

School Readiness: Closing Racial and Ethnic Gaps

Presenters

Jeanne Brooks-Gunn

Jeanne Brooks Gunn, Ph.D. is the Virginia and Leonard Marx Professor of Child Development and Education at Teachers College and the College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University. She co-directs the National Center for Children and Families at Teachers College and the Institute for Child and Family Policy at Columbia University.

Dr. Brooks-Gunn's specialty is policy-oriented research focusing on family and community influences upon the development of children and youth. She also designs and evaluates interventions aimed at enhancing the well-being of children living in poverty and associated conditions. Her books on these topics include *Consequences of growing up poor* (1997); *Escape from poverty: What makes a difference for children?* (1995); *Adolescent mothers in later life* (1987); and *Neighborhood poverty (1997): Context and consequences for children*.

She also conducts research on transitional periods focusing on school, family and biological transitions in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. She is interested in the factors that contribute to positive and negative outcomes, and changes in well-being over these years. Her books on these topics include, *He and she: How children develop their sex role identity* (1979); *Social cognition and the acquisition of self* (1979); *Girls at puberty: Biological and psychosocial perspectives* (1983); and *Conflict and cohesion in families: Causes and consequences* (1999). In addition, she is the author of over 450 published articles.

Eizabeth Burke Bryant

Elizabeth Burke Bryant, JD, is Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, a children's policy and research organization that provides information on child well-being, stimulates dialogue on children's issues, and promotes accountability and action. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT provides policy makers, community leaders, and the news media with the best available data and information on children's health, education, safety, and economic security. The organization produces a quarterly *Issue Brief Series*, hosts a monthly cable television program, and publishes the annual *Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook*.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT provided national coordination for the *School Readiness Indicators Initiative: Making Progress for Young Children*, a 17-state initiative sponsored by the Packard, Ford and Kauffman Foundations. The initiative's objective is to create a set of measurable indicators related to and defining school readiness that can be tracked at the state and local levels to improve school readiness and ensure early school success. A native of Providence, Rhode Island, Ms. Bryant received a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Vermont and a law degree from the George Washington University Law School. Previous positions include Policy Director for the City of Providence, Housing Court prosecutor, and consultant to

the Rhode Island Housing and Mortgage Finance Corporation, The Rhode Island Foundation, and the Women's Prison Mentoring Project.

Ms. Bryant has been actively involved in several community organizations including the United Way of Rhode Island and the Local Initiative Support Corporation.

Donnie W. Evans

Donnie Evans, Ed.D. is Superintendent of the Providence Public School Department. Previously he served as Chief District Academic Officer for the Hillsborough County Public School System in Tampa, Florida. Previous assignments in Tampa include Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, Assistant Superintendent for Supportive Services, Director of District Reform, and Supervisor of Exceptional Student Education. Prior to moving to Florida in 1990, Dr. Evans served eighteen years in the Durham County Public School System in North Carolina. He held positions as math teacher, assistant principal, and principal, all at the junior high school level. He also served as Durham County's Director of Programs for Exceptional Children. From 1990 to 1993, he served as Associate Professor in the University of South Florida's Department of Educational Leadership and Department of Special Education. Dr. Evans has authored or co-authored one book and a dozen articles, book chapters, and other publications on school reform and restructuring special education.

Cynthia García Coll

Cynthia García Coll, Ph.D. is the Charles Pitts Robinson and John Palmer Barstow Professor of Education, Psychology and Pediatrics at Brown University. She received her Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology from Harvard University in 1982. She has published over 100 articles on the sociocultural and biological influences on child development with particular emphasis on at-risk and minority populations. She has also been on the editorial boards of many prestigious academic journals, including *Child Development*, *Development and Psychopathology*, *Infant Behavior and Development*, *Infancy and Human Development* and is the incoming editor of *Developmental Psychology*. She was a member of the MacArthur Foundation Network: "Successful Pathways through Middle Childhood" from 1994-2002. She was Chair of the Committee on Racial and Ethnic Issues for the Society for Research on Child Development (SRCD) from 1991-1993 and now from 2001-2005. She served on the SRCD Governing Council from 1996-2002 and is currently on the Steering Committee of the Society for the Study of Human Development. She served as the SRCD representative to the National Head Start Research Conference Committee from 1994 to 2001. García Coll has co-edited several books including: *The Psychosocial Development of Puerto Rican Women*; *Puerto Rican Women and Children: Issues in Health, Growth and Development*; *Mothering Against the Odds: Diverse Voices of Contemporary Mothers*; and *Nature and Nurture: The Complex Interplay of Genetic and Environmental Influences on Human Behavior and Development*. She also was a co-editor of the special issue for the journal *Child Development* entitled "Children and Poverty". She is a fellow of the American Psychological Association.

