

# Informing the welfare debate: A conversation with state officials

*"In the near future, we may see fifty state-generated models of welfare reform, probably with many additional variants at the level of cities and communities." (this issue, p. 3)*

Even if Congress does not pass legislation ending the open-ended entitlement to welfare, the rapid pace at which states are requesting waivers (see this issue, pp. 34-37) means the eventual dismantling of the current welfare system. As the debate moves beyond issues of ideology into issues of implementation, state government's need for technical assistance and information will expand exponentially. If states are to respond appropriately to their new freedom in designing and managing welfare policy, what kinds of information will be most helpful, and how can it best be communicated to state officials? Reaching this diverse state audience will not be an easy task. The IRP project, "Informing the Welfare Debate," funded by the Helen Bader and the Joyce Foundations, is seeking to identify and develop effective methods of organizing and disseminating information at the level of state governments. This article summarizes some strategic and tactical issues raised at a March 15, 1996, meeting of the national advisory board for the project. The workshop began with presentations by state officials of reform activities undertaken and problems encountered in four states—California, Michigan, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

## California<sup>1</sup>

California has proposed major changes in welfare, creating four separate programs: two work-based, one for children only (25 percent of the California caseload consists of children-only cases), and one for the disabled. The state at present has a county-administered welfare system.

A constellation of problems surrounds current and future welfare reform. What are the realities and what are the myths in this complex arena? How can we position ourselves for anticipated policies? How can we identify the knowns and unknowns and focus on what works and what doesn't in both the short and long terms? How can we measure the population at risk? How do we measure success?

These questions raise two issues:

1. In order to gain credibility, any welfare program has to be consistent with society's general values. These values can be identified as *personal responsibility, child*

*well-being, and adult functionality.* To illustrate the complexity surrounding reform, consider the issues that teen pregnancy evokes: teen fertility, births to teens, both married and unmarried, premature emancipation, dependency, rape, sexual abuse and domestic violence, parenting styles, absent-parent responsibility and support paid, parental nurturing, educational attainment, impact on well-being, mental health, substance abuse, the heterogeneity of the target group in age and psychological resources, caseload dynamics, and the life-course events and intergenerational effects set in train by teen pregnancy.

2. Administrative data are very important in measuring the impact of reform. California has tried to link data across systems, to understand the dynamic of what happens to people over time. Survey data are needed to supplement administrative data; focus groups are also helpful. Not only systems, but populations will be changing: one basic need over the next 25 years will be to follow the experience of aging baby boomers. In social services we may well see the need for changes in program design every five years or so.

## Michigan<sup>2</sup>

The Michigan state budget has been prepared on the assumption that block grants will be legislated; without block grants, the budget will be \$320 million in deficit. A new block grant welfare system is planned; the legislature has given the governor a blank check for this. Under the proposed Family Independence Program, the Family Independence Agency will combine responsibility for JOBS, day care, and income maintenance. Present income maintenance workers, who generally have only a high school degree, will have to compete with college graduates—the current JOBS and day care workers—for staff positions. The plan is to spend more administrative time on cases without earnings, replacing a human capital strategy with a "labor force contract." Budget savings through policy simplification will free up staff for the new system. Some thought is being given to how to conduct an evaluation, but no decision has yet been made on whether to use a formal experimental design.

Besides this major reform, many smaller reforms are now going on line and should be evaluated—but how? Medicaid is being transferred to a new Department of Community Health, which will also have responsibility for public health and mental health; determining recipient eligibility remains with the Department of Social

Services. Two waivers have just been implemented. One involves full-grant sanctions for those who have refused for 12 months to participate in JOBS. Under the evaluation contract for this project, it will take at least a year to get results, so the state is trying to link data on these people across systems, in the California mode. The other waiver permits recipients to cash out food stamps as part of Michigan's continuing AFDC demonstration. Project Zero, a program now under way at six sites, provides extra services in an attempt to get public assistance recipients who have no earnings into the work force.

Michigan is concerned about how best to measure administrative costs to achieve cost neutrality if block grants are not legislated. The state would welcome advice on methodology to measure the administrative costs of policy changes.

## **Virginia<sup>3</sup>**

The Virginia Independence Program includes statewide modifications to AFDC that became effective in July 1995. Its primary elements are diversionary assistance (one-time help to families in crisis owing to temporary loss of income), a family cap (no increase in benefits for children born after the family has received AFDC for 10 months), compulsory school attendance, paternity establishment, and the requirement that a minor parent live with a parent. The employment-related program, the Virginia Initiative for Employment not Welfare (VIEW) requires all able-bodied parents, except those caring for their own children under 18 months of age, to find employment within 90 days of receiving AFDC. VIEW also includes a two-year time limit, the signing of a Personal Responsibility Agreement in order to be eligible for AFDC, subsidized employment, work experience, expanded income disregards, and transitional Medicaid and day care benefits.

The Department of Social Services is working on a way to report program data in a timely fashion, preferably on a monthly basis. An attempt is being made to link across systems, particularly the AFDC and child support systems, to obtain data in as much detail as possible. Program evaluation will be difficult. The state supports federal evaluation mandates. There is some concern that evaluations will not be as thorough without them.

## **Wisconsin<sup>4</sup>**

A major program proposal initiated by the Wisconsin state government is Wisconsin Works, W-2, which has just been approved by the state legislature and will replace AFDC in about October 1997. (See this issue, pp. 53-76, for description and analysis of W-2.)

New administrative data systems will be required for these programs. The two major systems at present are the child support reporting system, and CARES, for AFDC, which is two years old and still struggling to overcome problems. Two considerations in using large, automated administrative data systems to provide management information are: (1) the need to get appropriate data elements into the system during development; this involves a "selling" job—promoting the value of the information versus the cost of including it; and (2) ensuring integrity of the data during development and implementation. Strategies for retrieving data from administrative systems include defining the "data warehouse" to be used for direct on-line access; testing the data warehouse; and testing the production reports. All of these operations present difficult problems. Wisconsin has strong data links between the AFDC and the child support systems, but not with the child welfare system. W-2 will require a new system, and will be linked with JOBSNET, the current employment listing, and databases in the Department of Revenue.

Many questions concerning data collection and welfare reform remain unanswered: How can a program that is implemented statewide be evaluated? How much should authority over data maintenance and access be centralized, how much should be local? How can critical indicators be developed to provide management and operators with clear, concise measures of performance? What performance measures will provide incentives to achieve the desired outcome for the clients? When agencies are paid on the basis of their performance, how should performance be measured? How can we coordinate a variety of automated data systems?

## **Shared concerns**

These comments by state officials closely involved in the implementation and evaluation issues raised by welfare reform initiatives evidence a number of common concerns, and workshop attendants identified a set of questions that are relevant to many forms of welfare reform:

- What are the best ways to measure human situations in terms of need, child well-being, labor market placement, cost effectiveness?
- How can the performance of a system be measured under constantly changing conditions?
- How should success be defined, and what are the benchmarks against which to measure it?
- What outcome measures should be used to hold program providers accountable?
- Given how quickly things are changing, how can we obtain feedback swiftly enough to understand the

effects of programs and, where necessary, make corrections?

- What happens to people and families after the 2- or 5-year limits are reached? How do states deal with any problems after that?
- What about the issue of transitions—what happens when people leave programs?
- How have time limits changed the way we look at populations, at outcomes, at ways to monitor, at ways to look at all the other systems such as the Earned Income Tax Credit and supportive services?
- What are the “triage” methods for determining who goes into what program and who gets what services? How will evaluations determine whether the triage method is working?
- How are states restructuring work incentives?
- How can we humanely end transitional medical care and child care?
- How can states save the most money?
- How is child poverty affected by various strategies?
- How effective is the requirement that children stay in school? What happens to families sanctioned because their children are not in school?
- Should states be doing serious work on strategies for pregnancy prevention among teenagers? If so, what are the best two or three strategies?
- Under what conditions should teen mothers receive a cash grant?

Subsequent discussions at the workshop were broad in scope and exploratory in nature. They revolved around four central administrative areas in welfare reform: implementation, data collection, evaluation, and disseminating information. A sampling of the questions raised is given below. A more extended discussion of the evaluation of welfare reform, set in the context of W-2, appears on pp. 74–76.

## Implementation issues

How will program implementation affect the “culture” of the welfare office? Most of these offices have been responsible only for writing and sending out checks. They will now be accountable for everything from employment counseling to helping participants secure day care and transportation. How will income maintenance workers be retrained to manage their new responsibilities? How will they learn to determine at the outset whether a particular individual will need much, moderate, or little assistance in order to obtain a paying job? Other concerns included the factors to be considered in

establishing program time limits and in setting up systems that will effectively obtain program data.

## Data collection issues

Data collection and system design issues were areas of great common concern. Participants discussed setting overall standards for data collection; coordinating data systems (for example, welfare reform and child welfare systems); making decisions about what to collect; being able more easily to identify essential indicators; and identifying which items collected will be most useful not only to policy makers but also to researchers, who can then analyze the information/data and feed results back to the states. An example of the kind of information that is not now readily available but that will be necessary is attendance data in learnfare programs, where welfare benefits are conditioned upon school attendance by the children.

## Evaluation issues

### Limitations of experimental designs

Now that the limitations of experimental-design evaluations have become more apparent, what alternative evaluation styles show promise? Currently, the federal government is working with at least 35 states that have a total of 50 random-assignment demonstrations under way. There was consensus that this form of evaluation may not always be the most reliable method for producing the best (or most useful) information for policy makers. It contains many biases: sites may not be representative, implementation may vary across sites, and the experiences and expectations of the control group may be influenced in informal ways by the experiment.

### Field work

Beyond data systems and random-assignment evaluations, qualitative evaluations are important: case studies in the field, and ethnographic research are more important than ever in providing relevant and useful information to state officials.

### Definition of success

What constitutes success in a particular program and how is it to be measured? For example, if a participant engages in frequent job churning—a series of low-wage jobs interspersed with brief stints on a public program—would that be deemed a program success or a failure?

### Performance standards

If performance standards are to be a feature of welfare reform, what should the standards contain? Should these

standards affect, for example, the level of payments to vendors? Can evaluations and performance standards be useful in providing mid-course correction even as programs are being implemented?

### **Need for a broad perspective**

Evaluations will need to be expanded to include, for example, measurement of child well-being and impacts over two or more generations.

