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Early Start

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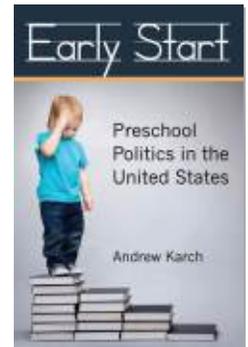
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2 | Historical Precedents and Forces for Change

Debates over the education and care of young children date back at least to the infant school movement of the early 1800s, and the contemporary rhetoric surrounding the issue resonates with the claims and counterclaims of earlier eras. After a brief review of developments in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this chapter examines three national government endeavors that preceded the critical juncture of the late 1960s and early 1970s. These programs share two key characteristics. First, they were viewed as temporary initiatives to address emergency conditions. Second, they were targeted rather than universal. In sum, the national government provided services to specific subgroups in response to temporary crises (Beatty 1995; Lazerson 1972; Slobdin 1975).

In the language of the analytical framework outlined in chapter 1, the historical episodes profiled in this chapter represent the “antecedent conditions” that preceded a critical juncture (Collier and Collier 1991, 30). As such, they constitute the baseline against which its consequences must be assessed.¹ The philosophy underlying the emergency nursery schools of the Great Depression, the wartime child care centers of the 1940s, and Head Start illustrates how the debates of the late 1960s and early 1970s, with their emphasis on universal access and a permanent national government presence, broke sharply with the past. The concluding section of this chapter describes how several demographic, intellectual, and political forces in the 1960s reshaped the debate over early childhood policy. The large-scale entry of women into the labor force, pathbreaking research in cognitive psychology, and a changing political environment altered societal attitudes toward early childhood and placed the topic on the national political agenda.

Infant Schools, Day Nurseries, and Nursery Schools

In the early nineteenth century, the infant school movement was the focus of the debate over early childhood policy. This movement emphasized the education and care of young, poor children whose parents worked outside the home. Some supporters viewed the infant schools as a way to facilitate work among low-income parents. Others viewed character and religious education as infant schools' primary benefit, arguing that low-income children "would benefit from both early character training and an education in Christian dogma" (Cahan 1989, 6). A third group emphasized infant schools' potential developmental benefits, portraying them as a way to deliver child-centered enrichment programs that would prepare children for elementary school (Cahan 1989, 8).

The infant school movement was short-lived. Shifting societal attitudes toward maternal roles in child rearing and a backlash against efforts to universalize the schools contributed to its demise. There were concerns about the cost of universalization and the fit between infant schools and the public school system. In addition, the movement violated societal norms that regarded childhood "as a discrete stage that had to be prolonged in order for children to develop properly under the watchful eyes of their mothers" (Michel 1999, 40). In the 1830s and thereafter, there was a revival of the notion that young children should be educated at home. Support for infant schools fell as Americans came to view the family as the "ideal agent of childhood socialization" (Cahan 1989, 11–12). The infant school movement declined rapidly, and "by the mid-19th century there was considerable hostility to the sending of three- or four-year-olds to any school" (Kaestle and Vinovskis 1978, S41).²

In the late nineteenth century, the rapid industrialization and urbanization of the United States and a massive influx of immigrants contributed to the rapid growth of day nurseries. Day nurseries were viewed as philanthropic work that would foster family preservation and absorb immigrant and poor families into the American mainstream by teaching values like cleanliness and patriotism (E. Rose 1999, 35). They emphasized health and hygiene and were a "child care service more custodial than educational or developmental" (Steinfels 1973, 52). Day nurseries provided minimal care, "for the simple reason that they lacked sufficient resources to be anything more elaborate" (Cahan 1989, 18). Established for working mothers who needed child care, day nurseries were usually open from seven in the morning to six at night.³

Despite their custodial orientation, day nurseries reflected societal am-

bivalence toward maternal employment. Supporters, facing charges that the nurseries contributed to the breakdown of the American family, often invoked “the heroic figure of the struggling widow or deserted wife, who could not be blamed for working” (E. Rose 1999, 29). The preservation and maintenance of the home was adopted as a guiding principle, and some supporters argued that a day nursery would allow an impoverished mother “to keep her children near her, a better solution, it was argued, than institutionalization” (Steinfels 1973, 50). Day nurseries never became very popular, and the families that relied on them typically did so for short periods of time. Mothers found them unappealing because they carried the stigma of charity and generally offered rigid, institutional care (E. Rose 1999). Day nurseries “fell into increasing disrepute” after the turn of the twentieth century (Cahan 1989, 21).

Nursery schools emerged in the 1910s and 1920s. They stressed educational development, and their organizers were convinced that “some definite educational plan is necessary before the age of five.”⁴ Supporters argued that nursery school enrollment provided valuable intellectual and health benefits (Bradbury 1936; Gesell 1924). They also believed that the school could contribute to better parenting. Even so, they remained sensitive to prevailing societal norms about the preeminence of the family. One supporter insisted that the opportunities nursery schools provided should not come “at the expense of the family”: “The nursery school in its zeal to serve the immediate needs of the child should serve them in such a way that the responsibility of the home is sharpened, not dulled” (Gesell 1924, 19).

After the First World War ended, nursery schools were “the major emphasis in early childhood education” (Lazerson 1972, 48). Lacking the stigma of day nurseries, they enrolled a mostly affluent clientele and were viewed as “not a matter of charity, but of privilege” (E. Rose 1999, 100). The early 1920s were a period of growth. According to one estimate, “There were perhaps 3 nursery schools at the beginning of the decade and at least 262 when it closed.”⁵ The science of child development was emerging, and nursery schools were viewed as laboratories for the study of “normal, active, healthy young children.”⁶ Educators experimented with pedagogical methods and hoped to acquire “empirical information about what environment and educational procedures were best for young children” (Beatty 1995, 133).⁷

Nursery school organizers hoped that their experiments would lead the schools to be incorporated into the public school system. Although the schools proliferated during the 1920s, organizers were unable to achieve their bolder goals. By the end of the decade, the movement seemed

to be losing momentum. Supporters' hopes that nursery schools would be universalized went unfulfilled, due in part to concerns about the potential cost of a universal program. By the early 1930s, foundation support for nursery education was declining, and government support was virtually nonexistent. Private nursery schools generally shortened their hours, offering half-day programs that suited the needs of their middle- and upper-class clientele. It took a national emergency to "reverse the retreat to privatization of preschool education" (Beatty 1995, 168).