Stephanie McGencey

Stephanie McGencey, Ph.D., MPH, is a nationally known results-driven manager and staunch advocate for children, youth, families, and communities. Dr. McGencey has over 17 years of progressive experience in community and organizational development, public health, and membership services. Prior to joining GCYF as Executive Director in 2003, she served in senior-staff positions for two national membership associations providing membership support, training, technical assistance, research, and policy analysis support to their national networks. Dr. McGencey brings to GCYF a tremendous set of association management skills as well as the strong membership orientation and robust service philosophy. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Health Science from San Francisco State University, a Master of Public Health in Health Behavior/Health Education from the University of Michigan, and a Doctor of Philosophy in Health Services from Walden University.

Peter McWalters

Peter McWalters, M.P.A. has served as the Rhode Island Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education since 1992. His priorities have been to establish an education system that is responsible for student results from the classroom to the State House. He has supported the development of high student performance standards, assessments that measure what students know and can do, school improvement procedures that inform school and district decision-makers and curriculum, and professional development that improves classroom practices. He has advocated for increased access to quality early childhood education, interagency collaboration in support of families of children in school, and the development of an education finance system that recognizes state responsibilities to meet individual student needs while being fair to taxpayers.

The commissioner serves in the governor's cabinet, as well as on numerous boards and professional organizations, including the Rhode Island Children's Cabinet and the Human Resources Investment Council. He is co-chair of the National Task Force on the Arts in Education, and is a past president of the Council of Chief State School Officers.

Prior to becoming Rhode Island's commissioner, McWalters served over twenty years in a variety of educational leadership and teaching positions, including superintendent of schools in the City School District of Rochester, NY. McWalters received both an M.P.A. and a Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study (C.A.G.S.) in School Administration from the State University of New York at Brockport, and a B.A. in history and philosophy from Boston College. He served in the Peace Corps in the Philippines.

Rosa A. Smith

Rosa A. Smith, Ph.D. is the President of The Schott Foundation for Public Education. Prior to joining Schott, Smith served as a school superintendent in Columbus, Ohio and Beloit, Wisconsin. She also served as assistant superintendent, high school principal and teacher in Minneapolis and Saint Paul, Minnesota and South Bend, Indiana.

Dr. Smith received degrees from Indiana State University, her Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota and an Honorary Doctorate from Ohio Dominican University. Smith has earned numerous awards, including the Wisconsin Superintendent of the Year, Martin Luther King Humanitarian Award, Sprugeon Award, YWCA Outstanding Achievement Awards, NAACP Service Award, Urban League Living Legend Award and the HOSTS Champion for Children Award.

Dr. Smith has published several articles since 2001 including: "Saving Black Boys: Unimaginable outcomes for the most vulnerable students require imaginable leadership", *The School Administrator*, January 2005; "A Call for Universal Preschool", *Educational Leadership*, November 2004; "Saving Black Boys: The Elusive Promises of Public Education", *The American Prospect*, February 2004; "Race, Poverty, & Special Education: Apprenticeships for Prison Work", *Poverty & Race Research Action Council*, November/December 2003; "Superintendent Leadership in an Audit: Strategies for Loving the Ugly Baby," by Rosa A. Smith and Meria Carstarphen. *AASA 2003 Monograph*, October 31, 2003.

Workshop Presenters

Charles Bruner

Charles Bruner serves as Executive Director of the Child and Family Policy Center, a nonprofit organization established in 1989 "to better link research and policy on issues vital to children and families." He holds an M.A. and Ph.D. in political science from Stanford University, and received his B.A. from Macalester College. He served twelve years as a state legislator in Iowa.

Through the Child and Family Policy Center, Bruner provides technical assistance to states, communities, and foundations on child and family issues and heads the technical assistance activities of the federally-established National Center for Service Integration. He also heads the State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network (SECPTAN). Through SECPTAN, Bruner has produced a number of policy briefs on early learning and school readiness. Also through the Policy Center, Bruner serves as the national evaluator for the nine-state Build Initiative, designed to help states develop comprehensive and accountable early learning systems. Bruner has written widely on public policy approaches to developing more comprehensive, community-based responses to children, family, and neighborhood needs.

Bruner's current interests relate to developing more neighborhood-based service systems that integrate professional and voluntary supports and serve in community-building as well as family-strengthening roles.

Joyce Butler

Joyce Butler has over 30 years experience in the field of early care and education. Since December 2002, she has been the director of Ready to Learn Providence (R2LP). During this time, Ms. Butler has worked to transform the community's vision for early care and education into a substantive citywide initiative with extensive local buy-in and national foundation support. Before launching R2LP, she served as project director for the *Child Care and Early Education Research Connections* website and as a state technical assistance specialist for the National Child Care Information Center. She is a former state child care administrator for the Massachusetts Department of Social Services, director of early care and education centers and faculty member at the Community College of RI. She attended Wheelock College and Teachers College, Columbia University. She resides in Providence.