### **Sharing information within and between states**

There was widespread agreement among participants that we have entered a new phase of policy making. This new era necessitates an increase in the sharing of information among researchers and practitioners within and between states. Practitioners need increased accessibility to appropriate research and information so that they may better address issues and the needs of clients. The policy community might also benefit by more effective communication with academic researchers. The discussion about ways to facilitate this communication included the following points:

Clarify the nature of the audience and its philosophy. Information or data useful to one group are not necessarily useful to another.

Assist in gauging the scope and substance of products or papers that are developed to serve the needs of various audiences and interests. For example, states currently on

the brink of new welfare initiatives require different kinds of information, differently presented, than do states that have been involved in welfare demonstrations for a longer time.

Assist with the translation and dissemination of information. Policy makers often look to researchers to make sense of huge amounts of information. How can researchers assist one another in doing so? What can academic institutions do to facilitate this process?

Maximize communication among groups, by providing forums where face-to-face interactions can take place. This type of “horizontal communication” is extremely helpful to state researchers and practitioners.

The overriding conclusion of the meeting was that those involved in planning, developing, and evaluating new state initiatives are searching for effective, efficient methods to facilitate the honest sharing of information and data in a safe, nonthreatening environment. ■

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<sup>1</sup>Presented by Werner Schink, Chief, Research Branch, California Department of Social Services.

<sup>2</sup>Presented by Robert Lovell, Director, Staffing and Program Evaluation, Michigan Department of Social Services.

<sup>3</sup>Presented by Carol Baron, Lead Analyst Supervisor, Virginia Department of Social Services.

<sup>4</sup>Presented by Ingrid Rothe, Chief of Research and Statistics Section, Division of Economic Support, Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services.

# Welfare waivers: Some salient trends

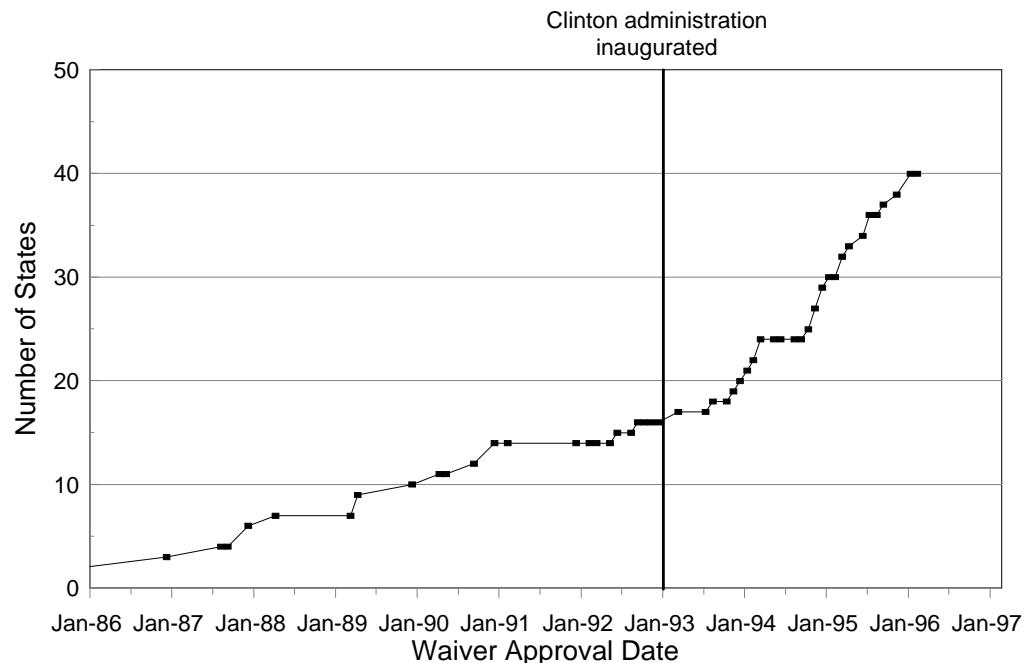
Elisabeth Boehnen and Thomas Corbett

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Reforming the welfare system is an ongoing preoccupation: announcements of new reforms seem to appear daily. How widespread is the scope of reform activities? How significant are the reforms proposed? Can we see any direction to this frenetic activity? This article examines some trends in state-initiated reforms of the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program that require federal approval through the administration's welfare waiver authority.

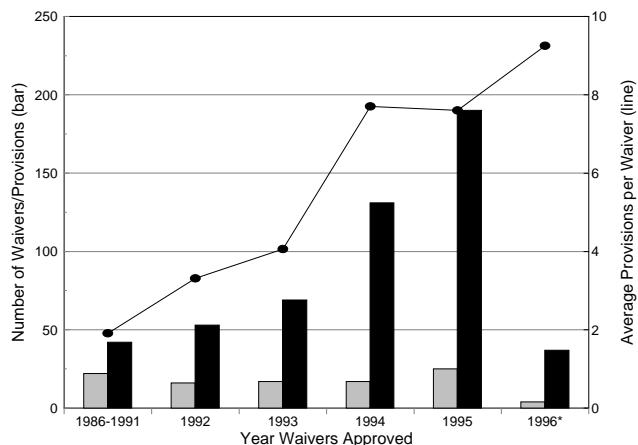
Since the early 1960s, the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has had the authority to waive provisions of the Social Security Act for the purpose of permitting states to innovate within the AFDC program. Until the late 1980s, these Section 1115 waivers were rarely sought by states and rarely granted by federal authorities. They were viewed primarily as a vehicle for testing new ideas within a governance environment in which ultimate program authority rested at the federal level. In recent years, the pattern of waiver use has resulted in the devolution of program authority over welfare from Washington to the states.

Waivers are no longer granted merely to learn new things to inform national policy; they are increasingly granted to circumvent national policy. This implicit transformation of purpose has released a torrent of state activity and experimentation. A great deal of effort historically has been directed at enhancing the labor supply of AFDC adult caretakers through work-related policies and programs. As discussed further below, other recipient behaviors are emerging as a focus of attention. These include personal decisions about marriage and cohabitation, decisions affecting family stability (e.g., divorce and other family changes over time), and fertility decisions. In effect, the thrust of reform activity increasingly is directed toward a new strain of social engineering—employing welfare policies and rules as a strategy for influencing the behaviors that society deems important. A March 1996 survey of state activity by the National Governors' Association (NGA) identified 36 states that have approved or pending waiver requests that have been loosely categorized as "strategies to promote responsible behavior."<sup>1</sup> These strategies included waivers focusing on so-called "family-cap" provisions (discussed below) and others dealing with parenting contracts, school attendance, and child immunizations. States and in some cases local jurisdictions have become laboratories of innovation in the welfare reform debate, particularly as incubators for testing the



**Figure 1. Approved state waivers, 1986–1996.**

**Source:** Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance, and Center for Law and Social Policy.



**Figure 2. Complexity of welfare reform waivers (approved waivers, 1986–1996).**

\*1996 figures based on 3 months of data.

Gray bar = waivers, black bar = provisions per waiver.

**Source:** Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance, and Center for Law and Social Policy.

premise that altering welfare parameters can affect fundamental personal behavior.

As of March 1996, 40 states had at least one waiver approved, and six additional states had waiver requests pending or under development.<sup>2</sup> At least three trends define this state-level activity.

First, the pace of state activity is increasing exponentially. As indicated in Figure 1, only a handful of states had successfully obtained waivers during the 1980s, despite encouragement from both the Reagan and Bush administrations. From the beginning of 1988 to the beginning of 1990, the number of states with waivers doubled, from five to ten; three years later, the state total had reached slightly less than twenty. With the advent of the Clinton administration (1993), the total increased dramatically.

Second, the complexity of state-based welfare demonstrations has increased. In the early days, a state would request permission to modify a few provisions of the Social Security Act in order to implement one or two new ideas. The waiver process was not widely used as a method for implementing state initiatives. As states became more familiar with the waiver process, however, the demonstration requests have become increasingly more bold and multidimensional (see Figure 2). In earlier years, two or three components of the welfare system were changed as part of a typical demonstration program. That has increased to eight or more component changes in recent requests.

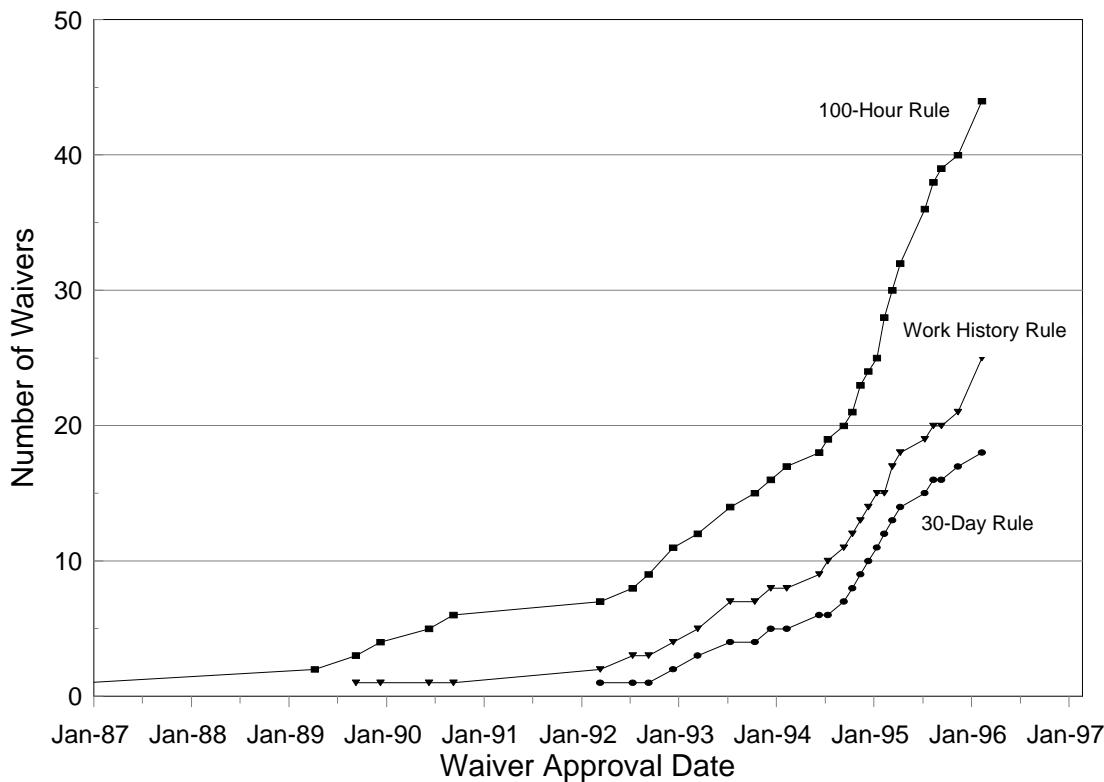
Currently, the most complex welfare reform program is Wisconsin's new initiative, Wisconsin Works (W-2), a welfare replacement initiative that changes virtually ev-

ery aspect of the AFDC program. (For a discussion, see this issue, pp. 53–76.) W-2 ends the individual entitlement to cash assistance and replaces most cash benefits with time-limited, work-based supports. It decouples child support from AFDC; support payments will entirely go to what formerly were AFDC families rather than to offset program costs. It separates the portions of Medicaid and child care that were formerly linked to AFDC. It changes virtually the whole mission and purpose of agencies and totally redefines the tasks of operational personnel. This program also constrains the government monopoly on the management of welfare programs: in some circumstances, local management teams will be selected on the basis of competitive bids open to for-profit and nonprofit firms. Absent block grant legislation in the Congress, an estimated 80 provisions of the Social Security Act must be waived and other regulatory and legislative changes will need to be made before the state may lawfully proceed with this complex program.