The Great Depression and Emergency Nursery Schools

The Great Depression spurred the national government to extend its role in early childhood policy, at least temporarily. Publicly funded emergency nursery schools emerged as one component of the New Deal and were portrayed as a temporary response to extraordinary economic conditions. One historian described the program as "a temporary measure whose first priority was to provide employment for teachers" (E. Rose 1999, 151). Another noted that it "intended first and foremost to function as an employment program" (Michel 1999, 120). The schools maintained the "twin goals of helping the economy and helping children, in that order" (Beatty 1995, 177). Despite its limited duration and impact, the Depression-era program nevertheless marks an important chapter in the development of early childhood policy.

In October 1933, the director of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration announced that federal work-relief funds and grants to state educational agencies would be used to fund emergency nursery schools. Sponsored by the Works Progress Administration (WPA), the schools were controlled by state and local educational agencies. This bureaucratic arrangement reflected the fact that "no one wanted [the schools] to be simply child-minding or babysitting centers" (Hymes 1979, 13).⁸ Economic objectives trumped concerns about educational content, however. Government officials hoped to open as many nursery schools as possible, leading some nursery educators to worry about staff training and school quality.

The program grew rapidly during its early years. Supervisors were appointed in virtually every state, and the program received support from state educational, welfare, and health agencies. During its first four years of operation, approximately seventy-five thousand children between the ages of two and five attended approximately nineteen hundred nursery schools organized in forty-seven states and the District of Columbia.⁹ Pat-

terns in New York State are illustrative. In 1932, one year before the establishment of the WPA program, there were thirty-four private nursery schools and no public nursery schools in the state. Four years later, there were “67 Federal nursery schools, four nursery schools publicly supported and a still further increase in private nursery schools over the 34 schools of 1932.”¹⁰ At its peak, according to one estimate, the WPA program enrolled approximately five hundred thousand children in nearly three thousand schools nationwide (Beatty 1995, 184).¹¹

While many early childhood educators hoped that the emergency nursery schools would become permanent, they recognized that the schools existed “primarily to provide employment for the women who worked at these child care centers.”¹² The regulatory provisions of the WPA program reflect its aims as a jobs program. The Great Depression had forced many public schools to close their doors, causing massive layoffs. The staff for the nursery schools was drawn from this pool of unemployed teachers and nurses, and 95 percent of the federal funds for the schools were earmarked for wages (E. Rose 1999, 145). These provisions suggest that the schools were only “a temporary expedient, a stopgap measure until teachers could return to the school system” (Rothman 1973, 19).

In a similar vein, economic hardship was a prerequisite for enrollment. Children were eligible if they were between the ages of two and five and if their families were receiving relief (Beatty 1995, 179).¹³ Federal regulations required that the nursery schools be free to the children of these needy and unemployed families (Hymes 1979, 15). In terms of both the teachers it employed and the children it enrolled, the emergency nursery schools targeted those in economic need.

While the program’s educational objectives were superseded by its economic ones, the former did affect the operation of the emergency nursery schools. In June 1934, for example, each state commissioner of education was permitted to hire a trained nursery school specialist who did not have to be eligible for relief. More than one specialist could be hired if the number of nursery schools in the state warranted it (Hymes 1979, 17). Administrators consistently emphasized the educational benefits of the program. They also sought to identify it with the public schools in an effort to convince local school districts to adopt nursery schools on a permanent basis (E. Rose 1999, 146). Their efforts were largely unsuccessful, however, and the schools continued to be viewed as a jobs program.

By the 1940s, the size of the WPA program had started to decline. Based on the 1940 U.S. Census, one report estimated that 38,375 children were enrolled in the federally financed nursery schools.¹⁴ Another esti-

mated that 1,661 WPA schools enrolled 46,101 children as of October 31, 1942.¹⁵ Both estimates suggested that fewer schools and students were involved in the program. As the economic crisis receded and the schools were threatened with extinction, however, a different emergency spurred the national government to extend its role in early childhood services.

The Second World War and the Lanham Act

The emergency nursery school program was discontinued in June 1943, yet the national government had already embarked on another foray into early childhood policy. This time, it resulted from the nation's mobilization for the Second World War. With many American men fighting overseas, the United States faced a labor shortage at home. Employing mothers of young children was viewed as something that should not be done until "all other sources of labor were exhausted and the employment of additional women was essential to the war effort."¹⁶ The war effort soon necessitated their employment, however. When mothers entered the workforce, most observers agreed that the government should provide adequate care for their children, and there was "no debate about the need for federally aided day care" (Slobdin 1975, 22). The exigencies of wartime produced a consensus. Like the emergency nursery schools that preceded them, the wartime child care centers were viewed as a targeted temporary response to a national crisis. They were part of "a 'win-the-war,' not a 'save-the-child,' program" (Cahan 1989, 37). One administrator explained, "From the standpoint of government and from the standpoint of the shipyards, we were effective if we enabled mothers to work in the yards."¹⁷

Maternal employment was viewed as a necessary evil during the wartime mobilization.¹⁸ Appearing before the Senate Committee on Education and Labor in June 1943, Dr. William F. Montavon of the National Catholic Welfare Conference argued that "the national interest is served best when the mother and the child remain in the home together," but he acknowledged that the war created a "temporary, abnormal condition" that necessitated large-scale female employment.¹⁹ Hundreds of thousands of American men were serving overseas, creating a manpower shortage that, according to Senator Carl Hayden (D-AZ), made women "the only reservoir of workers in war industry."²⁰ The needs of the war effort superseded the conventional belief that mothers should care for their own children in their own homes.

As more mothers joined the workforce, the issue of day care rose to the

fore. Supporters of government intervention argued that day care would enable women to accept employment and would make them more productive as workers. One advocate explained, “[T]he fact remains that many women will not consider employment until the community offers some program for the care of their children.”²¹ The Child Welfare League of America proclaimed more forcefully, “It is hardly American to leave a mother, too often poorly paid for her work, to shift for her child without some minimum guarantee of community service and some subsidy for the child’s care.”²² Some observers felt that coaxing women into the workforce without providing day care would exact a terrible social cost in terms of disease, illiteracy, and juvenile delinquency. They also feared that women would be too preoccupied to perform their jobs effectively if their children received substandard care. Since the war was a national emergency, many observers felt that the national government should fund the care mothers viewed as essential. Hayden said, “We are responsible for the war and the consequences of war and therefore Congress should contribute liberally toward meeting a problem that is a war problem.”²³ In short, the war created emergency conditions that necessitated publicly funded day care.

