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The Early Advantage: Rapid Change in Early Childhood Education and Care Around the World

Groundbreaking Early Childhood Education Study Funded by The National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) Provides New Insights in Changing Global Landscape

Washington, DC- As educators and policymakers around the globe grapple with how to best serve their youngest learners, a few systems are taking the lead. A new, groundbreaking study, *The Early Advantage*, finds that Australia, England, Finland, Hong Kong, the Republic of Korea and Singapore are pioneering new but remarkably different visions for early childhood education and care (ECEC).

In the new book, *The Early Advantage 1: Early Childhood Systems That Lead By Example*, world-renowned early childhood researcher Sharon Lynn Kagan and her team of international experts examined the innovative approaches to early childhood policy, practice, and service delivery in these leading systems. Kagan and her team analyzed the quality, equity, efficiency and sustainability of services for young children in the six jurisdictions. The book takes readers on a deep dive into the innovative strategies and approaches to ECEC and offers an insider's look into common challenges, themes and lessons from these diverse systems.

"This study brings to light the striking new reality facing early childhood education and care systems around the world," said Kagan. "For the first time, we are seeing clearly the disparate and rapidly evolving global perspectives in ECEC. These differing perspectives and approaches to the "how" and "what" of systemic change reflect a policy and research sphere that is at an inflection point. Our understanding of the significance of the early years is growing rapidly and the common effort to create public policy and programs that support young children during this critical time are, in many ways, scrambling to keep pace."

Funded and supported by NCEE's Center on International Education Benchmarking, this is the first of two books, published by Teachers College Press, that together will form the centerpiece of the multi-year *Early Advantage* international comparative study. Kagan, the Virginia and Leonard Marx Professor of Early Childhood Education and Family Policy at Columbia University's Teachers College and Professor Adjunct at Yale's Child Study Center, drew together a research team comprised of experts in educational research and policy across the globe, including: the late Collette Taylor, to whom the book is dedicated, professor emeritus of the Melbourne Graduate School of Education; Kathy Sylva, honorary research fellow and professor of educational psychology at the University of Oxford; Kristiina Kumpulainen, professor of education and vice dean for research at the University of Helsinki; Nirmala Rao, professor in early childhood development and education at the University of Hong Kong; Mugyeong Moon of Korea's Institute of Childcare and Education, and Rebecca Bull of the National Institute of Education in Singapore.

In this first book, *The Early Advantage* research team challenges prevailing ideas, confronting deeply held assumptions and historic narratives regarding the provision of early childhood education and care. The research team found that the jurisdictions studied are paying close attention to the growing empirical evidence around the importance of the first three years of life for brain development as it impacts public policy and a shared equity agenda, pedagogy and new ideas around quality of care for young children.

A few key findings of note in each jurisdiction include:

- **Australia**
 - A strong and well-implemented national reform agenda enables a learning framework and service quality standards to transcend states and territories, service types, and the age of the young child.
- **England**
 - A first-rate inspection system ensures all programs meet common objectives for program quality and equitable outcomes.
 - Rigorously collected child data are used extensively as tools for pedagogical and program improvement.
- **Finland**
 - A centralized national core curriculum for early years education, pre-primary education and basic education leaves room for local and regional flexibility tailored to child needs.
 - A comprehensive pre-service professional development system for ECEC teachers contributes to quality across the nation.
- **Hong Kong**
 - Increasing public support, combined with significant inspection and monitoring for quality, fosters effective private sector provision amidst considerable centralization.
- **Republic of Korea**
 - Substantial government investment in ECEC harmonizes service quality.
 - Government-funded institutes, with a robust commitment to research, support knowledge development in ECEC.
- **Singapore**
 - Its Early Childhood Development Agency serves as a centralized point for policymaking, oversight and access to affordable and quality ECEC.
 - Rigorous training and defined career pathways create a clear framework for professional advancement and development for ECEC professionals.

“Kagan and her team, in this first book, have laid out, in detail, the approaches toward early childhood that some of the world’s leading systems are taking and their respective trajectories moving forward as they work to better prepare their young children for success in life and school,” said NCEE President and CEO Marc Tucker. “The growing consensus around the pivotal role that the early years play in lifelong outcomes make *The Early Advantage’s* novel insights not just provoking, but absolutely vital.”

A second book, *The Early Advantage 2*, is slated to be published next Spring. In that second volume, Kagan and her team will detail the “building blocks” that serve as the cornerstones of high-quality ECEC. These building blocks are the synthesis of the research team’s exploration of how the differing jurisdictions approach quality and equity in their unique contexts.

To mark its release, NCEE President Marc Tucker will host a webinar on October 9, 2018 featuring a presentation from Kagan on the book’s findings and a discussion of its implications. Also on October 9, detailed country case studies, along with one-page summaries of the ECEC systems will be available on NCEE’s *Early Advantage* website, www.NCEE.org/EarlyAdvantage.

Reporters interested in speaking with Marc Tucker or Sharon Lynn Kagan may contact NCEE Director of Communications Brendan Williams-Kief at bwilliamskief@ncee.org or 202-905-6284.

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The National Center on Education and the Economy was created in 1988 to analyze the implications of changes in the international economy for American education, formulate an agenda for American education based on that analysis and seek wherever possible to accomplish that agenda through policy change and development of the resources educators would need to carry it out. For more information visit www.ncee.org.

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