The third trend has been an increase in the waiver activity that focuses on family-related issues. Figures 3 and 4 examine trends in state-level experimentation with two important waiver-based demonstrations designed to affect individual behavior. Figure 3 depicts the trend in the number of approved waivers to experiment with modifications in the unemployed-parent (UP) component of the AFDC program, providing benefits to two-parent families with children in which the principal earner is unemployed or underemployed. The UP provisions for obtaining and maintaining eligibility for AFDC benefits are more restrictive than those governing single-parent families, suggesting that they create an incentive to dissolve existing marriages or not to marry in the first place. The most widely waived rule of the two-parent family provisions is the 100-hour rule, which is discussed in this issue of *Focus* by Matthew Birnbaum and Michael Wiseman (pp. 38–41).

Demonstrations involving the imposition of what are called “family caps” or “child exclusion” provisions have been controversial and therefore less popular than modifications to AFDC-UP, yet a similar trend can be observed (Figure 4). A typical family-cap waiver demonstration provides no increase in AFDC benefits for children conceived and born while the parent is receiving benefits. The intent is to influence fertility decisions, particularly among nonmarried teens, who are assumed to be emotionally and financially unprepared for motherhood. As Figure 4 shows, states only began to experiment with family caps in 1992. However, by early 1994 six waivers were approved; interest in this policy spread, and by March 1996 twenty such waivers had been obtained.

The driving force behind the social engineering in many state welfare waiver reforms is a deep concern about the well-being of the American family—about children



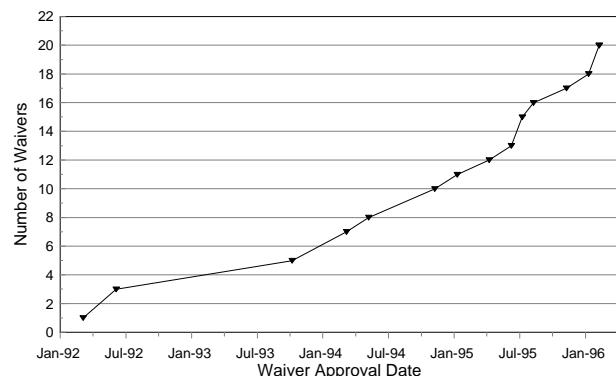
**Figure 3. Two-parent family provisions (approved waivers 1987–1996).**

**Source:** Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance, and Center for Law and Social Policy.

born and raised in what are considered troubled families, about how today's children are being raised, about crime and substance abuse, and about inadequate social and educational development. In particular, attention has been directed to out-of-wedlock teen births—the rate has grown 1.6 percentage points annually since 1970—and to their well-documented consequences.<sup>3</sup>

Politicians and policy makers are under public pressure to do something, to find a cause and immediately implement a solution. For many, it is clear that this social decline is connected to the social safety net—to welfare and a variety of other transfer and service programs. Society's well-intended efforts to assist the disadvantaged, it is argued, have eroded personal and community responsibility. Wayne Bryant, the New Jersey state senator who is regarded as the chief developer of that state's Family Development Program, which includes a family cap provision, recently described this link: "In my city of Camden, which is the poorest in the state of New Jersey and the fifth poorest in the nation, there are 123 square blocks with no legitimate males. None, absolutely none. People ask, what do you mean by legitimate males? I mean men who can take their place in that community. That should not surprise you. The way welfare has traditionally worked, despite all the good intentions, is by teaching all the wrong values."<sup>4</sup> Ron Haskins, Republican staff director of the U.S. House Ways and Means Committee, Subcommittee on Human

Resources, recently noted that the debate in Congress essentially is one of values and belief.<sup>5</sup> Work and marriage are seen as unambiguously positive. Proponents of congressional welfare reform bills are convinced that the current system sends the wrong message—that welfare, in providing support (including in-kind transfers such as food stamps and health care) to a nonmarried teen who has a baby and sets up her own household, is a compelling motivator to "do the wrong thing." From these and similar beliefs has come the determination to reshape personal behavior that is most stringently expressed in the various family-cap provisions. The New



**Figure 4. Approved family cap provisions, 1992–1996.**

**Source:** Center for Law and Social Policy.

Jersey provision, the first put into practice, drew national attention when preliminary results, based on two months of implementation experience, suggested that the birth rate among welfare recipients had already fallen by 16 percent.

Political discourse favors the presentation of social challenges in ways that suggest straightforward, inexpensive solutions amenable to legislative action. Complexity, ambiguity, and the admission of uncertainty (about either the nature of the problem or the solution) do not lend themselves to salable corrective legislation or regulation. Change welfare and you can reduce nonmarital births and restore family stability. This is a powerful message, but the very process of simplifying the contours of the debate may well obscure accompanying analysis and understate the complexity of it all. In this respect, New Jersey's family-cap experiment offers policy makers a cautionary tale. In the year following its imposition, the apparently favorable early results were continually revised downward, until by the end of that year, there was no statistically significant difference between the experimental group that was subject to the family-cap policy and the control group whose AFDC benefits continued to be adjusted upward when additional children were born. The change in the estimates is attributed not to different methodologies for the comparisons, but rather to the improved accuracy of birth data. Because the group subject to the cap drew no advantage from reporting the birth of an additional child, they did not do so; the control group, in contrast, remained eligible for benefit increases if they supplied information about new births. But over time, the existence of children born to women subject to the family-cap provision became known to the welfare system for other reasons, and the differences between the experimental and the control group vanished.

Nor is this the end of the story. It is not clear whether welfare recipients in New Jersey really understand the policy change.<sup>6</sup> If recipients are confused, then members of the control group as well as the experimental group may also change their behavior as a result of the rhetoric surrounding a change in policy that affects others in their community but does not yet affect them. Efforts are still under way to disentangle possible effects on welfare entry and exit rates, to explore the influence of changing community norms, and to allow for the confounding effects of other welfare policy changes or changes in local economic conditions that are known to affect welfare dependency. The waiver reforms are setting in motion social processes of extreme complexity; just how very complex they are is revealed by the next article, which analyzes the efforts of three states to implement changes in one single ingredient in the welfare mix—the 100-hours rule.

Clearly, the use of waivers to bring about change in the AFDC program has been transformed. In the beginning,

waivers were granted sparingly and to add to our stock of knowledge. Now, waivers are routinely granted, and virtually all states are actively pursuing reforms, many of them quite ambitious. Some observers, indeed, question whether a national welfare policy still exists. ■

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<sup>1</sup>Laurie Thorton, "National Governors' Association Summary of State Welfare Reform Waivers," National Governors' Association, Washington, D.C., 1996.

<sup>2</sup>According to Howard Rolston, Chief of the Office of Policy and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. All waiver requests are reviewed by staff in this unit.

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, *Growing up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994); *Kids Having Kids: A Robin Hood Foundation Special Report on the Costs of Adolescent Childbearing*, ed. Rebecca A. Maynard (New York: Robin Hood Foundation, 1996).

<sup>4</sup>As quoted in the *Washington Post*, Sunday, September 1, 1995, section C4, col. 1.

<sup>5</sup>In comments at a conference on "Welfare and Child Development," sponsored by the National Research Council, Board on Children and Families, Washington, D.C., April 11, 1996.

<sup>6</sup>The article by Birnbaum and Wiseman raises the same issue with regard to the 100-hours rule in Wisconsin (see p. 41).

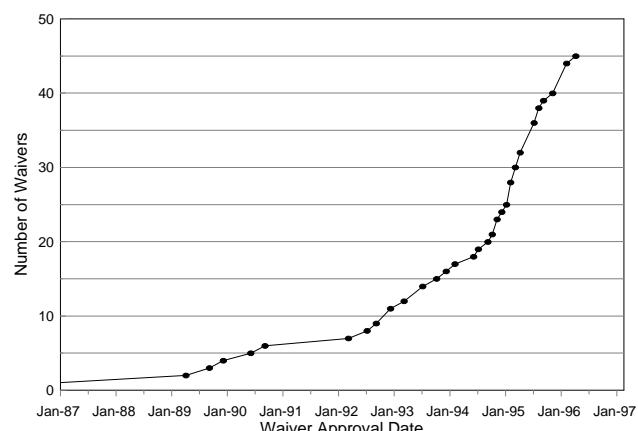
# Extending assistance to intact families: State experiments with the 100-hour rule

Matthew Birnbaum and Michael Wiseman

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Many states are currently experimenting with changing the terms of public assistance for two-parent families. Under federal law, poor two-parent families in which neither adult is disabled may receive aid only if the principal wage earner is involuntarily working less than 100 hours per month and has a significant work history. The “100-hour rule” applies regardless of wages earned on the job. It allegedly creates a barrier to movement back into employment by the principal wage earner, especially in cases where available wage rates are low. As a result, the rule is believed to make job placement difficult, to lengthen welfare spells, and to encourage fathers who take low-wage jobs to leave their families in order to assure them, as recipients of regular AFDC, continued income support and access to welfare-related services such as Medicaid.

States have responded to the apparent irrationality of this restriction by experimenting with alternatives. As is true for many other aspects of welfare law, the number of waivers granted by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) for 100-hour experimentation has grown dramatically over the past three years. Two-parent families who qualify for AFDC on the basis of



**Figure 1. Approved 100-hour waivers, 1987–1996.**

**Source:** Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance, and Center for Law and Social Policy.

unemployment are called AFDC-UP. As Figure 1 indicates, the number of approved state demonstrations that changed AFDC-UP eligibility conditions increased from 11 in January 1993 to 45 by March 1996; 33 states have been involved (in some cases, with multiple experiments). Table 1 shows the status of these demonstrations. As indicated, some states have combined elimination of the 100-hour rule with alteration of federal requirements regarding the principal earner's work experience and another federal requirement that the qualifying principal earner be unemployed for 30 days before eligibility is established. While some of these experiments are now completed, most are either still under way or are yet to begin.