The Federal Works Agency provided grants for day care under Title II of the Lanham Act. Section 202(c) enabled the Federal Works Agency to provide financial assistance to schools in areas affected by the war effort, and the care of children of employed mothers was regarded as a “proper extension of the school service.”²⁴ Grants were limited to “war impacted areas” and required a finding that “an acute shortage of facilities or services either exists or impends which would impede the war effort” and that those needs could not be met without national government assistance, an “excessive” tax increase, or an “unusual or excessive” increase in the debt limit of the locality in question.²⁵ Grant amounts were based on need, cost, and the availability of local revenues. It was estimated that “approximately two-thirds of total maintenance and operating costs of all Lanham child care projects [was] covered by Lanham funds.”²⁶ The remainder came from parental fees and other local contributions.

The first Lanham Act grants for purposes of day care were issued on August 31, 1942. The program expanded rapidly and reversed the declining enrollments that characterized the emergency nursery schools.²⁷ By February 1943, 260 units had been approved for Lanham Act grants in 28 communities, providing for 9,600 children at a cost of \$854,000. By June, 2,685 units with a capacity of 138,410 had been approved in 369 communities at a cost of \$8,988,000.²⁸ Total enrollment also grew rapidly, from ap-

proximately 43,000 children in September 1943 to 108,157 children in 2,995 wartime centers by June 1944. At this later date, there were 1,700 nursery school units with an enrollment of 50,929 children.²⁹ By July 1945, the units devoted to younger children enrolled 73,660 youngsters.³⁰

Some of the most famous wartime child care centers were financed and administered by the private sector. Edgar Kaiser, owner of a shipbuilding operation in Oregon with twenty-five thousand employees, feared that the low salary schedule stipulated by the Lanham Act would cause child care centers to lose teachers to higher-paying jobs in the shipyards. He therefore adjusted salaries at his centers so that they were in keeping with the shipyard as a whole. As a result, they attracted skilled professionals from across the country. By June 1945, the staff consisted of five child nutritionists, six group supervisors, ten nurses, one hundred professionally trained nursery school teachers, and two family consultants. The centers provided a wide range of services, and they were widely celebrated for their quality (Slobdin 1975).

Providing care for the young children of working mothers was viewed as a “grim, unsentimental necessity in a nation geared to the production of tanks and more tanks, bombs and more bombs, planes and more planes.”³¹ Yet the Lanham Act program, like the emergency nursery schools that preceded it, raised advocates’ hopes for a permanent postwar program. They believed that high-quality programs like the Kaiser Child Service Centers demonstrated nursery schools’ positive impact on child development. One observer argued that “nursery schools have demonstrated that they have a definite place in contributing to the wholesome development of young children.”³² As a result, the WPA and Lanham Act programs sparked a broader debate over early childhood policy.

The campaign to make nursery schools a permanent element of the educational system began during the war. In January 1940, the White House Conference on Children in a Democracy adopted a report that recommended, “School systems should provide nursery school, kindergarten, or similar educational opportunities for children between the ages of 3 and 6.”³³ Supporters claimed, “The nursery school is not for problem children; it is for all children.”³⁴ Despite their lobbying efforts, however, three proposals to extend the national government’s role in early childhood policy suffered defeat in Congress during the Second World War (Lazerson 1972, 51). In 1943, a particularly heated debate occurred over the War Area Child Care Act, also known as the Thomas Bill. Its demise, which is sometimes portrayed as a defeat for the effort to provide univer-

sal access to preschool education, has been traced to infighting among children's agencies and advocates and to objections from women in labor unions and from African American groups (Beatty 1995, 188; E. Rose 1999, 169–70).

Although the Thomas Bill and similar proposals made limited headway, the WPA and Lanham Act programs contributed to an attitudinal shift toward female employment and day care. The wartime centers were especially important. They presented themselves as a public service rather than a private charity and contributed to “the growing conviction that [child care] was educational and thus benefited children, not just their mothers” (E. Rose 1999, 177). Many observers speculated that demand for child care would continue into the postwar period. Indeed, when working mothers were surveyed about their postwar employment plans, many of them answered that, societal norms against female employment notwithstanding, they planned to continue working. A survey of 2,778 working mothers in twenty-seven Ohio communities found that 47 percent of them planned to work indefinitely, 32 percent planned to work only for the duration of the war, 8 percent planned to work only for a short time, and 13 percent were undecided. Fifty-seven percent of the respondents indicated that they would need day care for their children after the war.³⁵ A survey conducted in the Los Angeles area found that 63.5 percent of working mothers planned to continue working in the postwar period, 17.4 percent of them did not plan to work, and 15.2 percent were undecided.³⁶ In Detroit, a survey of 1,448 working mothers found that 54.5 percent planned to continue working, 37.6 percent did not plan to continue working, and 6.8 percent were undecided.³⁷ The surveys were few in number, a fact that nursery school advocates lamented,³⁸ but they suggested that postwar demand for child care services would remain high.

Several prominent national organizations supported continued public funding of child care services. In a May 1945 memorandum, the Child Welfare League of America argued that “the time has come for such planning in the federal government as will facilitate the development of day care of a quality consistent with American standards of child welfare.”³⁹ The president of the National Association for Nursery Education claimed that “generous federal aid will be needed” to close the gap between the need for nursery schools and their availability.⁴⁰ At a meeting in 1946, the United Auto Workers of the Congress of Industrial Organizations pledged to “work to make nursery schools a permanent part of our school structure, free to all parents in the community wishing to avail themselves of

the opportunity.”⁴¹ Various organizations urged the federal government to provide permanent funds for early childhood services, and they continued their efforts after the war ended.⁴²

Early Childhood Policy in the Immediate Postwar Period

As the Second World War drew to a close, President Harry S. Truman extended funding for the Lanham Act child care centers for six months. The subsequent termination of the program confirmed that national government support of child care centers had been a temporary response to emergency conditions.⁴³ Washington State, New York State, and several counties and cities allocated funds to extend the lives of the centers, and local industries, service clubs, and lay organizations in other communities made similar financial commitments.⁴⁴ Continued support from the national government, however, was not forthcoming. Representative Helen Gahagan Douglas (D-CA) introduced legislation during the Eightieth and Eighty-First Congresses that sought to “assist the States and Territories in providing more effective programs of public kindergarten or kindergarten and nursery-school education,”⁴⁵ but neither proposal received serious consideration.

