody that people call the number and they get to talk, or do they put in their zip code and find the names of the programs and it tells them automatically, how does that work?

JOYCE STAPLES: No it's just, it's person to person.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: OK.

JOYCE STAPLES: There are numbers, it's like a help line; you can call for a whole lot of resources and information and one of them is School Readiness.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: So do you have any information yet that tells you how aware families are of their pre-k opportunities?

JOYCE STAPLES: I, probably anecdotally by saying to you that almost all of the communities have waiting lists.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Wow.

JOYCE STAPLES: And we are not serving all the children, infants that we need to, all the eligible children in Connecticut, and we're continually striving to expand and increase the number of slots.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Now let me ask you, you just mentioned wait lists. Does having the wait list help you in your budget battles so that folks in the Appropriations Committee and elsewhere can understand how many families need pre-k?

JOYCE STAPLES: One of the other things that we do is ask a question upon entry to kindergarten about preschool experience. This was one of the reasons that the Department was concerned—the number of children who had not had a preschool experience. Our goal, especially in the poorer urban communities, is to ensure that more children have access to preschool and utilize the preschool experience the same as suburban kids do, because we have much higher rates of utilization in the suburbs. So, we're still not there yet. We have done some reports to the Commissioner and to the legislature. Eventually it will go over the legislation and talk about the gap in services.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: And, and did you have any big time coordination issues to get this survey question into an existing survey, I mean?

JOYCE STAPLES: No it was all already asked before, even before School Readiness which was one of the pieces of data that was used to drive the school readiness question.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Interesting, interesting. And then what you did was massage the data and you found this evident disparity between suburb and urban?

JOYCE STAPLES: Exactly, we had, the fact that it was driven by one of the legislators originally because, for example, in Hartford less than 40 percent of their kids had access to a preschool program versus some of our suburbs. Connecticut is a state with very big disparities, so that we had some suburbs in which like 80 percent of the children had had preschool experiences.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: And of course that fit as an important piece of information given the impetus for your program being a concern about disparate well being?

JOYCE STAPLES: Yes.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Let me ask, taking it all together in terms of what you've been able to provide for working families through your pre-k emphasis on full day/full year, do you have data or anecdotes to share about how it's really made a difference in the lives of working families? I mean we could talk full day/full year all the time and say it's got to be good for working families. But what do you have that can texturalize this story?

JOYCE STAPLES: I think that one of the things when we look at it is that most of the families that are in our School Readiness Program, because we track income levels, most of the families have incomes that are below, 50 percent below, the state median income. These are families that are usually either hourly workers or workers who are carrying more than one job, single families, single-parent families. None of them would have access to the programming that we have or could afford to pay for the preschool experiences in the daycare. And so I think that in that way we know that, and we know that, we have the waiting list, we know the program is working and we think that it is necessary – I did say that we have hard data. Have we interviewed a family? No, but I think in each of our communities I know that the liaison would be able to come forth with many, many stories from individual families who have said, this is the only way I can go to work and feel that my child is safe.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: And does that issue of safety come up because people feel very comfortable with the pre-k program in their community, that it feels good because it's right there in their community?

JOYCE STAPLES: It is, it is good because it's in their community and they also know that there are some regulations around it as far as the quality and the teaching staff, because all the requirements exceed licensing requirements so we've raised it up.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Did you say exceed?

JOYCES STAPLES: Yes, they, we have raised it up a little bit, a notch, from what is required by licensing; in our staffing patterns, in our adherence to our Connecticut framework, which are the expectations of what children should know and do when they leave preschool, to the professional development that we require of all of our staff in the School Readiness Program. So I think that all of those things, and we have, I do get a lot of calls from parents who are disappointed because there are no School Readiness Programs in their own community.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: On that note let us let you conserve your voice because we know you have laryngitis and appreciate your coming on even though it's been hard and a strain on your voice, because you need that voice to keep working on these details and keeping this program going.