States generally seek to eliminate the 100-hour rule as a condition for continuing welfare eligibility for two-parent families, although the unemployment of the principal wage earner is often retained as a condition for opening a case. In the Family Support Act (FSA) of 1988, Congress authorized a set of state experiments with altering the 100-hour rule. The original legislation authorized waivers for up to eight states, but only three—California, Utah, and Wisconsin—responded to the ACF Request for Proposals and eventually initiated demonstrations under the FSA provisions. Unlike most of the demonstrations listed in Table 1, the 100-hour rule experiments authorized by the FSA generally do not involve a great variety of other program changes. Thus they offer an exceptional opportunity to gauge the impact of a well-defined and narrowly focused reform. The results of those experiments will be formally released by ACF later in 1996 in a report to Congress.

Elimination of the 100-hour rule is superficially very attractive, but several considerations suggest a need for caution as states consider new policies for two-parent families. First, although elimination of the 100-hour rule might accelerate job-taking by adults, a change in the rule might also extend welfare receipt for those who would have moved to employment anyway. If this occurs, an analysis of outcomes related only to employment, without any accompanying analysis of welfare utilization, will be misleading. Data collected only for families receiving assistance will show increased rates of employment, and it will appear that the increase is the product of the change in the 100-hour rule. In fact, this increase could instead be the product of the greater likelihood that families would combine work and welfare. This may be a desirable outcome, but it could increase state costs. In cases in which the 100-hour rule is eliminated only for continued eligibility, the outcome

**Table 1**  
**State Waivers with Two-Parent Family Provisions, by Approval Date, 1987–1996**

State	Program Name	Date Approved	Date Implemented	Implementation Structure	Rule Eliminations			Combined with Other Reforms
					100-Hr. Rule	Work History	30-Day Wait	
CA	Link-UP	1/87	10/87	Various sites	X			NO
CA	Helping AFDC Parents Enter Employment (HAPEE)	5/89	6/89	Various sites	X			NO
AL	Avenues to Self-Sufficiency through Employment and Training (ASSETS)	10/89	5/90	Various sites	X	X		YES
CA	RISE-UP	1/90	6/90	Various sites	X			NO
WI	100-Hour Rule	7/90	10/91	Various sites	X			NO
UT	100-Hour Rule	10/90	1/92	Various sites	X			NO
WI	Parental and Family Responsibility Act (PFR)	4/92	7/94	Various sites	X	X	X	YES
MI	To Strengthen Michigan's Families (TSMF)	8/92	10/92	Statewide	X	X		YES
CA	Assistance Payment Demonstration Proj. (APDP)	10/92	12/92	Statewide	X			YES
IL	Family Responsibility Proj. (FRP) <sup>a</sup>	1/93	11/93	Various sites	X	X	X	YES
MO	21st Century	1/93	7/94	Various sites	X			YES
VT	Family Investment Proj. (FIP)	4/93	7/94	Statewide	X	X	X	YES
IA	Family Investment Prog. (FIP)	8/93	10/93	Statewide	X	X		YES
IL	Fresh Start	8/93	11/93	Statewide	X	X	X	YES
WI	Work Not Welfare (WNW)	11/93	1/95	Various sites	X			YES
FL	Family Transition Prog. (FTP)	1/94	2/94	Various sites	X	X	X	YES
CA	CA Work Pays Demonstration Project (CWPDP)	3/94	4/94	Statewide	X			YES
VT	Welfare Restructuring Proj.	7/94	7/94	Statewide	X	X	X	YES
MI	To Strengthen MI Families - M (TSMF-M)	8/94	10/94	Statewide	X	X		YES
NY	Jobs First	10/94	pending	Various sites	X	X	X	YES
PA	Pathways	11/94	pending	Various sites	X	X	X	YES
IN	Impacting Families Welfare Reform Demonstration Proj. (IMPACT)	12/94	5/95	Statewide	X			YES
MS	MS New Direction Prog.	12/94	10/95	Statewide	X	X	X	YES
SC	Self-Sufficiency and Parental Responsibility Prog.	1/95	withdrawn	Various sites	X	X	X	YES
NE	Welfare Reform Demonstration Proj.	2/95	10/95	Statewide	X	X	X	YES
OK	Mutual Agreement: A Plan for Success (MAAPS)	3/95	pending	Various sites	X			YES
OH	Families of Opportunity	3/95	withdrawn	Various sites	X		X	YES
OH	Community of Opportunity	3/95	1/96	Various sites	X			YES
MO	MO Families Mutual Responsibility Plan-I (MFMRP-I)	4/95	6/95	Statewide	X	X		YES
MT	Families Achieving Independence in Montana (FAIM)	4/95	2/96	Statewide	X	X	X	YES
AZ	Employing and Moving People off Welfare and Encouraging Responsibility Program (EMPOWER)	5/95	11/95	Statewide	X			YES
DE	Better Chance	5/95	10/95	Statewide	X	X	X	YES
MA	Welfare Reform	8/95	11/95	Statewide	X			YES
UT	Single Parent Employment Demonstration Proj. - Modified (SPEDP-M)	8/95	8/95	Various sites	X			YES
MD	Family Investment Prog.	8/95	10/95	Statewide	X	X	X	YES
WI	Pay for Performance (PFP)	8/95	3/96	Statewide	X			YES
FL	Family Transition Prog. - Expansion (FTP-M)	9/95	10/95	Various sites	X	X	X	YES
ND	Training, Education, Employment and Management Prog. (TEEM)	9/95	7/96	Various sites	X			YES
WA	Success Through Employment Prog.	10/95	pending	Statewide	X			YES
CT	Reach for Jobs 1st <sup>b</sup>	12/95	1/96	Statewide	X	X	X	YES
NC	Work First	3/96	pending	Various sites	X	X		YES
OH	Ohio First	3/96	pending	Statewide	X	X	X	YES
OR	Oregon Option	3/96	pending	Statewide	X	X		YES
TX	Achieving Change for Texans	3/96	7/96	Various sites	X	X		YES
SC	Family Independence Prog. (FIP)	5/96	pending	Statewide	X	X	X	YES
KA	Actively Creating Tomorrow	pending		Statewide	X	X	X	YES
HI	Families Better Together	pending		Statewide	X	X	X	YES
NH	Employment Prog.	pending		Various sites	X	X		YES
GA	Jobs First	pending		Statewide	X			YES

**Source:** Center for Law and Social Policy and Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance.

**Note:** The table contains a total of 45 approved waivers for 33 states.

<sup>a</sup>Single demonstration, part of larger "Multi-Pronged Welfare Reform" initiative.

<sup>b</sup>Formerly entitled Fair Chance, 11/94.

is certain to create inequity: some families will be allowed to continue receiving AFDC payments because of past unemployment, even though families in the same current circumstances but without past unemployment will be ineligible.

Second, eliminating the 100-hour rule could make AFDC more attractive to families not currently receiving assistance, thus increasing the flow of new case openings. Many poor and near-poor families experience spells of joblessness that might qualify the family for assistance. If the 100-hour rule is eliminated for continued eligibility, such families would be able to move onto welfare, gain access to welfare-related services, and retain such services and possibly some benefits once new employment was obtained. Little evidence is available on the potential size of such effects. The number of families potentially eligible for AFDC-UP will be greater if the 100-hour rule is also eliminated for determination of initial eligibility.

Third, the effects of public assistance on family stability are uncertain. It is possible that the additional safety net which more ready access to AFDC would provide might help secure families in stress, but the available evidence on this point is very weak.<sup>1</sup> It is certainly not strong enough to justify claims, often heard, that the expansion of AFDC-UP has reduced family breakup. Nevertheless, many of the proposals for 100-hour experimentation cite such effects.

All these uncertainties suggest that it was appropriate for Congress to encourage experimentation with alternatives to the 100-hour rule in determining AFDC eligibility for two-parent families. But, at the same time, it is clear that the effects of such changes will be difficult to detect. And the consequences of changes in the 100-hour rule, as complicated as they may be, are generally likely to be less complex than those of the more ambitious state experiments with welfare innovation. Since both the 100-hour-rule experiments and most subsequent state demonstrations involve evaluation based upon random assignment of cases to groups experiencing the change and groups subject to preexisting law, the 100-hour experiments provide some evidence on the ability of states to produce evaluations useful for policy study.

We have surveyed early results from the three state demonstrations under the FSA in order to gain some impressions of the effects of altering treatment of two-parent families.<sup>2</sup> Our major conclusions follow:

*All three experiments with 100-hour-rule variation are flawed, and problems with both design and implementation reduce the usefulness of the experiment.*

Utah tested a relaxation of the 100-hour rule in the context of a six-month time limit on cash assistance and

a level of required activity for adult participants that exceeds what is likely to be cost-effective or desirable in most states. Participants were to have been randomly assigned to experimental and control groups by the central office. However, the data reveal that their assignment was not random, because of manipulation in local offices. As a result, differences in outcomes between the two groups may reflect factors other than the 100-hour rule.

Wisconsin's experiment did not include a time limit. However, an implementation error led to the addition to the experimental group of a number of families that were exceptionally likely to be job-takers. This and other sample adjustments complicate interpretation of the results.

The evaluation in the California experiment has been compromised by the inclusion, in one participating county, of data for both recipients and applicants in the experimental group but for only a subgroup of applicants in the control group. The resulting problems with the data have hampered analysis of the outcomes.

*The relevance of the demonstration results for planning large-scale program changes is limited by the scope of the changes implemented.*

The very narrow time limit applied in the Utah experiment is an option permitted under the FSA for states that added the program after 1988. It is uncertain whether the results of operations under this constraint are relevant to operations in the many other (generally later) state programs that do not impose the constraint. In any event, it is unlikely that the substantial activity levels achieved in the Utah case will be replicated elsewhere.

*Results suggest that the concern about actual effects on employment and public assistance costs is justified.*

It appears that the experiments increased case duration and raised public assistance costs in all three locations. In California, elimination of the 100-hour rule had no significant effect on adult earnings, but did raise the likelihood that employment would be combined with welfare receipt. This *coverage effect* may also be present when states experiment with more liberal earnings disregards for all AFDC cases.