Early childhood advocates nonetheless viewed the late 1940s as a moment of opportunity. They felt that the WPA and Lanham Act programs had generated unprecedented publicity for early childhood policy. In 1947, one advocate claimed, “Interest in nursery and kindergarten education is at a high point. . . . Public attention is beginning to recognize these schools for young children as an essential for parents and as an economic asset in terms of the conservation of childhood.”⁴⁶ The National Association for Nursery Education launched a publicity campaign whose goal was to “attach amendments to state education laws which would make it possible for nursery education to be provided as part of the public educational system.”⁴⁷ It offered interested parties a fact sheet, magazine articles, radio scripts of fifteen-minute dramatic sketches, a film, and pictures of small children to assist their lobbying efforts.

During the immediate postwar period, advocates experienced their greatest success in California. The state legislature allocated a one-year appropriation of \$3.5 million for the child care program in 1946. Without these funds, the centers established during the war would have had to close. The bill enabled the state to retain a large proportion of its child care centers and laid the foundation for its postwar child care program.⁴⁸ Child

care advocates won annual and biannual child care appropriations until 1957, when the program became a permanent part of the state budget. Their success has been attributed to a favorable political environment. A surplus existed in the state treasury, opponents never coalesced into an organized countermovement, and advocates cultivated an influential set of allies (Reese 1996). The California program remains the oldest continuous state child care program in the country. Supporters struggled to achieve their goals in other states.

The Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth in 1950 devoted some attention to nursery schools and kindergartens. At the time of the conference, states and municipalities funded only 10 percent of child care facilities across the country, and another 14 percent operated with funds from community chests. Commercial nursery schools constituted 43 percent of the total, and voluntary organizations, such as churches, philanthropies, and institutions of higher education, constituted another 23 percent (Michel 1999, 177–78). A conference report emphasized the “necessity for making nursery schools and kindergartens far more widely available, as well as for considerable flexibility in policies on age of admission.”⁴⁹ Attendees adopted sixty-seven recommendations, including one stipulating “[t]hat as a desirable supplement to home life, nursery schools and kindergartens, provided they meet high professional standards, be included as a part of public educational opportunity for children.”⁵⁰

The overall landscape of early childhood programs changed very little during the 1950s.⁵¹ In 1960, preschool attendance remained uncommon, and most parents relied on private nonprofit and commercial sources. During the 1960–61 academic year, only about 1 percent of the school districts in the United States operated public nursery schools. There was some minor regional variation, but the overall “distribution throughout the country [was] relatively even, though extremely low.”⁵² The slow growth of public programs meant that most children who attended preschools attended private nursery schools, and only about 6 percent of the first-grade children in public schools had attended either a public or a nonpublic nursery school.⁵³ Given this limited reach, it is not surprising that the Golden Anniversary White House Conference on Children and Youth in 1960 reiterated the 1950 conference’s goal of expanding public programs. It called for the increased “provision of supplemental services for parents of preschool children, such as day care centers, nursery schools, kindergartens, and summer day camps.”⁵⁴ Repeated calls for expanded public services did not have a major policy impact during the immediate postwar period.

The most noteworthy policy change occurred in 1954, when the federal income tax code was revised to allow a tax deduction for specific employment-related dependent care expenses. The tax deduction allowed working adults (widows, widowers, divorced persons, or married mothers) to deduct up to six hundred dollars a year for child care that enabled the taxpayer to work. The maximum deduction was available to individuals or couples earning less than forty-five hundred dollars per year. The tax deduction received broad support, but most members of Congress “made it clear that they did not condone maternal employment in general” (Michel 1999, 205). By allowing minimal expenditures and keeping the income cap relatively low, Congress “gave a nod to the employment of low-income women while maintaining its distance from child care in general” (Lombardi 2003, 35).

The tax deduction represented a sea change in attitudes toward poor women. Whereas mothers’ pensions and Aid to Dependent Children supported them to remain at home with their children, the tax deduction underwrote the cost of child care to encourage them to join the workforce.⁵⁵ Despite its limited initial reach, the tax deduction “turned out to be the most significant breakthrough in child care policy of the 1950s” (Michel 1999, 209). In the 1970s, it was transformed into a tax credit, and its eligibility provisions were broadened considerably. The tax deduction played a significant role in the evolution of early childhood policy, but it differed sharply from the strategy of service provision that was embraced by the WPA and Lanham Act programs.

The War on Poverty and the Creation of Head Start

On March 16, 1964, the White House delivered a message to Congress that called for a “national war on poverty” and described several programs to assist low-income individuals and families. Its goal was “to allow [the poor] to develop and use their capacities, as we have been allowed to use ours, so that they can share, as others share, in the promise of this nation.”⁵⁶ With the creation of Head Start in 1965, early childhood education became a key component of the War on Poverty. It was viewed as a way to address the long-term disadvantages that accompanied growing up in poverty and to prepare disadvantaged children for elementary school. The launch of Head Start had much in common with the emergency nursery schools and Lanham Act centers. It was a targeted, temporary response to an emergency situation (Beatty 1995; Lazerson 1972; Slobdin 1975).⁵⁷

The creation of Head Start reflected growing interest in compensatory school programs. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Ford Foundation funded early childhood initiatives at several experimental sites as part of its Great Cities School Improvement Program (Vinovskis 2005, 26). Changing views of child development, with their emphasis on the importance of the first five years of life, encouraged many to view compensatory schooling programs as a way to address the root causes of poverty. By the early 1960s, leading politicians like Robert F. Kennedy viewed preschool education as a “normal and desirable component of comprehensive efforts to improve deteriorating inner cities” (Vinovskis 2005, 30).

Early childhood policy received considerable attention from the Johnson administration. In August 1964, consultant Harry Levin issued a brief assessment of preschool programs, concluding that “schooling must start on a preschool basis and include a broad range of more intensive services.”⁵⁸ He predicted that the “present combination of circumstances . . . makes a large scale establishment of preschools inevitable.”⁵⁹ Anticipating a landslide victory in the November election, President Johnson appointed several task forces to make legislative recommendations. His Task Force on Education assembled thirty-one papers, including two devoted specifically to preschool. It portrayed preschool as a resource for disadvantaged children, not as an opportunity that should be provided to all children (Vinovskis 2005, 54–57). After the election, lawmakers transformed this interest in early childhood policy into concrete proposals.⁶⁰

In a special message to Congress in early 1965, Johnson announced his intention to locate a preschool program within the Office of Economic Opportunity’s Community Action Program and called the initiative “Head Start” for the first time (Vinovskis 2005, 73). In February, the Head Start Planning Committee endorsed a comprehensive vision of child development and reached an “unofficial consensus” that Head Start should begin as a small pilot program. It did not object, however, when the administration decided to “proceed immediately with a nationwide Head Start program that would serve 100,000 children” (Zigler and Muenchow 1992, 22).