Nazly Guzman-Singletary

Nazly Guzman-Singletary is Assistant Director of the AmeriCorps Program at Ready to Learn Providence (R2LP). Prior to returning to Rhode Island and joining R2LP, Nazly served as Student Programs Coordinator for the East Central Missouri Area Health Education Center. She also served as Teaching Assistant at the University of Arizona, America Reads Program Coordinator for the Vermont State Colleges and is a former AmeriCorps volunteer. Her volunteer activities include Mayor Cicilline's Latino Leadership Council and Next Generation Network of Young Innovators (N-GEN). She is a graduate of Central Falls High School and Boston College and received her master's degree from the University of Arizona.

Jackie Jackson

Carnell "Jackie" Jackson serves as the Coordinator of Family Engagement at Ready to Learn Providence (R2LP). In this position, she is overseeing R2LP's efforts to increase family involvement in its programs and work. She recently graduated from Simmons College in Boston, Massachusetts, with her Masters in Social Work. She also graduated from Rhode Island College with a Bachelors degree in Social Work. Prior to earning her Masters degree, she worked as a parent consultant for the Rhode Island Parent Information Network (RIPIN) under the umbrella of the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH), and later had the privilege of working with R2LP. Jackie is a single mother of a well respectful, handsome teenager who is fourteen years old and attends Feinstein High School in Providence.

Deeana Jang

Deeana Jang is a Senior Policy Analyst at the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) working on child care and early education issues with a focus on immigrant families. Prior to joining CLASP, Ms. Jang was with the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services serving as the lead senior policy analyst working on policy issues and providing technical assistance and training to ensure that health and human services

programs are accessible to immigrants with limited English skills under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. She has also worked on immigrant health policy issues at the Asian and Pacific Islander American Health Forum, and was a legal services attorney for many years representing low-income families in domestic violence, immigration, school discipline and housing issues. She received her BA from Oberlin College and her JD from King Hall School of Law at the University of California Davis.

Tania Quezada

Tania Quezada serves as the Coordinator of Community Learning at Ready to Learn Providence (R2LP). She is an experienced facilitator and environmental assessor of child care centers and homes. She has facilitated *HeadsUp! Reading* for R2LP since 2003 and has provided one-on-one technical assistance to many family child care providers in Providence. In February 2006, Tania began facilitation of the R2LP Club which is comprised of *HeadsUp! Reading* graduates who continue to meet to discuss and assist each other in the areas of child care. She is a graduate of Rhode Island College.

Catherine B. Walsh

Catherine Boisvert Walsh, MPH, is Deputy Director for Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, a statewide multi-issue children's policy organization. Cathie is responsible for planning and management of all Rhode Island KIDS COUNT programs. She is co-director of the 17-State School Readiness Indicators Initiative. She edits the *Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook, Issue Brief* series, and special reports. She has contributed to the design of many innovative programs for children and families, including Lead Safe Centers, Comprehensive Child Care Networks, the Providence After School Alliance, the Newport Partnership for Families and others. Prior to her current position, she was an independent consultant to non-profit organizations, a Program Officer for the Rhode Island Foundation, and Regional Manager for Family and Community Health Programs at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. Cathie received her BA from the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts and her Masters in Public Health from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

When researchers measuring school readiness gaps control for parenting differences, the racial and ethnic gaps narrow by 25-50 percent. And it is possible to alter parenting behavior to improve readiness. The authors examine programs that serve poor families—and thus disproportionately serve minority families—and find that home- and center-based programs with a parenting component improve parental nurturance and discipline. Programs that target families with children with behavior problems improve parents' skills in dealing with such children. And certain family literacy programs improve

Racial/ethnic achievement gaps declined during the same period. To determine whether these two trends have continued in more recent cohorts, we examine trends in several dimensions of school readiness, including academic achievement, self-control, externalizing behavior, and a measure of students' approaches to learning, for cohorts born from the early 1990s to the 2000–2010 midperiod. We use data from nationally representative samples of kindergarteners (ages 5–6) in 1998 (n = 20,220), 2006 (n = 6,600), and 2010 (n = 16,980) to estimate trends in racial/ethnic and income school readiness gaps. Although racial and ethnic gaps in achievement have narrowed over the past thirty years, test score disparities among racial and ethnic groups remain significant. To date, policymakers and practitioners have focused most of their attention on the gaps in achievement among school-aged children. However, sizable gaps already exist by the time children enter kindergarten. At this event, sponsored by the Brookings Institution and Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School, panelists will discuss the latest issue of *The Future of Children* journal, which focuses on sources of these racial and ethnic gaps in educational achievement. Although racial and ethnic gaps in educational achievement have narrowed over the past thirty years, test score disparities among American students remain significant. In the 2002 National Assessment of Educational Progress, 16 percent of black and 22 percent of Hispanic twelfth-grade students displayed "solid academic performance" in reading, as against 42 percent of their white classmates.¹ Similar gaps exist in mathematics, science, and writing. Improving the health of mothers and infants may also help to close racial and ethnic gaps in school readiness.