But I'm going to turn to Rachel and talk with Rachel about a new report. You Rachel and CLASP staff, Katherine Hart along with Joan Lombardi, have just completed a study of pre-k in community based child care settings that is now posted on the CLASP website at clasp.org. It's also simultaneously going to be posted, or has been posted, on the Brookings Institution website which is brook.edu. The report is called *All Together Now: State Experiences using Community Based Childcare to Provide Pre-kindergarten*. Rachel Schumacher, tell us, what is a community-based setting? We've been using that word already but if you could fill us in now that would be helpful.

RACHEL SCHUMACHER: Sure, Jodie. We use that term to mean a setting that's not in the public schools, because we were really trying to look at whether this old idea that pre-k meant public schools and only public schools was true now. But we really found that states were using a range of community-based settings, including private non-profit, for-profit centers, Head Start, family child care homes, et cetera, and that's what we wanted to focus on.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: So what is it about the location that makes an investigation into community-based settings important? Why care about this?

RACHEL SCHUMACHER: We focused on delivery of pre-k and child care settings for two main reasons. We really think it had, we were wondering if it would have the potential to break this traditional barrier that I think our guests have talked about, between early education and child care policies, and address the needs of children in working families in a coordinated way so you're bringing together both goals. We also thought that there was a great potential to strengthen the quality of community-based child care programs by getting higher standards into those programs, like Joyce was describing, more resources and supports into those settings, especially because so many children of working parents are already in community-based child care settings.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: So how many states have you found provide community-based pre-k?

RACHEL SCHUMACHER: We were really surprised. We knew that it was happening, but we found actually 29 out of a total of about 38 states that have pre-k at all allow delivery of it in child care, and several states told us that they're still in development but they're coming soon. We had states asking to be included in this study even when they had really small initiatives because they thought it was something they wanted to promote. And we also want to let folks know we can share those individual state summaries if they're interested and they follow-up with me. So overall, you know, most children I would say are, may still be in school-based pre-k programs, but we know that 9 states reported that over half their pre-k children are in non-school settings.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Really?

RACHEL SCHUMACHER: Yeah, and all of those states that are working towards universal programs, you asked me that question earlier...

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Yes.

RACHEL SCHUMACHER: ...actually allow child care to deliver pre-k already, so it's certainly recognized as a model that states that are working to expand access to high-quality pre-k programs are using.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Zeroing in further, Rachel, on those states with community-based pre-k programs, what did you find about the different ways states approach whether or not a particular provider can participate?

RACHEL SCHUMACHER: That's a good question. We found only two states that require a certain percentage of pre-k be offered in community-based settings. We saw two others that have a separate funding stream for community-based pre-k, so they have a funding stream for school based and a funding stream for community based. But most of them allow or require community-based providers to participate without any type of set minimum. So this sort of leaves a lot of variation on how these decisions about who gets to be a provider get made. Most often there's a central state agency that decides which programs meet the criteria to provide pre-k and whether, you know, whether that be a school-based program or not. In many states the pre-k funds go through the schools and so sometimes the state requires that the school have a community advisory. Sometimes it's at the full discretion of the school district whether or not to partner with child care programs, and then we see a couple of states that have local councils including, that include schools, child care, Head Start, parents as part of the decision makers and the money goes to those councils, and they make the plans and distribute the funding.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Now, Joyce was mentioning earlier when we were talking about criteria and standards, Joyce was mentioning that in Connecticut the pre-k program has higher standards than other child care, and I'm wondering, in states with community-based settings, are those states by and large applying the same standards to programs in schools as those in community settings or are they differing them?