*The assessment of the effects on family stability is inconclusive.*

The outcome for both Wisconsin and California suggests that the experiments may have reduced the likelihood that mothers in AFDC-UP families would end up as single adults, but the effects are poorly measured. The Utah experiment reveals no significant difference between families subject to the 100-hour rule and families exempted from it in the likelihood that women will transfer to basic AFDC.

*The effects may be small because the information is bad.*

There is little information in available reports on demonstration process, that is, on the way in which the 100-hour changes were carried out and on the success of procedures for communicating the change to participants. Materials distributed in Wisconsin to inform recipients of the nature of the change appear very complicated, and, although the 100-hour demonstration itself was relatively uncomplicated, many families were simultaneously subject to other program variants. The experimental description distributed to all Wisconsin recipients is reproduced in the box (in Wisconsin and in some other states, AFDC-UP is called AFDC-U). This leaflet was mailed to recipients more than *nine months* after the beginning of the demonstration.

Survey data collected from participants in California also suggest that ignorance of the change implemented in that state's demonstration was widespread.<sup>3</sup> No information is available on process for Utah. Presumably, if changes in AFDC-UP eligibility were introduced statewide, recipients would receive better and less ambiguous information about the consequences of taking a job for their public assistance benefits.

*Planning for research infrastructure needs to extend beyond individual projects.*

Despite various implementation problems, the California demonstration provides the best insight into the effects of eliminating the 100-hour rule. The utility of the California findings results in substantial part because evaluators were able to use state data systems developed to support the state's general program of welfare-related research. States planning long-term welfare reforms would be well advised to consider establishing general data-collection strategies suitable for support of a variety of management needs, including research. Once in place, such systems make the marginal cost of examining particular issues relatively cheap. States also would be well advised to include local officials in planning for experiments. Operational decisions made in local offices in California and Utah compromised the integrity of the experimentation in these states.

## Conclusions

These demonstrations were relatively simple, and all three states had prior experience with experimentation. Yet in none of these experiments was random assignment executed without flaw. Nor are the results of the FSA mandate very encouraging. For all three states, it is clear that little or no evaluation would have been accomplished in the absence of federal requirements. Even with the mandate, Utah's evaluation amounts to little more than a spreadsheet summarizing experimental outcomes. At the time the 100-hour demonstrations

### AFDC-U 100-Hour Rule

Wisconsin has received permission from the U.S. government to run a special AFDC-U program. Under the program some primary wage earners who have been receiving AFDC-U will be allowed to work more than 100 hours a month, and remain eligible for benefits, based on the family's income. The U.S. government requires that only half of the persons receiving AFDC-U be allowed to work over 100 hours to test the effects of the program. A family will be in the new program if the mother's Social Security number ends in a 0, 2, 4, 6 or 8. If the mother's Social Security number ends in 1, 3, 5, 7 or 9, the family would lose AFDC-U eligibility if the primary wage earner worked 100 hours or more per month.

**If you have a question about which group you belong to, or how these policies apply to you, contact your county income maintenance worker.**

(Reproduced from Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services Brochure, *Incentives to Work: Wisconsin's Welfare Reform Federal Waivers for Recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children*, July 1992.)

were designed and implemented, the number of people in the Administration for Children and Families who were monitoring state welfare demonstrations was larger than it now is. It is hard to believe that monitoring will improve with diminished resources, or that states will do a better job with the demonstrations implemented since 1993. ■

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<sup>1</sup>See Ann Winkler, "Does AFDC-UP Encourage Two-Parent Families?" *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 14, no. 1(1995): 4-24 for a discussion of the relation between AFDC-UP and family stability.

<sup>2</sup>See Matthew Birnbaum and Michael Wiseman, "Extending Assistance to Intact Families: State Experiments with the 100-Hour Rule," paper presented at the Advisory Committee Meeting of the IRP project, "Informing the Welfare Debate," Milwaukee, March 15, 1996. Our sources are as follows: For California, the California Department of Social Services, *Proposed Redesign of the Welfare System: Detailed Program Description* (Sacramento, California: The Department, 1996); Yeheskel Hasenfeld, Alisa Lewin, Michael Mitchell, and Dale Weaver, "Link-UP: Evaluation of the 100-Hour Rule Waiver for AFDC-U. I. Impact and Cost-Benefit Analysis," unpublished ms., University of California at Los Angeles School of Public Policy and Social Research, Center for Child and Family Policy Studies, 1995; and Donna Hardina, Michael Carley, and Kim Thompson, "Link-UP Evaluation Project Report on Recipients Survey," unpublished ms., California State University at Fresno School of Health and Social Work, 1995. For Utah, Utah Department of Human Services, Office of Family Support, *The 100-Hour Rule: Utah's Work and Time Limited Demonstration Alternative*. Application for Federal Assistance [Section 1115(d) waiver], May 17, 1990, and unpublished data provided by the Utah Department of Human Services. For Wisconsin, Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services, Office of Policy and Budget, *Wisconsin's 100-Hour Rule Experiment: Preliminary Report* (Madison, Wisconsin: DHSS, 1993). In all three cases the results are preliminary and subject to change.

<sup>3</sup>Hardina, Carley, and Thompson, "Link-UP Evaluation Project Report on Recipients Survey."

# State-level indicators of children's well-being: Getting the numbers right

As states assume more responsibility for the design, management, and financing of social welfare programs affecting children and parents, they will become more deeply involved in defining success in program design and measuring the effects on children of particular programs and policies. But resolving the conceptual, technical, and political issues in the development and use of indicators of child well-being presents a formidable challenge. The transfer of responsibilities for social welfare programs from the federal government to the states, now well under way, makes that challenge fifty times harder.

National discussions of indicators of child well-being have been under way for several years. In 1994, they culminated in three separate activities that explored national data issues in the context of children's well-being. An IRP-sponsored conference at the National Institutes of Health gave attention to the choice and development of national indicators in the areas of health, education, economic security, population, family, and neighborhood, as well as to the methodology of indicator development. (The proceedings were summarized in *Focus* 16:3, Spring 1995.) A two-day workshop, sponsored by the Committee on National Statistics and the Board on Children and Families at the National Academy of Sciences, identified improvements in the national statistical infrastructure necessary for policy analysis and social science research, especially data sets that could provide better measures of the forces shaping the lives of children and families. (The conference papers were published in the spring of 1995 as *Integrating Federal Statistics on Children: Report of a Workshop*, National Academy Press.) And 1994 also saw the creation of a federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. The forum includes the Chief Statistician of the Office of Management and Budget, the Director of the U.S. Bureau of the Census, the Director of the National Center for Education Statistics, the Director of the National Center for Health Statistics, the Commissioner of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, and the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Services Policy of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The aim of the forum is to foster coordination, collaboration, and the integration of federal collection and reporting of data on child and family issues.

Discussions that had already begun at the national level must now also direct their attention to state welfare policies and programs. The new state responsibilities in the welfare area were one focus of attention in a Decem-

ber 1995 workshop that gathered over fifty members of state and federal agencies and others concerned with monitoring child well-being.<sup>1</sup> The purpose was to learn of efforts under way in the various states, to stimulate ideas for further development, and to share information on present and potential data-collection and goal-setting efforts. This article reports some of the more pertinent discussions at that wide-ranging meeting.

## Goal-setting within states

### Minnesota

In 1991, Minnesota initiated a statewide benchmarking project, Minnesota Milestones. Beginning with focus-group sessions of citizens throughout the state, the state Planning Department drew up a long-range plan that specified 20 broad goals (e.g., Minnesota children will not live in poverty) and 79 indicators (e.g., percentage of children below the poverty line). In 1994, the Planning Department issued a "report card" measuring progress toward the goals. A major consequence has been improvement in services for children and families. An integrated "children's budget" was developed in 1993, showing how much state money is spent on children and families. In 1994, a description of Minnesota Milestones and a Children's Report Card came on-line through the state's data dissemination effort, DataNet, which is easily accessible on the Internet and through computers in public libraries and is constantly updated. The report card provides county-by-county information on 21 indicators of children's well-being, such as rates of child poverty, infant mortality, abuse and neglect reports. In 1995, a state Department of Children, Families, and Learning was created.

Linda Kohl, of the Minnesota Office of Strategic and Long-Range Planning, noted three important aspects of the milestone exercise. First, citizen involvement helped build public support for children's issues: "When people have solid information about how children are doing in their own communities, it can be a powerful tool for mobilizing citizens, the private sector, the nonprofits, and other community interests to reform services for children and families." Second, performance measurement can be used as a tool for accountability, if states are given block grants for social programs. Discussion of block grants often centers on the degree of control to be imposed by the federal government in the absence of fiscal requirements. Using report-card indicators could, Kohl felt, represent a middle ground, meeting the federal government's desire for account-

ability while leaving state and local governments flexibility in making funding decisions. Finally, the results-oriented approach embodied in the milestones alters the relationship between the state and local governments: rather than acting as enforcer or regulator, the state becomes a partner with localities, providing support, guidance, and information.

## Oregon

Each of the 36 counties in Oregon has a Commission on Children and Families, mirroring the state commission of that name. The commissions have been engaged in their own comprehensive planning. Designed to involve citizens, service providers, and local organizations in improving the well-being of families and children, the planning process started by analyzing existing community conditions, selected long-term goals (Oregon Benchmarks) to improve those conditions, then developed short-term outcome indicators and specific actions to help reach them, "macro budgets" that contain funds from governmental and nongovernmental sources, and an evaluation system to measure outcomes. The role of the state commission has been to establish a set of basic goals that each county must address, to provide technical assistance, to monitor the planning process, and to assure quality control.

An underlying issue involved in this exercise, which was described by Pam Curtis, Interim Director of the state commission, is the changing role of the state. It has moved from providing services and programs to focusing on outcomes among children and families, leaving the strategies and decision making to the counties, and thus giving up a measure of control. Those most resistant to this altered role tend to be traditional state bureaucrats and traditional service providers.

## Ohio

In Ohio, the state has played a leading role in the creation of local Families and Children First Councils. John Cunningham, of the Ohio Department of Human Services, noted that counties in Ohio have traditionally had considerable autonomy in planning and providing social services. The result has been variation in, and fragmentation of, services. The councils are designed to overcome that fragmentation by putting together teams with broad membership—e.g., service providers, family court judges, family members themselves. In creating the councils, counties were asked to feed information on conditions and needs to the state, which offered guidance on forming and operating the local groups. The state is experimenting with waiving some of the regulations and rules that the councils regard as impediments to the innovative types of activities in which they wish to engage. In fact, it is considering a five-year sunset provision for state rules, in an effort to provide more flexibility to local units.