The ambitious decision to launch Head Start as a nationwide program offered several advantages. The availability of unused funds from the Community Action Program (CAP) facilitated its rapid expansion. The cost of the nationwide launch actually “represented a solution—a worthwhile way to allocate the remainder of the unused CAP funds before the end of the fiscal year” (Zigler and Muenchow 1992, 25). Nationwide implementation was also politically beneficial. It “made the program highly vis-

ible” and “created the grass-roots support—and a potential vote from every congressional district—that would protect Head Start later on” (Zigler and Muenchow 1992, 28).

The main drawback of the nationwide launch was inconsistent quality among Head Start centers. Many centers lacked the resources they needed to achieve their objectives. For example, there was a shortage of qualified teachers with training and experience in early childhood education. In addition, local school districts worried that Head Start would impose a national curriculum, so program supporters were reluctant to mandate a specific educational approach (Zigler and Muenchow 1992, 42). Head Start therefore allowed local communities to make many curricular choices, which fostered uneven program quality. Concerns about program quality led some critics to question whether Head Start would significantly help disadvantaged children, but the program nonetheless enjoyed strong public and bipartisan support at its inception in the summer of 1965.

A preschool panel at a White House conference in July is illustrative. The panel featured “an enthusiastic commitment to Head Start as a fresh breeze in American education” and “an all-pervading feeling that the momentum of Head Start should not be lost.”⁶¹ Head Start received especially effusive praise from consultant J. W. Getzels. Getzels wrote that Head Start “represents the awakening of the American conscience to the nation’s most serious problem, and we can take pride that a generation hence no one will be able to say as we are about a generation ago that although the problem was recognized nothing courageous to solve it was attempted.”⁶² This support for Head Start was accompanied by a broader call for national government action, including a large-scale financial investment in early childhood programs. Panelists urged the president to support “a national commitment for a war on ignorance directed specifically at the preschool child.”⁶³

At the conference, Representative Albert Quie (R-MN) announced his intention to offer an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) “to incorporate within the traditional school structure programs like Head Start for preschool children.”⁶⁴ Other participants objected to Quie’s idea because they wanted the initiative to be affiliated with community action programs. When Quie offered his amendment to the ESEA, it provoked an extended debate on the House floor. Democrats complained that the proposal was too prescriptive and too narrowly focused on early childhood programs, whereas Quie and his Republican colleagues argued that the Democratic alternatives devoted insufficient at-

tention to preschool and would not facilitate a close relationship between early childhood education and the public schools (Vinovskis 2005, 82–85). The Republican congressman’s proposal nonetheless reflected the bipartisan appeal of Head Start and preschool education. In a 1966 memorandum, in fact, Republicans claimed credit for the idea behind Head Start and described it as “the most successful of the new poverty programs.”⁶⁵

The enthusiasm surrounding the nationwide launch of Head Start caused some supporters to worry that “too much was being promised too soon” (Zigler and Muenchow 1992, 27). Head Start provided several social services, but it was eventually evaluated primarily along the dimension of cognitive gains. The notion that children’s intelligence could be affected by their environment led to speculation, much of it by program supporters, that Head Start would raise enrollees’ IQ scores. Supporters who worried about the overselling of the program argued that evaluations relying primarily on cognitive gains were “unrealistic and unfair.”⁶⁶ One observer explained “[T]hey tried taking kids for six weeks in the summer, giving them a razzmatazz program, and some injections, and a little feeding up, and then expecting to go back five years later and find that these children had I.Q.s that were twenty points higher than the ones who hadn’t been subjected to this. . . . What could be more patently ridiculous?”⁶⁷ Cognitive gains and IQ scores nevertheless continued to be the primary dimensions along which Head Start was evaluated.

Early evaluations of Head Start led to setbacks for the program. A March 1967 report on the first summer and winter Head Start programs was inconclusive. It found that program attendees experienced significant gains in some contexts but not in others. Furthermore, follow-up studies suggested that just six months “after the end of the experience differences between Head Start and non-Head Start children had been reduced.”⁶⁸ This “fade-out” problem, which had been recognized as early as 1965,⁶⁹ led to the launch of the Follow Through pilot program in June 1967. Follow Through attempted “to capitalize upon and supplement the gains children make in preschool experiences through continuing their participation in a program” of comprehensive social services.⁷⁰

Head Start received a fundamental challenge in April 1969, when the Westinghouse Learning Corporation released its preliminary report on the long-term impact of Head Start enrollment. It focused on the attitudes and academic achievements of former Head Start enrollees in first, second, and third grade and concluded, “Head Start children could not be said to be *appreciably* different from their peers in the elementary grades who did not attend Head Start in most aspects of cognitive and affective

development measured in this study.”⁷¹ Although the data in the report could be interpreted in several ways, the report was widely viewed as evidence of Head Start’s limited effectiveness. One historian describes the Westinghouse report as “damning criticism . . . which suggested that the intellectual gains of preschool compensatory education evaporated after a few years in elementary school” (Cravens 1993, 257). The report placed Head Start supporters on the defensive, yet the program survived these initial difficulties due to its strong political constituency and widespread public support (E. Rose 2010, 29; Vinovskis 1999a, 74–75).⁷² There were calls for the outright elimination of Head Start, but by 1969, the program “had become too popular among the public and politicians to be abandoned” (Vinovskis 2005, 143).

Supporters also defended Head Start against several efforts to transfer it to the Office of Education in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW). HEW secretary Robert Finch argued that the transfer would improve Head Start by facilitating greater program length and continuity and increased technical assistance and evaluation efforts.⁷³ He suggested that the transfer would benefit Head Start financially, allowing it to draw on departmental resources “without necessarily going up for a higher appropriation for Head Start as such.”⁷⁴ He wanted to reassure Head Start supporters who feared that the program would get lost in a large department and that its community action component would evaporate. In June, the Nixon administration announced that Head Start would be placed under the jurisdiction of the Office of Child Development, a special agency within HEW that was set apart from the Office of Education (Vinovskis 2005, chap. 8).

Due to their long-term political impact, two features of Head Start deserve further attention. The first is the program’s comprehensive approach. The Head Start Planning Committee’s decision to endorse a comprehensive program has been characterized as “one of its most important recommendations” (Hymes 1979, 34). Head Start is premised on the assumption that child development is a “multifaceted process” involving children, their parents, other family members, and the community at large.⁷⁵ In addition to its educational goals, it strives to improve physical health and nutritional outcomes. It is a child development program that attempts to “integrate all services needed by young children into a unified program to influence their total development.”⁷⁶ The comprehensive nature of Head Start foreshadowed the debates of the late 1960s and early 1970s in which supporters of a permanent, national, universal early childhood program insisted that it should emulate the Head Start model.