RACHEL SCHUMAKER: This is obviously something that I think a lot of people wonder when they're thinking about using such disparate providers for pre-k programs, and we cared a lot about it because the term pre-k doesn't really mean the same thing as the standard, like teacher education levels, teacher-child ratio, class size, content, really vary a lot, and we want to see kids have the same quality experience no matter which door they enter. We found that the majority of the 29 states require all participating programs to meet the same standards. Usually they require them right away. There's a subset that allow a phase-in period for certain standards. Most often for requirements for teachers to have a certain of level of education, a bachelors degree or a teacher's certification or giving them some time to become nationally accredited with the National Association for the Education of Young Children, or some of the other national accrediting bodies that are out there.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: And do states tend to help community-based programs meet the standards? Are they taking steps to provide training to assist them in meeting these standards, or are they providing them more money? What strategies?

RACHEL SCHUMAKER: This is a really crucial point. Child care providers, as Joyce mentioned, are usually required to meet state licensing laws, but these usually tend to focus more on health and safety and don't always have an educational component or high teacher qualifications requirement. So having a law on the books that allows child care to

do pre-k without any of the technical assistance or support to help them qualify is sort of an empty promise. Most states told us they have at least one support. They may offer start up funds, pay for equipment and curriculum supplies, help with accreditation costs, and usually offer some sort of ongoing state-level technical assistance. One of the top barriers that we, that we see out there, that Representative Coulson touched on earlier, is getting the teachers to the education level that we would want to see in these programs, and the cost of either helping current staff meet those education levels and then, of course, compensating staff adequately. We see a couple of states really trying to address this and in a variety of ways. One thing we saw is that a handful of states requiring comparable salaries across school and child care pre-k settings, but overall we found that very few states have the resources available to make these supports statewide, and many states are relying on programs that were set up earlier for broader child care systems, like the Illinois Great Start Program; it's a great program. Other states have similar models, modeled on the North Carolina TEACH Program, but they often aren't putting, or aren't able to put in additional funding to sort of address that if you really want to expand pre-k and you want to partner a lot with community-based providers, you ought to add some money in also to help more teachers in the child care settings access those scholarships and get those compensation packages. So there can be a real barrier to expansion but one that can be addressed.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Let's turn to funding. Earlier you told us, Rachel, that five states have legislation or regulations that provide what working families need, a longer day. Now one way to accomplish that is for the state to fund those slots. Another way is for the state to fund some of it and tap other sources to make up the difference, and we heard from Joyce that that's sometimes what goes on for slots in Connecticut. What have you found out about the different approaches states are taking to the funding needed to provide full day/full year pre-k slots?

RACHEL SCHUMACHER: Right, as I said before, about five states have a policy requiring pre-k programs to really address working family needs. Two allow pre-k dollars to be used to pay for the expanded day for working families, and the other three they're working to coordinate the funding at the state level by working with the law and child care subsidy program administration in the state, or they're just encouraging the programs to find that other funding. And, you know, Joyce described in their state they actually require the pre-k programs to help the families access that other system. There are also a number of other states that don't require programs to address working families but allow pre-k dollars to be additive to what the state is receiving, what the program would be receiving from the state in terms of low-income child care subsidy payments, which is similar again to what Joyce was describing. So those programs can provide a pre-k standard-based program to the children that are already in their care from the low-income subsidy program, and putting those funds together can really help a child care program meet these higher standards and hire those teachers that they need to do pre-k.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: That's a bunch of different approaches that you've found out about. Let's pretend you're with a state looking to develop or even expand the state pre-k

program. Which of those approaches would you give highest priority to and why, or would you Rachel, recommend a new way?

RACHEL SCHUMACHER: I think every state needs to look at the systems they have in place and try to figure out how to put the pieces together that really make sense to them, but there are key things that we would recommend. I mean, first of all, we really think that it's important that a state require a portion of the pre-k address working families. Like you were saying before, that requirement is not there; it may happen but it may not, and that type of requirement is really useful to assure that it's going on.

Secondly, we'd say you really need to make sure that the total payment that pre-k programs receive per child is enough to pay for the standards and the promises of pre-k. This can't be done on the cheap and there are some really hard costs like teacher salaries that, you know, just can't be skimmed on.