The state has set eight goals for children and families, based on the National Education Goals—the first, for instance, is that when children start school, they will be ready to learn. The goals are defined broadly: the ready-to-learn goal encompasses enhancement of family stability, provision of preschool education, and services for children with disabilities. The councils report quarterly to the governor on progress toward the goals. A large effort is being made to bring data collection systems into this monitoring process, which involves a struggle to redesign and coordinate existing systems.

## Goal-setting within particular program domains

### Welfare

"Changing the culture of welfare"—moving the primary attention of AFDC caseworkers from accuracy in determining eligibility and payments to the progress of clients toward economic self-sufficiency—is an important component of the current welfare debate. Federal laws and regulations have traditionally encouraged concentration upon case accuracy through the quality control system. That system is not so well suited to tracking clients' earnings, a complex process in which some inaccuracies are all but inevitable.

In this period of welfare policy changes, Illinois is identifying new ways of measuring success, which were described by Karen Maxson of the Illinois Department of Public Aid. The state has submitted a waiver request to the federal government to adapt its quality control system to focus on client outcomes. In the interim, it has begun to collect data on several measures: self-sufficiency resulting solely from employment; self-sufficiency resulting from unearned income, such as child support; self-sufficiency from combined sources of income; recidivism owing to earnings losses; the number of participants in the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) program who complete postsecondary education and vocational education; the number of children for whom paternity has been established.

Maxson observed that welfare computer systems are designed to record data on *cases*, not children or other individuals. Those systems do not routinely collect information on school attendance, low birth weights, or repeat pregnancies. The states need the support of federal agencies if they are to change the welfare agency focus to clients' well-being. Federal reporting requirements must shift toward measuring outcomes in terms of individual well-being, and the federal government should offer support to meet new computing needs, because under block grants states will not be able to afford to develop new systems. She recommended that the federal government develop models of basic systems to which particular state variations could be added.

## **School readiness**

Vermont's program for school readiness culminated in the "Success by Six" initiative, whose principal goal is that all children will enter school ready to be active and critical learners. Cheryl Mitchell, Vermont Agency of Human Services, pointed out that twenty years ago, when schooling started at first grade, all six-year-olds were considered ready for school and the teachers were expected to make whatever adaptations were needed for each child. As kindergartens were added to the public system, schools began to assess the readiness of individual children and, where necessary, offer remedial services, thus acknowledging a public role in preparing children. Parents began to be included in preschool assessments as the crucial role of the family became clearer. Now, when most parents are in the labor force, the focus has shifted toward identifying the strengths of the child and family and ways in which teachers and service providers can enhance them.

In this process, the state has asked communities and schools what they need. Among the responses were requests for waivers of state and federal regulations so that services for children and families can be delivered in ways that make more sense locally; requests for information concerning best practices in other communities and states; and requests for an evaluation strategy that, rather than scoring how well a school is doing, becomes a process for continuous improvement of school quality. These responses have been incorporated into the Success by Six initiative.

Success by Six encourages educational, health, and other human service organizations in each community to pool resources to enable families to help their children develop. The communities are encouraged to blend funding streams to permit flexible use of financial resources. The Agency for Human Services has taken the first steps in a long-term evaluation of the program by selecting communities for an assessment using data currently available or capable of being readily obtained. Those data include (1) information on funding strategies, changes in service delivery, and parent satisfaction, obtained from local program coordinators; (2) information on changes in family and child well-being, using data from the KidsCount project sponsored by the Casey Foundation and from the Department of Health and other agencies; and (3) past surveys of kindergarten teachers in the selected communities, plus a new survey of teachers and of parents to obtain more specific information on the program. A comprehensive set of indicators and measures of the well-being of children and their families is being developed for this purpose.

## **Health**

Complementing the Minnesota Milestones project, Minnesota has developed health goals influenced by federal

leadership in the Healthy People 2000 effort. DataNet and the Children's Report Card have proved to be very useful tools in developing goals and in constructing performance indicators. The private sector, motivated in part by the need to measure the performance of managed care systems, is also contributing. Health goals are particularly applicable to children's well-being, as they prompt monitoring of childhood immunizations, collection of information recorded on birth certificates, and other perinatal tracking systems, etc.

John Oswald, of the Minnesota Department of Health, commented that one challenge facing the state is to connect with rankings compiled by other organizations such as the Children's Defense Fund and the KidsCount project. Other data issues involve successfully linking data to program development and evaluation, ensuring privacy, dealing with small-area variations in county-specific analyses, and making meaningful comparisons across states. He delineated a number of opportunities as well: linking Medicaid and AFDC data with information on birth outcomes, collaborating with family service organizations and with child support systems, and developing joint health and social services goals and performance indicators.

## **Data resources and their challenges**

### **Block grants**

Under a block grant regime, there will be need both for continuing the federal role in data efforts and for collecting substate data at the levels where many block grant decisions will be made. Stressing the importance of national leadership in monitoring children's experiences as social policies change, Nancy Dunton, of the New York State Department of Social Services, urged that national data sets be continued, but noted that they lacked detailed coverage of special populations and small areas. The states, she thought, will be hard pressed in a block grant world to underwrite the collection of uniform data. County- and community-based programs will be important in that world, but to require those substate units to collect and maintain data so that programs and recipients can be monitored may be seen as the imposition of an unfunded mandate.

Although state administrative data are sometimes superior to national survey data, Dunton noted deficiencies in the use of administrative records to monitor individual well-being, among them difficulties in linking data systems to look at system operations, and the fact that such data are not population-based. For example, administrative data on child support obligations and receipt among AFDC recipients are fairly comprehensive, because they are part of income determination, but administrative coverage of the non-AFDC population is sparse.

## **Special data needs in welfare reform**

When employment is stressed as the primary vehicle for welfare reform, it is important not to lose sight of the special needs of problem populations—AFDC recipients whose capacity to work is impaired by mental and physical disabilities; AFDC children-only cases, unable to be aided by employment programs; teen parents who need education rather than immediate jobs; substance abusers and victims of family violence. Because of the overlap among these populations, Werner Schink, of the California Department of Social Services, stressed the need for linkage across administrative databases.

Schink suggested creating a national children's archive of longitudinal databases, accompanied by guidelines assuring confidentiality, so that the data could be made available to researchers; mechanisms for targeting adults and children at risk; supporting such national data sets as the Survey of Income and Program Participation and the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth as well as use of state survey data; and collecting of implementation data to learn how programs actually work. He also noted that demonstrations under the waiver process may begin to falter if program administrators begin to resist complex data requirements.

## **Data linkages**

In developing indicators, Robert Goerge, of Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, stressed the value of data that can describe the well-being of children in very small areas, even at the level of street blocks. Linkages among data systems are important: starting with birth certificate data, for example, would make it easier to comprehend the use of services in the general population. Linking data across such agencies as children's services and AFDC can provide very valuable information, but data must be comparable at the level of analytic variables. Goerge summarized several of the resource challenges to data collection: state and local agencies could make more effective use of the funds they spend on computers, now relatively inexpensive; and much of the federal money now invested in basic research does not support work that contributes to indicator development. Work funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the National Institute of Mental Health, should, he thought, be more directly focused on indicators of child well-being. The issues of privacy and data security that are sometimes cited as barriers to state and local data efforts are often red herrings, in Goerge's view. The federal government should take a firm lead in guiding the states toward developing the kinds of data that will support their need for information.

## **Monitoring of child well-being by nongovernmental organizations**

### **Data collection in Texas**

In Texas, state agencies and other official state entities do not actively collect data on child well-being, nor does there appear to be any internal mechanism for easily doing so. Patrick Bresette, from the Center for Public Policy Priorities, a KidsCount grantee and a non-governmental source of social policy analysis, described the Center's plans for tracking the impact of program changes. The Center is beginning to create baseline data on a myriad of programs. In addition to information like that profiled in the national KidsCount Data Book, staff are gathering historical caseload and service data on all state-level programs that serve children. Wherever possible the data are broken down by county, age groups, and ethnicity. This has been a difficult undertaking in Texas—an expansive state with 254 counties and 18 million people.

Among barriers to these efforts are: changes in federal reporting requirements that could threaten key sources of data on children and programs that serve them; the pressure on state budgets to address reductions in federal funding that could render data collection efforts a distant priority; and the disinterest of current political leaders in using data, in particular outcome data, for either budget or program decision making. Even recent changes toward performance-based budgeting have incorporated only superficial assessments of program effectiveness. Other leaders, tired of hearing how low Texas ranks on so many social welfare indicators, seem suspicious of all data. This has only increased the importance of an independent analysis of data outside of government, such as that undertaken by the Center.

As the Center becomes better known and county-level data on child well-being more widely available, pressure mounts on policy makers to account for Texas's traditionally low ranking on child well-being. Fiscal pressures resulting from reduced federal participation in major social programs are likely to increase the desire for accountability in policies, programs, and funding. Individual legislators and committees also are beginning to see the urgency of preparing for federal changes and developing mechanisms for tracking impacts, if only to ensure equity for their constituents. Many policy makers are looking to the Center as a source of such data and analysis. Bresette expressed hope that agencies will increase their internal capacity and give priority to data collection. He thought that legislators might need training in order fully to understand the importance of data

and other objective indicators in budgeting and program decision making.

### Evaluation of heterogeneous programs

Given current state and local variation, program interventions and administration will vary greatly in their effects among and within states, said Mark Courtney, of the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Particular programs for children will differently affect the various domains of their well-being—health, quality of care within and outside the family, and school performance. Programs targeted on parents will also vary in their effects. Some parents in welfare employment programs will participate for long periods, others for short periods; still others will be sanctioned or dropped entirely. Each of these conditions has different implications for family well-being.

Courtney recommended that evaluation of an intervention begin with a careful analysis of the program, identifying both its goals for, and potential effects on, children. State administrative data should be assessed for their usefulness in analyzing child well-being, particularly their ability to track children across different service systems. States will vary considerably in their ability to accomplish this objective. Cross-state panel studies of families and children affected by welfare reform will therefore be of great value as those reforms are implemented. Given the financial constraints on state and local governments resulting from block grants, Courtney believes that the federal government and/or private foundations will need to be significantly involved in evaluating and monitoring state efforts.