A second attribute of Head Start that had an important long-term political impact is its emphasis on parental involvement, which ultimately became a source of both controversy and political support (Zigler and Muenchow 1992). Active parental involvement was an “absolute requirement of an acceptable Head Start program,” and every grantee was required to establish a policy advisory committee with at least half of its membership made up of parents or parent representatives.⁷⁷ A Head Start program manual published in September 1967 outlined four major kinds of parental participation: (1) participating in the process of making decisions about the nature and operation of the program; (2) participating in the classroom as paid employees, volunteers, and observers; (3) welcoming center staff into their homes for discussions of how parents can contribute to child development in the home; and (4) participating in educational activities developed for and with help from the parents.⁷⁸ Parental input on program operation and the possibility of paid employment had an especially profound long-term impact. Parents and families who have participated in Head Start have been heavily involved in its planning and governance and, as subsequent chapters of this book will show, have often defended these prerogatives.

Head Start’s generation of jobs for adults was a source of both national and local controversy in 1969. When the program was delegated to the Office of Child Development, HEW insisted that the transfer would lead to no job losses, and it emphasized its commitment “not only to the hiring of non-professionals in Head Start programs, but the development of career ladders for them.”⁷⁹ Around the same time, a controversy erupted over whether Minneapolis public schools administering Head Start programs were giving parents sufficient input in program decisions and preference for classroom positions. School system leaders argued that the “vast majority of Head Start aides” had always been Head Start parents or residents of poverty-area neighborhoods.⁸⁰ Parental involvement in Head Start had long-term implications because it gave Head Start parents and their advocates a stake in the existing policy repertoire and caused them to resist proposed changes.

Demographic, Intellectual, and Political Forces for Change

Until the 1960s, the national government role in early childhood policy could be classified as a “series of crisis interventions” (Cahan 1989, 37) that reflected “a lack of comprehensive social policy and the formation of tem-

porary policy in times of crisis” (Takanishi 1977, 158). Government intervention was “reluctantly funded by the public and only in extraordinary historical times” (McGill-Franzen 1993, 175). As one observer explained in 1946, “WPA had the tendency to make us think of nursery schools only as a means of employing teachers. Lanham Funds forced our thinking somewhat into a groove where we saw the nursery school only as a means of freeing mothers for work. These were not children’s purposes; they were ‘secondary purposes’ which nursery schools can serve.”⁸¹ The programs of the 1930s and 1940s had been temporary targeted responses to national crises. Head Start was similar along those dimensions.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, government officials turned their attention to programs serving a broader constituency, moving away from targeted programs and toward universal ones. The importance of this shift cannot be overstated in light of the precedent set in earlier decades. Supporters had long argued that early childhood services should be available to all children. Only in the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, did lawmakers seriously consider establishing a permanent national framework for the universal provision of educational, nutritional, and health services. Why did this shift occur?

In his influential model of the agenda-setting process, John Kingdon (1995, 165) argues that “policy windows” open only when a “problem is recognized, a solution is developed and available in the policy community, a political change makes it the right time for policy change, and potential constraints are not severe.” The merger of these streams provides policy entrepreneurs with the opportunity to push their preferred policy solution. Kingdon’s model helps explain why the debate over early childhood policy shifted from an emphasis on targeted, temporary programs to the serious consideration of a permanent, universal program. A combination of demographic, intellectual, and political forces placed early childhood policy on the national political agenda and contributed to a decisive break with the past.

Demographic Change: Trends in Female Employment

Changing societal conditions can draw officials’ attention to new issues or cause them to revisit old ones. In the context of early childhood policy, the most crucial demographic shift was the transformation of the American workforce between the Second World War and 1969. During this period, mothers of young children entered the labor force in large numbers, and a debate ensued about whether and how the government should respond to

this change. Among mothers with children under age eighteen, rates of participation in the labor force increased from less than 10 percent in 1940 to 30 percent in 1960 and about 40 percent in March 1969.⁸² The employment rate of married women with children under age six increased from less than 12 percent in 1950 to more than 30 percent in 1970 (E. Rose 1999, 213). This trend has been called a “historic substitution [that] transformed the demographics of the twentieth-century American economy and affected all classes” (Sealander 2003, 13). Many families could not rely on grandparents or other relatives to provide care for their young children, because “the traditional extended family structure [had] been fractured.”⁸³ As a result, many more American children were cared for outside their homes.

Scholars trace this demographic shift to various sources. Gornick and Meyers (2003, 28) attribute it to the Second World War, which caused a “temporary employment shock [that] set in motion irreversible changes in attitudes toward the employment of married women.” Others describe it as part of a larger economic and social transformation, as families headed by a breadwinner and a homemaker became less common. David Frum (2000, 68–69) argues that the entry of women into the workforce was part of a larger trend toward “expressive work [that] was caused at least as much by new ideas about the meaning of work as by the need for more family income.” Economic necessity was another potential cause. Supporters of government intervention often claimed that women entered the labor force in order to make ends meet. The Policy Council of the National Women’s Political Caucus, for example, attempted to legitimize governmental support by arguing, “The vast majority of women work not by choice but because they must.”⁸⁴

Regardless of its ultimate source, there is no disputing the political significance of this demographic shift. The widespread participation of mothers of young children in the labor market fomented controversy about whether and how the government should respond. Supporters of government intervention pointed to demographic changes to justify policy change. In 1967, one advocate noted that other countries had taken action because “[they] are realists and they reason that if you take the mother away from the home and employ her, something must be done about the children who are left without supervision and without the love and attention that only a mother could give.”⁸⁵ Congressional Republicans were especially struck by the fact that these trends in the labor market affected many families in the lower-middle and middle income ranges. According to one staffer, “From the simple day-care question we very soon

spilled over into the whole area of child development.”⁸⁶ This transition reflected broader intellectual changes.

Intellectual Change: Developments in Cognitive Psychology

The fact that the mothers of young children entered the workforce in unprecedented numbers did not require a specific course of action. The split between day nurseries and nursery schools in the early twentieth century, for example, illustrates how one could adopt a custodial approach to early childhood and care or place a stronger emphasis on educational content.⁸⁷ The debates of the late 1960s and early 1970s emphasized educational programs and focused on the notion of child development. Supporters often justified this focus by referring to an intellectual shift in cognitive psychology.

