

## **NASP Position Statement on Early Intervention Services**

### **Introduction (Background/Research/Rationale)**

The National Association of School Psychologists is committed to serving the educational and mental health needs of all children and youth, including infants, toddlers and preschool age children. There is a growing body of research that emphasizes the immeasurable impact of a child's experiences during the first three years of life. Some key issues regarding early childhood development include:

- All children are born ready to learn.
- Early environments matter and nurturing relationships are essential.
- Society is changing and the needs of young children are not being addressed.
- Interactions among early childhood science, policy, and practice are problematic and demand rethinking.

Research has shown that early intervention with young children with disabilities or who are at-risk for developmental difficulties benefits both children and families and accrues long-term cost savings to both school districts and society. Research shows that early intervention has the potential to positively impact future academic success and deter children from substance abuse and juvenile delinquency.

Public schools are involved in the provision of special education and related services to young children as a result of federal and state legislation. Two programs for young children and their families under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) are Early Intervention Programs for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities, Part C, which covers services to children from birth to age 2; and the Preschool Program (Section 619) of Part B, which covers services to children from ages 3 to 5. Data from the 1999-2000 school year show that 1.8% of the nation's infants and toddlers, and 5% of all U.S. preschool age children were served under IDEA. In addition, Head Start legislation, which includes Head Start programs for 3 and 4 year olds, provides assistance to children and families living below the federal poverty level. These children are at risk for both significant cognitive delays and poor school readiness.

NASP encourages school psychologists and others to advocate at the national, state and local levels for high quality early intervention services for both disabled and at-risk children. While individual states allocate resources for service delivery for the birth-to-five population, it is incumbent upon school psychologists to gain knowledge and expertise in how to effectively work with infants and young children. We must work with school administrators, teachers, and families to develop comprehensive intervention programs that are developmentally appropriate, family centered, and sensitive to cultural and linguistic differences. Programs should be developed to address all areas of development, including cognitive, social/emotional, motor, adaptive and communication skills.

Developmentally appropriate practices take into account what is known about child development and learning, what is known about the unique needs, strengths and interests of each child, and what is known about the cultural and social environments in which each child lives. Classroom practices that are developmentally appropriate tend to be child-initiated, and have been shown to be associated with higher levels of cognitive

functioning, social skills development and creativity in comparison to classrooms using traditional didactic teaching methods. Ideally, the school psychologist must work in unison with other early childhood intervention professionals to ensure that programs are based on methods with solid empirical support.

Early intervention services must include family participation. Parental involvement in any program is crucial for success, and early intervention is most effective when the families of children are fully involved. School psychologists must educate caregivers about their role in the IFSP/IEP process and about the significance of their input. Parents should be encouraged to target goals for their child, learn about their legal rights and responsibilities and exchange information with providers.

Cultural differences between service providers and families must be recognized. School psychologists, as well early interventionists, must be aware that families' communication styles, belief systems, and perceptions of disability, may vary greatly from their own. In order to understand these differences, practitioners must evaluate their own beliefs and attitudes and demonstrate empathy toward differences in perspective.

### **Role of the School Psychologist in Early Intervention Services**

Early intervention services are provided through a variety of school and community-based settings. The variability of services depends on a multitude of factors such as: the needs of the child and family, the needs of the community, and the service delivery system adopted by early intervention agencies, public school systems, and/or local preschools. Therefore, the role of the school psychologist with young children, families, early intervention professionals, and childcare providers is one that must be unique to this population.

School psychologists serving young children and families must perform roles similar to that of school psychologists working with the school age population, in addition they must expand their roles to meet the developmental, educational and mental health needs of young children in a variety of school and community-based settings.

NASP encourages the active participation of school psychologists across early intervention settings to:

- Apply knowledge of culturally and developmentally appropriate assessment practices to design and conduct screenings, individual assessments, and accountability systems that enable timely early interventions, provide services without labeling, link assessment to functional goals, and inform programs about appropriate and effective interventions.
- Work directly with children and families and indirectly with teachers and caregivers to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate individualized and group interventions for children, and to assist adults in acquiring skills needed to facilitate children's learning.
- Utilize research from areas of child development, developmental psychopathology, risk and resilience, and disability prevention to promote adoption of empirically demonstrated instructional practices in areas such as emergent literacy, socialization and problem-solving skills and self-management. Such skills enable

young children to transition successfully to school-age programs in typical or inclusive settings.

- Design and conduct evaluations of local early intervention programs and engage in action research which provides for participant involvement in studying processes and outcomes, with a focus on improving interventions and expanding knowledge about effective early intervention programs.
- Assist early intervention teams with the transition of young children from various settings by providing updated evaluation information, assistance with program planning, communication with receiving agencies or school staff and support to families as they learn about new programs and educational settings to ensure a consistent delivery of services.
- Provide advocacy and leadership in building comprehensive, collaborative systems of care that value parents as equal partners, respect individual differences and incorporate multicultural perspectives while insuring access to high-quality early educational environments for all young children.

## Summary

NASP recognizes the significant impact of a child's early experiences and supports the development of comprehensive, family centered early intervention programs that serve both children identified with a disability and children who are deemed at-risk. NASP encourages the use of empirically based, culturally sensitive, developmentally appropriate practices that are implemented in the child's natural environment whenever possible. School psychologists must consider the unique needs and circumstances of the early intervention population and adjust their role accordingly.

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### **Resources**

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### **Web Resources – current as of April 2003**

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)  
[www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org)

*NAEYC is a large, national organization of early childhood educators and others committed to improving the quality of programs for children from birth through third grade.*

The National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL)  
[www.ncedl.org](http://www.ncedl.org)

*NCEDL is a national early childhood research project focusing on enhancing the cognitive, social, and emotional development of children from birth through age eight.*

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)  
[www.cec.sped.org](http://www.cec.sped.org)

*The CEC is a large international professional organization committed to improving educational outcomes for students with disabilities, persons with exceptionalities, and/or the gifted.*

Zero to Three: National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families  
[www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org)

*Zero to Three is a national, non-profit organization dedicated to promoting the healthy development of infants and toddlers by supporting and strengthening families, communities, and those who work on their behalf.*

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