Third we would say the funding doesn't necessarily have to be from all of one source, like you say it can be packaged, but it does need to be coordinated in a way that makes it easy for providers and for parents to put it together and to access to do full day. Some states have inter-agency agreements between the Department of Education and the Human Services Agency that has the child care funds to make this go smoother and make it real easy for providers to do this. I think New Jersey is an example of that.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Is that, so that by the time it gets to the provider level it feels seamless to the provider? Are they aware that they're having to deal with a variety of agencies at the same time or is somebody at the state level making it seamless for them?

RACHEL SCHUMACHER: Right, and it allows for better planning and makes sure that the funding is actually there and available so that they can be putting it together. And also it might be, you know, there's different requirements for those funding streams and then they can make that smoother in terms of monitoring, reporting, things like that.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: I want to encourage everybody to go to the CLASP website and download this new report, and we only have a couple of minutes more, and Rachel I'd like to give you a chance to give us some big takeaway messages from your look at state practices.

First, let me tell the audience that I had a chance to look at this report and I'm not a child care maven and I could get the big picture by reading your report. But what I also got from the report was some fabulous detail about individual states and the ability to learn how individual states are structuring their decision making, what they are actually providing. So it is a really useful tool for folks in the states who understand different ways and approaches to addressing pre-k and this issue of community-based, the issues of working parents, so on and so forth so.

RACHEL SCHUMACHER: Thanks, Jodie.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: I'm only giving you a few seconds here though, Rachel, so take away number one: the potential link between state investment in pre-k and working families' need for ready access to slots, which allow them to keep their jobs. Do you feel like the potential has been realized, just beginning to be recognized, a solid trend, give us that global take?

RACHEL SCHUMACHER: I think this is just getting on the radar screen of the state pre-k policy makers, but there is a ways to go before we really see early care and education policies that do promote both early development of kids and the support of working parents. Although you can see from the folks we had on the call that there's great folks out there working on this in a leadership position. So that's wonderful because no one really wants to see expansion of pre-k in the states that leaves out working families, especially low-income families. So we're hopeful that with so many states already allowing this mixed delivery model, that this potential can be realized.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: Finally Rachel, as the interest in state pre-k continues to grow—and we hope that the potential that you're beginning to recognize and others are going to see and we're flagging here today—what needs to be done to expand access for children in working families?

RACHEL SCHUMACHER: Basically more recognition that we're often talking about the same children, whether they are in pre-k or child care, and we want to see those kids have the same quality experience no matter which door they enter. This means building up early education and pre-k programs without losing the funding for the child care system as a whole or for younger, younger kids and older kids, really thinking about it altogether and bringing the stakeholders together like they were talking about doing in Illinois. Working parents need care for their kids before they reach preschool age, too, and all of that needs to be high quality. So I think it's just this sort of holistic approach and keeping both goals in mind. Our eye is on the prize, we want the high-quality experience for kids. We want child development. We also want to support working parents, because otherwise those kids might not be in those situations that we're building up for them.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: I want to thank you both and I want to encourage the audience to tune in to our next audio conference on March 18th. It's called Marriage and Family Balance, an interview with author Kathryn Edin, who is actually the coauthor of a forthcoming book, hasn't hit the streets yet, so you'll be the first to know about it. It's called *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before Marriage*. I also want to thank today's guests, State Representative Elizabeth Coulson from Illinois, who we let go early so she could get back to work, Rachel Schumacher from CLASP, thank you, Rachel.

RACHEL SCHUMACHER: Thank you so much, Jodie.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: And Joyce Staples with the Connecticut Department of Education, the person in charge of the state's pre-k program, thank you so very much for joining us, Joyce.

JOYCE STAPLES: Thank you, Jodie.

JODIE LEVIN-EPSTEIN: And hold onto that voice. I also want to thank today's audience for joining in and I hope that you will be with us for other calls in this series on The Family Squeeze. Take care everyone bye, bye.

JOYCE STAPLES: Bye, bye.

OPERATOR: Thank you. That does conclude today's conference. You may disconnect your lines at this time and have a wonderful day.