The mid- to late 1950s were “a transition point in American psychology in general, and in child psychology in particular.”⁸⁸ Many psychologists rethought the process of cognitive development and characterized intelligence as something affected by environmental forces. In doing so, they broke with the “Gesellian era, with its emphasis on maturation and the implicit notion of the fixed I.Q.”⁸⁹ In short, many cognitive psychologists rejected the long-standing idea that intelligence was fixed at birth. They argued that early childhood experiences had profound implications for subsequent development. This paradigmatic shift led to “rapid growth in interest in early childhood education . . . by suggesting that certain kinds of experiences may affect the rate of early cognitive development” (Cahan 1989, 48). It heightened the perceived importance of children’s experiences during the first five years of life.

Several psychologists contributed to this intellectual shift, but the work of J. McVicker Hunt and Benjamin Bloom was especially influential.⁹⁰ Developmental psychologist Sheldon H. White explained, “The papers by Bloom and Hunt must easily have been the most frequently cited publications in discussion of preschools.”⁹¹ Hunt and Bloom “produced some of the earliest and most effective arguments for early childhood education in the late 1950s and early 1960s” (Vinovskis 2005, 11). Advocates of increased investment in early childhood education often invoked their research.

Hunt’s *Intelligence and Experience* was published in 1961. Hunt argued that intelligence was modifiable and could be affected by environmental forces. He proposed that a “substantially higher adult level of intellectual capacity [can] be achieved by providing quality encounters with the environment in the early years.”⁹² He emphasized the interaction between an

organism and its environment: “Much of the evidence reviewed in this work is concerned with showing that experience, and especially early experience, is of importance” (335). Hunt was optimistic about the potential long-term impact of early childhood experiences. Arguing that additional research might make it “feasible to raise the average level of intelligence as now measured by a substantial degree,” he speculated, “In order to be explicit, it is conceivable that this ‘substantial degree’ might be of the order of 30 points of I.Q.” (267). This optimistic speculation helps explain why Hunt’s book sparked such widespread interest in early childhood policy.

Published in 1964, Bloom’s *Stability and Change in Human Characteristics* examined data from about one thousand longitudinal studies. It questioned the notion of a fixed IQ and described intelligence as a developmental concept. Bloom noted increased stability in intelligence measurements with time and pointed out that about 50 percent of the variation in intelligence at age seventeen was accounted for by age four. This pattern, he concluded, “would suggest the very rapid growth of intelligence in the early years and the possible great influence of the early environment on this development” (68). He hypothesized that the impact of environmental factors and deprivation were most pronounced during the first few years of life. He concluded that “the increased ability to predict long-term consequences of environmental forces and developmental characteristics places new responsibilities on the home, the school, and the society” (231). He argued that these responsibilities must be met early in life, when it is easiest to bring about desirable changes. Bloom’s book was very influential. It “[threw] the spotlight on the tremendous importance of the early years of life, and [showed] how hard it was to bring about changes later in life. It added up to a strong plug for early childhood education” (Hymes 1979, 33).

Some psychologists and other scholars questioned whether appropriate conclusions were being drawn from the research described in the preceding paragraphs. They worried that the potential benefits of early experiences were being overstated. Scholars such as Edward Zigler felt that the “environmental mystique” was a valuable corrective to the Gesellian era but had been oversold and that “scientists and lay people alike were displaying an almost magical faith in the power to increase mental capacity” (Zigler and Muenchow 1992, 13).⁹³ Others focused on the lessons that educators and legislators drew from this research in cognitive psychology. One pair of critics complained, for example, that the advocates of early schooling “make unfortunate twin assumptions: that a child’s intelligence can be nurtured by organizing it, and that brightness means readiness for

school.”⁹⁴ They argued that early schooling might be damaging over the long term if it occurred in a setting that failed to provide warmth and security, and they asserted that “one of a child’s primary needs in these formative years is for an environment free of tasks that will tax his brain.”⁹⁵

Despite these and other critiques, cognitive psychology research provided a scientific justification for increased interest in early childhood policy. Scholars like J. McVicker Hunt and Benjamin Bloom questioned the notion of fixed intelligence and emphasized the impact of the first five years of life on cognitive development. This intellectual transition was especially important because it provided a rationale for focusing on child development rather than on custodial child care. At around the same time, the political environment offered opportunities for elected officials to propose a major expansion of the national government’s role in this policy arena.

Political Change: The War on Poverty and the Shifting Contours of Education Policy

Several political developments raised the profile of early childhood policy in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a period of social reform and national government activism. In a 1972 speech, S. P. Marland Jr., the U.S. commissioner of education, described the 1960s as a time of “almost unparalleled idealism” during which Americans “turned our sense of social justice into massive federal funding and corresponding law.”⁹⁶ The size and scope of national government activity expanded dramatically in this period, fueled by an activist president and, after the 1964 election, an overwhelmingly Democratic Congress. This activism reflected public opinion. James Stimson (1991, 64) argues that “the liberal winds of the 1960s were blowing in the latter part of the previous decade, a gradual run-up that was gone soon after it was generally recognized to be in place.” This bundle of domestic policy preferences meant that Americans were willing to countenance major expansions of national government activity.

State and local government authorities had traditionally exercised control over educational programming. As late as 1959, one scholar wrote, “The desirability of *local* control of the public schools is an article of faith among most trained educators and many other Americans” (Eliot 1959, 1032; emphasis in original). Local control was justified on several grounds. It allowed educational programs to be adapted to social and economic conditions and the unique needs of local communities. It permitted experimentation, which resonated with the popular portrayal of the states as

“laboratories of democracy.”⁹⁷ Localities could try out new ideas, and if their experiments led to improved educational outcomes, they could be emulated elsewhere. Finally, local control encouraged political participation, serving as “an indispensable laboratory for training an intelligent and competent citizenry for larger civic affairs and more responsible positions” (Hales 1954, 7).

National government aid to the public schools had been debated in the 1930s and 1940s, and both major party platforms endorsed it during the 1948 presidential campaign (Vinovskis 2005, 13). Three interrelated issues, however, made it “impossible to shape a winning coalition in Congress” (Thomas 1983, 273). One issue was financial aid for parochial schools, which was seen as a deal breaker by those who viewed it as a violation of the separation of church and state. A second issue was financial aid for segregated public schools, especially after the landmark *Brown* decision in 1954. The civil rights issue resonated especially strongly with policymakers from southern states. A third issue was the possibility that national government aid to the public schools would lead to “federal control” of education policy. Fears of centralization and totalitarianism were especially important in the context of the Cold War. Multiple historians have described the issues as the “three R’s” of race, religion, and reds (Bailey and Mosher 1968, 21; Thomas 1975, 3). Several education bills failed to clear these political hurdles. By the late 1950s, one of the “most distinctive attributes [of American politics was] the tenacity with which the United States, unlike most nations, had resisted a national education policy” (Graham 1984, xvii).

