Universal Preschool Advisors Brainstorm New Research & Evaluation Strategies

What are the most effective ways to prepare children for kindergarten? How do we measure preschoolers' progress in programs? What would success look like? These are some of the dozens of questions that Universal Preschool Research Advisory (RAC) wrestled with last week at its inaugural meeting in Los Angeles.

Composed of 20 of the nation's top early childhood research and evaluation experts, the RAC was convened by First 5 LA and Los Angeles Universal Preschool to develop leading-edge evaluation strategies for the most ambitious, and eventually, the largest preschool program in the country.

First 5 LA has committed $600 million over five years to provide access to high-quality preschool to every 4-year old in LA County, regardless of family income.

"We were impressed to see how much research and evaluation have already been done prior to and in the first year of this program," said John Love, Ph.D., RAC co-chair and a senior fellow at Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. "Our committee got a good start in developing strategies for both the short and long-term."

RAC members formed eight working groups, which will provide advice on specific issues, such as child assessment measures and language/culture challenges.

For information, contact Katie Fallin, research analyst, at (213)482-9489 or kfallin@first5la.org.

Janet Gonzalez-Mena to Speak at the Kit for New Parents Event in Pasadena

Janet Gonzalez-Mena, a nationally-recognized early childhood researcher, author, and educator will speak March 24 and 25 on the importance of parent/child attachment at the Second Annual Kit for New Parents Conference at the Hilton Pasadena, 168 S. Los Robles Ave., Pasadena.

The Making Connections conference is sponsored by Child Development Media (CDM) and First 5 LA.

For four decades, Gonzalez-Mena has developed
Apr. 1: 10 a.m.-2 p.m., Diabetes Prevention Fair Better to Prevent Than to Treat at Elizabeth Learning Center, 4811 Elizabeth St., Cudahy 90201. For information, contact Ezequiel De La Torre at edelator@lausd.k12.ca.us or (323) 562-0175 x1710.

Apr. 1: Noon-4 p.m., 6th Annual Raising Readers-A Literacy Festival at Santa Monica College, 1900 Pico Blvd., Santa Monica 90405. For information, call (310) 452-3325 x237 or visit www.connectionsforchildren.org.

Apr. 7: 8 a.m.-noon, Early Identification of Autism in Infants/Toddlers and Intervention Approaches at the Cambrian School District, 4115 Jackson Drive, San Jose 95124. Registration fees are $50 for IDA members and $70.00 for non-IDA members. To register by Mar. 31, visit www.idaofcal.org.

Apr. 10: 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m., Risks of Not Breastfeeding: Diabetes, Obesity and More-A Day with Marsha Walker presented by the Breastfeeding Task Force of Greater Los Angeles at Good Samaritan Hospital in Los Angeles. For information, call Karen Peters at (213) 596-5776 or visit www.breastfeedla.org.

Apr. 12 & 26: 8 a.m.-5 p.m., Gentle Transitions: Support, Establish and Protect Both Early Mother-Infant Attachment and Breastfeeding in the Hospital Setting presented by the Breastfeeding Task Force of Greater Los Angeles at Harbor UCLA Medical Center, 1000 W. Carson St., Torrance 90502. For information, call Karen Peters at (213) 596-5776 or visit www.breastfeedla.org.

Apr. 30: 10 a.m.-4 p.m., El Dia de Los Niños (Children's Day) at the East Los Angeles College, 1301 Avenida Cesar E. Chavez, Monterey Park 91754. For information, call Ancelma Sanchez at (323) 981-0028.

numerous early education programs, including one in therapeutic child care and another for home-based bilingual preschool.

She teaches at WestEd's Program for Infant-Toddler Caregivers Training of Trainer Institutes and has worked as a Head Start trainer and faculty member in several community colleges.

She has written numerous articles and 13 books related to early childhood, including her newest publication, 50 Early Childhood Strategies for Working and Communicating with Diverse Families, scheduled for June 2006 release.

Also featured at the conference will be six intensive workshop sessions on strategies for connecting with parents, infant massage, adolescent pregnancy and teen parenting, early language development, keeping kids healthy and safe, and parenting and discipline from the male and female perspectives.

For information call, CDM at (818) 989-9136.
**EVIE'S DESK**

**Children's Nutrition Tips**

**Focus on Healthy Snacks**

The *Journal of Pediatrics* says the average preschooler consumes nearly 65 pounds of added-sugar annually, yet only weighs between 30 and 50 pounds. This is one example of how the quality of children's diets is declining. Research shows children naturally eat what they need as long as they are offered healthy choices.

During National Nutrition Month, **First 5 LA** encourages parents to choose healthy snacks, including foods with calcium and iron like fresh fruits, vegetables, unsweetened cereals, tortillas, cheese or yogurt.

As a parent myself, I'd like to share some tips that have worked for my family:

- Introduce a new food with one that your child already likes.
- Give fun names to foods, like "little trees" for broccoli.
- Give kids finger foods so they can be independent and practice coordination. Allow your child to stop eating when he or she is no longer hungry.
- Don't feed toddlers and young children in front of the TV – it can make them anxious.

_Evelyn V. Martinez_

Executive Director

First 5 LA

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**CHAMPION PROFILE**

**Linda Espinosa** Co-Leads Research Advisory Committee on Preschool

Champion Profile features individuals who exemplify **First 5 LA’s** tagline: “Champions for Our Children.”

Linda Espinosa, an Early Childhood Education professor at the University of Missouri-Columbia, is co-chair of the Universal Preschool Research Advisory Committee convened by First 5 LA and Los Angeles Universal Preschool.

Formerly co-director of the National Institute for Early Education Research at Rutgers University, she has worked as a preschool teacher, child care center director, elementary school principal, central office administrator and state program director.

Espinosa serves on boards of national education commissions, and has been consulting editor and contributor to *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* and other journals. She earned her doctorate in Educational Psychology at University of Chicago, and her Ed.M. at Harvard University.

**What is your favorite way to spend time with an important child or children in your life?**

Mostly, I just like to listen. I am always moved by the truth and spontaneity of young children.

**What is your idea of a perfect world?**

I think there never has been, nor will there ever be a perfect world - but a perfect life is one devoted to help make the world a little better for those who need help the most.

**What is the greatest challenge the children and families of LA County face today?**

The simple acts of getting up every day and believing that you can make a difference-- that your actions do count and therefore must always strive for "good works".

**Which living person do you most admire and why?**

I have the greatest admiration for mothers who are struggling to raise their children, often with little support, and also manage to contribute to the welfare of others.

**What is your motto?**

Every day, struggle to commit small acts of truth and kindness and it will add up to a worthy life.