### Efforts of the Ohio Children's Defense Fund

The Children's Defense Fund–Ohio, described by Robin Harris, is a KidsCount grantee and has been collecting, analyzing, and reporting data for more than a decade. CDF and other Ohio advocacy groups have joined together to identify measures of well-being among Ohio's 88 counties in preparation for the implementation of federal proposals. Three main issues have emerged. First, true measures are not available. State agencies collect data by county, but they have not been required to measure county performance in a way that portrays the status of children; instead, they have data on how well counties process paper and other similar activities. CDF has a good working relationship with many state agencies that are very interested in developing new performance measures, and has provided input on draft proposals of new reporting requirements for child care, JOBS, child support, and Medicaid programs.

Second, current state management information systems are large and slow to change. Data requests that child advocates and others may consider to be simple are not so simple to state agencies. Systems analysts and programmers must write new programs to extract data for

reports to comply with any request, and the hunger for new information and reports is so huge that the Ohio Department of Human Services cannot comply with its highest-priority requests in less than a year's time. Turnover of computer staff is a major problem for the department, and probably other departments in other states. The state provides a training ground for programmers, who leave as soon as they can get a higher-paying, less stressful job.

These difficulties, said Harris, do not even touch on working with state, county, and community providers and with client or advocacy groups to develop common definitions and expectations. They suggest, nevertheless, that a reasonable first step toward new outcome measures of child well-being is a careful review of what is currently collected and used, and a rethinking of how to interpret those data.

### What next?

Data are important not only to government but also to the private sector, particularly in providing indicators to be used for accountability, observed Kristin Moore, of Child Trends, Inc. Moore urged that there be greater communication among states in sharing data, knowledge of best practices in using data, and methodological expertise. She noted several reasons for optimism: the innovative state projects that pooled ideas and activities among agencies in order to improve services, that made data readily available on the Internet, and that took advantage of multiple state-federal funding streams; and the general willingness to engage in the measurement of child well-being. On the deficit side of the balance sheet, however, are the lack of integrated data; the need for more sophisticated computer systems and better systems capability; the danger that data quality will erode over time insofar as that quality depends on the salaries of personnel; the paucity of data on migration into and out of states; and a lagging capacity to track data across all domains. Moreover, it seems unlikely that data that are comparable across the states will emerge spontaneously, without financial or technical assistance.

What, Moore asked, will be the federal role in setting standards and providing technical assistance and funding? A strong federal presence is essential to maintain our national databases. Foundations can also make significant contributions to state record-keeping, as the KidsCount project has well demonstrated, and can assist in supporting research, data analysis, and dissemination activities.

We are still looking under the lampposts—the areas already visible—said Matthew Stagner, of the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. We would do better to investigate new territory, e.g., middle

childhood experiences, or the effects and quality of child care. Regardless of the fate of block grant proposals, he stated, the landscape of social policy is changing: community councils, citizens' groups, and other forms of local organizations are increasingly demanding a role in determining what governments should do. He enumerated what we will need to do to assure that children's experiences will be adequately tracked: maintain and enhance national data systems; develop state and local data; investigate contextual issues of children's lives—family structure, income, work—at the state and local levels; improve the use of administrative data; provide federal incentives to improve the comparability of data across states; and develop new indicators through basic research.

Discussions after the December 14 workshop among Moore, Stagner, and representatives from IRP led to proposals for three initiatives:

**Initiative 1** builds upon the papers at a November 1994 conference on indicators of child well-being.<sup>2</sup> At present, indicators are sparse or missing for some aspects of child and family well-being across populations over time—for example, neighborhood characteristics, family relationships, father's involvement, time use and children's activities, children's use of complex technology, and prosocial (as opposed to antisocial) activities. The purpose of this initiative is to identify, test, and operationalize indicators, to develop data collection mechanisms, and to identify where the data could be collected regularly within the federal statistical system.

The generic tasks under Initiative 1 are:

- a. To identify the specific indicators recommended by the presenters at the 1994 conference and to clarify both the more nebulous concepts around which presenters noted a need for an indicator and the aspects which states and communities would like to measure.
- b. To develop a set of criteria by which the current body of indicators might be reviewed. These criteria would include the thirteen principles outlined by Moore at the 1994 conference and would cross-reference them by age groups and domains of interest.
- c. To develop concrete measures to fill in the conceptual gaps. New measures might be developed by gleaning items from existing surveys; by conducting focus groups with parents and older children; or by brainstorming with researchers, policy makers, and survey design specialists. A review of routinely collected administrative data may yield some low-cost possibilities.
- d. To move from a proposal to an operational measure: assessing the measurement properties of the proposed indicator, for example, by testing for response variation, missing data, and scale reliability. A systematic review of existing surveys or data collection efforts will reveal where new items might be included.

**Initiative 2** seeks to improve both the ability of the Federal Statistical Service (FSS) to provide state and local information on child well-being and the number and reliability of measures that can be used in all 50 states. A series of workshops, hosted or cosponsored by national organizations representing state governments, and organized with the collaboration of the Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, would bring together policy makers from the states and the FSS with researchers who are adept at using these data. These last would help clarify the questions to be addressed, provide insight into how existing data could be better used, and assess the reliability and validity of suggested methods.

The first task would be descriptive: How do states now use the FSS to develop policies for children and families? What data are developed at the state and forwarded up to the FSS (e.g., vital statistics and administrative reports)? What issues are involved in maintaining and improving the comparability of these data? What federal surveys are key to children's policy making in the states? How are they used?

The second task would address seminal research questions: How would proposed changes in the FSS affect states? How can statistics collected by the federal government be improved to measure child well-being accurately and consistently across all 50 states (e.g., different sampling, different questions, state supplementation of samples)? What new state-level measures are possible?

The third task would be to plan for change in the FSS to improve the ability of states (and researchers) to understand child well-being at the state or local level.

**Initiative 3** seeks to develop "regional" state consortia for addressing at least some of the technical and developmental roadblocks that hinder assessment of how well individual states are doing. Along with the new flexibility, state governments will acquire full responsibility for tasks formerly shared with or largely determined by the federal government. States that can identify and collaborate in shared responsibilities will achieve economies of scale and help one another. There are clearly regional commonalities; contiguous states are somewhat alike in demographics, labor markets, and political cultures. And the increased sensitivity to interstate migration that is likely to be evident under the new federalism will require at least regional cooperative approaches to social welfare planning.

This initiative is not intended to create either a regional planning or a regional management capability. Its purposes are more limited—to find ways to pool resources, primarily across states and between the too often separate spheres of academia and government, and to develop a model for regional cooperation and collabora-

tion in conducting critical design and management tasks in social welfare and related programs. As federal resources shrink and the price of state investments in human services programs and management increases at the margin,<sup>3</sup> individual states will find it more problematic to support the full range of activities in which they currently engage.

The model that the initiative generates, including substantive outcomes of a prototypical regional collaborative effort, will be made available to other states and regions. ■

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<sup>1</sup>This one-day workshop was held at the National Academy of Sciences, in Washington, D.C., on December 14, 1995, and sponsored by the Institute for Research on Poverty, the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, Child Trends, Inc., and the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

<sup>2</sup>The conference was fully reported in *Focus* 16, no. 3 (Spring 1995): 1–32. Proceedings are being prepared for publication by the Russell Sage Foundation.

<sup>3</sup>Both are certainties under virtually any of the block grant proposals currently being considered. All cap the federal contribution at a fixed level. This means the value will fall in real terms unless we enter a period of deflation. Moreover, states must pay the full cost of all expenditures beyond the federal contribution, a circumstance that will make investments in evaluation, automated management systems, and monitoring appear to be avoidable luxuries.

## **Access to IRP information via computer: the World Wide Web site**

IRP has a World Wide Web site that offers easy access to Institute publications. The Institute site includes publications indexes, updated quarterly, information on IRP publications, and ordering information. It provides basic information about the Institute's staff, research interests, and activities such as working groups, conferences, workshops, and seminars. The Web site also includes an annotated list of affiliates, with their particular areas of expertise. It offers an extensive set of links to poverty-related sites and data elsewhere.

Publications available on the Web site include files of formatted text of *Focus* articles, and selected Discussion Papers and Special Reports in both unformatted (ASCII) versions and formatted (Adobe Acrobat or Postscript) files. From the Web site, charts and graphs are available for immediate viewing and for downloading and printing.

IRP's home page on the Web can be found at: <http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/irp/>. The IRP gopher site still exists; run your gopher client with the hostname "eunice.ssc.wisc.edu" and select the item "IRP Gopher"

# What a difference a state makes: Tracking the well-being of young children and families

Jane Knitzer and J. Lawrence Aber

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In the spring of 1996, the National Center for Children in Poverty released the first edition of *Map and Track: State Initiatives for Young Children and Families*.<sup>1</sup> This article highlights the framework used for Map and Track, some of the key findings, and the implications and lessons for devolution.

## The framework

Map and Track is designed to answer a critical question: To what extent are states investing in program and planning strategies designed to enhance school- and health-related outcomes for young children and their families, especially low-income families? This is important for three reasons. First, given the trend toward the devolution of federal authority and responsibility from federal to state governments for antipoverty and human service policies, NCCP believed it crucial to establish baseline data about state-generated rather than federally driven program and planning initiatives for young children and their families. Second, there is both a common sense rationale and an increasingly solid empirical rationale for investments in comprehensive child and family services to young children and families. Given this, NCCP thought it important to determine the extent to which state policy makers are acting upon developmentally grounded findings about the potential returns to investing in young children and families.<sup>2</sup> Third, NCCP sought to create a document that could serve, over time, as a monitoring tool for individual states and across states, and that would also include information to foster state-by-state learning and information sharing, a particularly important form of technical assistance in the context of devolution. To that end, throughout the report, components of individual state strategies are highlighted.

Recognizing that it was not possible to track all state efforts for young children and families and, at the same time, develop a manageable, replicable methodology, NCCP decided to focus on two central policy strategies: program development and planning/system reform ef-

orts. Thus, Map and Track identifies, state by state, state-supported programs that meet two criteria: (1) the program model itself is comprehensive, intended to meet the multiple needs of young children and their families in a family-friendly manner, and (2) there is some commitment to statewide penetration. It also identifies, state by state, state-initiated strategies for comprehensive (that is, cross-system) planning and system reform efforts focused on young children and families, whether considered separately or in the context of a broader effort.

To better understand in what ways, if any, state special initiatives on behalf of young children and families are related to levels of risk in the young-child population and to other types of state investments in young children, we also provided state-level information on proxy indicators of child and family risk and of state investment. (See box, p. 50.)

Finally, to capture the “big picture” for young children and families and to highlight alternative possibilities for other states, we clustered each state according to one of five overall strategic approaches, ranging from states with the most comprehensive, high-level, politically visible initiatives to states doing nothing more than federal law required in the fall of 1995.

