



The Early Advantage 2

Building Systems That Work for Young Children

PRESS RELEASE

New Study: The Inconvenient Truths of Early Childhood Education and Care and How the United States Must Confront Them

*Major International Comparative Study, *The Early Advantage*, Provides Recommendations for Improvement Based on the Practices for Young Children in Innovative Systems Around the World*

Washington, DC – The United States needs to rethink its approach to early childhood education and care (ECEC) based on the experiences of high-performing nations and develop a cohesive system that is high-quality, equitable, sustainable and efficient. This is the principal finding of the groundbreaking study from the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE), *The Early Advantage*, the focus of a release event held today in Washington, DC. The study examines how highly successful jurisdictions around the world are strategically and inventively designing and implementing early childhood policies and services to advance children’s well-being, and provides policy recommendations to help the U.S. expand the reach, equity and rigor of its early childhood offerings.

In the new book and centerpiece of the study, *The Early Advantage 2: Building Systems That Work for Young Children*, world-renowned early childhood researcher Sharon Lynn Kagan, her co-editor Eva Landsberg and a team of international experts explore the ECEC systems of Australia, England, Finland, Hong Kong, Singapore and South Korea, extracting essential elements from each of these innovative systems. The study found five common policy “pillars” in each jurisdiction: strong policy foundations; comprehensive services, funding and governance; knowledgeable and supported teachers and families; informed, individualized and continuous pedagogy; and data to drive improvement—as well as 15 “building blocks” or system elements that undergird the policy pillars.

“The pillars and building blocks unveiled in the second volume of *Early Advantage* help to unearth the inconvenient truths of the United States’ ECEC system,” Kagan said. “We have for too long dismissed the reality of context, advocated for the ‘one best’ ideology and relied on piecemeal thinking. The U.S. must boldly confront these truths to create a system of quality, equity, sustainability and efficiency for our young children. Our study provides a guide for the U.S. – and countries around the globe – to improve their systems by focusing on the building blocks and pillars that serve as the cornerstones of early childhood education and care in the highest-performing jurisdictions in the world.”

The second book provides a guide for countries as they grapple with the challenges of supporting young children and their families. Specifically, the study implores policy makers to:

- 1. Boldly address the inconvenient truths**
 - Be realistic about the U.S. context
 - Bury the “one best strategy” approach
 - Honor synergies to create a system and infrastructure that advances quality, equity, sustainability and efficiency
- 2. Be more inventive about revenue generation and distribution**
 - Think about engaging both the public and private sectors
 - Consider incentivizing quality, equity, sustainability and efficiency
- 3. Focus on bridging policy and program gaps among ECEC services**
 - Create effective governance structures
 - Use policy tools (e.g., frameworks, regulations, professional credentials) to create alignment among and continuity across programs
- 4. Be more inventive about workforce preparation, compensation and deployment**
 - Create common levels and titles for the workforce that transcend states and programs
 - Tie compensation to competence
 - Deploy personnel flexibly
- 5. Create a national curricular framework that focuses on quality, equity, sustainability and efficiency**
 - Focus on quality pedagogy for each and every child
 - Incentivize the framework’s adaptation throughout the nation
 - Use the framework to inspire improvements in monitoring, financing and professional preparation
- 6. Focus on data for quality improvement**
 - Build comprehensive data systems that include provisions for the collection and use of data on children, families, programs, personnel and systems
 - Foster a national research agenda on ECEC systems and their infrastructure.

Funded and supported by NCEE’s Center on International Education Benchmarking (CIEB) and published by Teachers College Press, the book is 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 team of experts from across the globe for the study, including: Rebecca Bull, formerly principal research scientist at the Center for Research in Child Development at the National Institute of Education in Singapore; Kristiina Kumpulainen, professor of education and vice dean of research at the University of Helsinki; Mugyeong Moon, director of the Centre for ECEC Policy for Future and Vision at the Korea Institute of Child Care and Education; Nirmala Rao, professor in early childhood development and

education at the University of Hong Kong; Kathy Sylva, honorary research fellow and professor of education psychology at the University of Oxford; and the late Collette Tayler, chair of Early Childhood Education and Care at the University of Melbourne. The first volume of the book, *The Early Advantage 1: Early Childhood Systems That Lead by Example*, was released in September 2018.

“There is much the U.S. can learn from the careful analysis of the high-performing countries conducted by Kagan and her team,” said Anthony Mackay, President and CEO of NCEE. “At precisely a time when countries across the globe are in need of the policy tools that will help them best serve their youngest learners, actionable recommendations abound in *The Early Advantage 2*.”

To mark its release, NCEE will host a symposium at the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Washington, DC today. The event will feature the leading voices in early childhood education and care as well as a presentation from Kagan and members of her team on the study’s findings and implications.

Reporters interested in speaking with Sharon Lynn Kagan, Anthony Mackay or principal investigators from the research team may contact NCEE Communications Officer Julia Banks at jbanks@ncee.org or 202-888-2536.

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The National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) 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.

The Center on International Education Benchmarking (CIEB), a program of NCEE, conducts and funds research on the world’s most successful education systems to identify the strategies those countries have used to produce their superior performance. Through its books, reports, monthly newsletter and a weekly update of education news around the world, CIEB provides up-to-date information and analysis on the world’s most successful education systems based on student performance, equity and efficiency. Visit www.ncee.org/cieb to learn more.