Observers disagreed about what the future held. The ongoing controversy surrounding aid to parochial and segregated schools led one scholar to predict that “general federal aid is still far off” (Eliot 1959, 1043). Another argued that “education appears to be on the threshold of an appreciable increase in federal control” (Hales 1954, 54). The period from 1960 through 1964 laid the foundation for the passage of legislation. Supporters altered their legislative strategy by “thinking of education in terms of social welfare and economic growth and presenting the program in an omnibus bill and messages.”⁹⁸ Francis Keppel, the U.S. commissioner of education from 1962 to 1965, eventually developed a compromise that satisfied both the teachers unions and Catholic leaders, “finding a legislative formula that would permit massive federal assistance of a kind that would at the same time strengthen state and local initiative” (Bailey and Mosher 1968, 35). These powerful constituencies recognized that an insistence on ideological purity would prevent them from receiving tangible benefits (Sundquist 1968,

206). As a result, the “customary fragmentation of the education lobby was displaced by a rare demonstration of unity.”⁹⁹ The leadership of President Lyndon B. Johnson was crucial. Johnson “placed his substantial influence behind federal policies aimed at federal support of American education” (Bailey 1975, 36). A skilled legislative tactician, he “made education his highest domestic policy concern after civil rights” (Thomas 1983, 277).

Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act into law in 1965.¹⁰⁰ A delicate balancing act was necessary for its passage, and the ESEA “was a closely woven tapestry of educational objectives and program proposals that Congress could not greatly alter without a serious impairment of substance or political appeal” (Bailey and Mosher 1968, 48). The core of the statute was Title I, which was devoted to the schooling of economically deprived children. Although Title I did not provide general aid, “[w]ide geographical funds and a semblance of ‘general aid’ were ensured by counting all school age children in poverty, and by requiring that a school district only have three percent eligible children to qualify for a grant” (Bailey and Mosher 1968, 49). The ESEA expanded the national government’s role through several categorical programs, but its passage “was celebrated . . . as a historic breakthrough for general aid” (Graham 1984, 79). Historians and politicians described its passage in dramatic terms, focusing on its implications for federalism and education policy. They called the ESEA “a radical departure for the federal government” (McDonnell 2005, 36) and “a clean break with earlier models” (Bailey and Mosher 1968, 60). States and localities now shared control over education policy with the national government.

Passage of the ESEA fundamentally reshaped the debate over education policy. Public attitudes toward the national government and its role “changed rather dramatically and rather fast.”¹⁰¹ In 1968, Representative John Brademas (D-IN) noted that “the politics of education in the United States has altered very sharply in the last several years.”¹⁰² The commissioner of education described national education funding as one of “those formerly controversial issues that once threatened to topple the Republic but that now have gained widespread acceptance.”¹⁰³ Historians used similar language. By the late 1960s, there “was no longer serious debate over the propriety of a major federal role in education” (Thomas 1975, 34). According to one scholar, “The question would be, henceforth, not *whether* the national government should give aid but *how much* it should give, for what purposes—and with how much federal control” (Sundquist 1968, 216; emphasis in original). Passage of the ESEA represented a major policy shift, altering the role of the national government in education policy.

In sum, the 1960s were a period during which lawmakers expanded the scope of national government activity in education policy. Passage of the ESEA in 1965 was the culmination of a decades-long struggle over the issue of education funding. The ESEA legitimized national government involvement in a policy arena that had previously been dominated by states and localities. When advocates later pressed for the national and universal provision of early childhood services, the ESEA constituted a precedent on which they could build.

Summary: Forces for Change in Early Childhood Policy

A combination of demographic, intellectual, and political forces placed early childhood policy on the national political agenda in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Mothers with young children entered the labor force in unprecedented numbers, which meant that more American children were being cared for outside their homes. Research in cognitive psychology affected parents' and policymakers' ideas about the type of care that was best for these children. By heightening the perceived importance of the first five years of life, this research suggested that any care young children received outside their homes should have a prominent educational component. Politically, the decade of the 1960s was an era of increased national governmental intervention. One of the legislative landmarks of this era was the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which expanded the role of the national government in a policy arena that had previously been dominated by states and localities. This confluence of forces raised the profile of early childhood policy and caused lawmakers to debate the national government's role in its provision.

**Conclusion: Changing Attitudes toward
Early Childhood Education**

During the 1960s, a fundamental shift occurred in how politicians and the American public thought about early childhood policy. Historically, the national government had been limited to administering targeted policies under crisis conditions, but by the end of the decade, several organizations and politicians endorsed the creation of a universal national framework. The National Education Association and the American Association of School Administrators argued that "the opportunity for early education at public expense should . . . be universal" for all children over the age of

four (Educational Policies Commission 1966, 5). Using governmental resources to expand access to early childhood programs possessed bipartisan appeal. Some Republicans acknowledged the cost of a universal program but cited its potential long-term benefits: “The cost to institute such a program would be high, but would more than pay for itself by savings in law enforcement, manpower, job retraining, welfare payments and mental health services.”¹⁰⁴ Perhaps the most important change of the decade was a shift in how Americans viewed the role of the national government. The idea that early childhood programs should be run by the national government received significant public support. A July 1969 Gallup poll suggested that “two-thirds of the American public favored the establishment of federally funded day care centers.”¹⁰⁵ These results suggest a remarkable willingness to countenance governmental intervention in a realm that had traditionally been considered the private domain of the family.

In sum, the 1960s were a period of dramatic change in the politics of early childhood. By 1965, “[t]he number and diversity of compensatory preschool projects [were] growing so rapidly that it [was] hazardous to say anything about *the* nature of the program with risk of oversimplifying and being out of date almost at once.”¹⁰⁶ In an April 1968 speech, Harold Howe II, the commissioner of education, predicted, “If I read the signals correctly, this whole area of early education will be a major emphasis for the next several decades.”¹⁰⁷ Howe would soon be proven correct, as the confluence of several demographic, intellectual, and political forces led to the introduction of many major legislative proposals, foremost among them the Comprehensive Child Development Act of 1971.