## Key findings about program development

For each state, Map and Track provides a summary profile, a detailed description of program, planning, and comprehensive multistrategy initiatives, and information on both child and family risk factors and state investments. From a national perspective, several key themes have emerged.

Three-quarters of the states (37) are supporting one or more state-funded, comprehensive program strategies explicitly targeted to young children and families. This suggests that the message about the importance of early childhood programs has penetrated the political arena, although there is wide variation in expenditures for and scope of the programs, and most programs are of relatively recent origin. Also encouraging was the finding that one-third of the states are not only focusing on the preschool years (ages 3–5), but are developing home visiting, parent education, or family support programs targeted to infants and toddlers and their families. While this still leaves the United States far behind many other Western countries, it does suggest a growing awareness that the developmental needs and program strategies for

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## **What Map and Track Highlights**

### **State special initiatives affecting young children and families**

#### *Program development*

Comprehensive program initiatives for infants and toddlers (e.g., home visiting, parent education)

Comprehensive program initiatives for preschoolers (e.g., prekindergarten programs with comprehensive standards)

Family support programs for young children and families

#### *Planning*

Comprehensive planning/system reform initiatives

Early care and education planning initiatives

#### *State-by-state strategic approaches*

Deliberate, goal-directed, interconnected, multisector initiatives to benefit young children and families

Separate planning and program initiatives

Only program or only planning initiatives

System reform efforts for other populations of children

No or limited state-initiated efforts

#### **Risk factors**

##### *State-by-state indicators of risk factors affecting young children and families*

The percentage of young children who live in poverty

The percentage of low birthweight babies

The percentage of women who have not finished high school

The percentage of unemployed men

The percentage of children living in overcrowded housing

#### **State investments**

##### *State-by-state indicators of state investments in young children and families*

The state-selected eligibility level for Medicaid for young children

The availability of a state-funded child supplemental health insurance program

The availability of a state-funded prekindergarten program

The use of state dollars to supplement federal Head Start funds

Training requirements for center- and family-based child care providers

Early childhood (ages birth to five) education teaching certification

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the youngest (and most vulnerable) group of children differ from those of preschoolers.<sup>3</sup>

Fourteen states report developing family support programs serving children ages birth to 6, either exclusively, or with an explicit focus in the context of family support programs for other age children as well.

Close to 40 percent of the states are engaging in broad state-level or state- and community-level planning and system reform efforts. In over half of these states, the target population is exclusively young children and families, or includes programs specifically directed to them. In five of the states, the planning effort is only at the state level; in the others, there is also some local

counterpart. There is considerable variation, however, in the state planning framework, the specificity of the charge, the link to outcome indicators, and the availability of technical assistance.

Overall, although there is much activity among the states on behalf of young children and their families, only eight states have developed comprehensive initiatives with linked program and planning components, as well as public awareness campaigns and other strategies to engage a broad constituency. More typical are parallel program and planning efforts without a clear vision and goals, or program development initiatives only. There is no obvious pattern linking state program, planning or comprehensive multistrategy initiatives with levels of risk in the young child population, or patterns of state investments based on the indicators we identified.

## **The implications for monitoring and enhancing the well-being of children in the context of devolution**

Map and Track has several important messages. First, as has historically been true for children's services, individual states have developed innovative strategies on their behalf. Second, many states do seem to recognize the importance of investing in young children and families either with public dollars alone, or through state/private partnerships, notwithstanding the evidence from a recent analysis of legislators' understanding of children's issues, which suggests that many legislators lack an understanding of policy issues related to children's issues in general and young children in particular.<sup>4</sup> Third, the mechanisms for building a strong community voice on behalf of young children and families are expanding. Close to half of the states already have planning processes for children and families in place, many involving a range of community voices; these may provide a positive and unanticipated catalyst for the allocation of federal and state dollars in new ways. Fourth, some states are already experimenting with a kind of state-to-community devolution; creating, for example, "readiness to learn" flexible funding streams that communities can use to fill in gaps in services.

These are clearly important and positive messages, but our data and, more particularly, our conversations with public officials highlighted some difficult issues as well. First, many of the young children's initiatives described in Map and Track build on or use federal dollars. Or they use state dollars to supplement basic services supported with federal dollars. If federal dollars and mandates shrink, the pressures on state discretionary revenues is likely to increase. Whether the investment arguments for young children and families

will be strong enough to compete successfully with the needs of other constituencies for state resources is unclear. Second, the most comprehensive state initiatives for young children and their families tend to be clearly identified with one set of political leaders. Thus, supporters face the challenge of sustaining the strategies with new leadership. In some states, there have been efforts to plan for the transition, but in general, this will be an important test of how well young children's initiatives can be institutionalized. Third, and very significantly, it appears that there were very limited, if any, efforts to link welfare reform planning with existing state initiatives for young children and families. Fourth, only a few states are building in rigorous monitoring and evaluation strategies to guide decisions and help refine or reframe policy and practice.

These latter two points are especially relevant to the topic of this issue of *Focus*. First, they underscore the lack of state-level information about both children's well-being and policy and program impacts. Second, they reinforce the need for strengthening the capacity within states to link administrative data sets across programs and systems, as one strategy to correct this. Third, the Map and Track findings about the limited evaluation of program and planning initiatives, coupled with other recently gathered NCCP data about the lessons to be learned from state welfare waiver evaluations, highlight the importance of focusing national attention on developing a common set of child indicators.<sup>5</sup> NCCP found, for the 17 states examined, that the evaluations will provide only limited information about the impact of welfare reform on children, either because the goals and measures are primarily adult-driven, the child measures are superficial, or, most importantly, few child measures are used across the evaluations. This, in turn, points to a critical need for closer dialogue between those conducting state evaluations and the national research community, and more particularly, a concerted effort to agree upon and use a core set of child measures. Absent this, developing a national overview of the well-being of children will be very much more difficult, given the variety of state initiatives that can be expected—some, indeed, have already begun. ■

<sup>1</sup>J. Knitzer and S. Page, *Map and Track: State Initiatives for Young Children and Families* (New York, NY: National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University School of Public Health, 1996). *Map and Track* is available from the National Center for Children in Poverty for \$19.95. Order by writing NCCP, 154 Haven Ave., New York, NY 10032 or through e-mail ([ejs@columbia.edu](mailto:ejs@columbia.edu)) or the World Wide Web (address: <http://cpmcnet.columbia.edu/dept/nccp>).

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, W. S. Barnett, "Long-Term Effects of Early Childhood Programs on Cognitive and School Outcomes," *The Future of Children: Long-Term Outcomes of Early Childhood Programs* 5, no. 3 (1995): 25–50; and H. Yoshikawa, "Long-Term Effects of Early Childhood Programs on Social Outcomes and Delinquency," *The Fu-*

*ture of Children: Long-Term Outcomes of Early Childhood Programs* 5, no. 3 (1995): 51–75.

<sup>3</sup>S. B. Kamerman and A. J. Kahn, *Starting Right: How America Neglects Its Youngest Children and What We Can Do About It* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995); Carnegie Corporation Task Force on Meeting the Needs of Young Children, *Starting Point: Meeting the Needs of Our Youngest Children* (New York, NY: Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1994).

<sup>4</sup>State Legislative Leaders Foundation, *State Legislative Leaders: Keys to Effective Legislation for Children and Families* (Centerville, MA: State Legislative Leaders Foundation, 1995).

<sup>5</sup>A. Collins and J. L. Aber, "State Welfare Waiver Evaluations: Will They Increase Our Understanding of the Impact of Welfare Reform on Children?" National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University School of Public Health, Working Paper, 1996.

# **Confronting the new politics of child and family policy in the United States**

***Two projects codirected by Sheila B. Kamerman and Alfred J. Kahn, of the Columbia University School of Social Work, Cross-National Studies Research Program***

Current legislative and administrative changes in federal welfare policy—still a moving target—will undoubtedly affect child and family policies and programs in the states and cities. What potential problems and opportunities will these changes generate? Both these projects are nonpartisan efforts whose major purpose is to protect and, where possible, enhance the well-being of children and their families.

**Project 1**, an 18-month effort supported by the Carnegie Corporation, is designed to assist states, local government, and the voluntary sector as they respond to the social policy debates and changes precipitated by the 104th Congress by:

1. Explaining and interpreting the new policy environment for those who must participate in it.
2. Identifying, through experience, experiments, and analysis, the opportunities offered by whatever new flexibility has evolved and developing potential administrative, programmatic, and budgetary strategies for coping with problems resulting from congressional or executive branch actions.

The primary vehicle for this project is a series of miniconferences in which small groups of analysts, public officials, and representatives of advocacy organizations and foundations will seek to identify an informed consensus and lay the groundwork for formulating strategic guidelines and action plans. The miniconferences began in November 1995 and will continue into the fall of 1996. Conferences already held include "Whither American Social Policy?" (November 1995), "Planning a State/Local Welfare Strategy under Waivers or Block Grants" (February 1996), and "Child Health and Medicaid" (April 1996). Conferences scheduled are "Child Care in the Context of Welfare Reform" (June 1996), "Child Welfare: Changes and Spillover Effects" (September 1996).

**Project 2**, a 21-month, action-oriented project supported by the Ford Foundation, focuses in particular on the likely impacts of the changed social policy environment on the largest American cities. In the current reshaping of welfare, scant attention has been paid to the potential effects of particular proposals on urban areas. Roundtable meetings involving representatives from the public and private sectors, the research and advocacy communities, the foundations, and two intergovernmental groups—the U.S. Conference of Mayors and the League of Cities—will discuss policies and actions in different cities, paying attention especially to the major child and family policies affected by congressional and executive branch actions: AFDC, the Food Stamp Program, Medicaid, and child welfare policies—health and nutrition, child care programs, and the like. The project will provide timely and practical information about the strategies available to cities, voluntary agencies, and community and advocacy groups as they grapple with change.

Each project has a dissemination strategy, because the purpose of the miniconferences and roundtables is to identify material that can be used in states and localities. The first Carnegie report has appeared, with papers by Hugh Heclo, Paul Peterson, Robert Greenstein, and Sheila Kamerman and Alfred Kahn. The second is in press; it features papers by Mark Greenberg and Anna Kondratas. The "Child Health and Medicaid" meeting was launched with a background paper by Sara Rosenbaum. Papers are available from the Cross-National Studies Program, School of Social Work, Columbia University, 622 W. 113th Street, New York, NY 10025.