Statement of Purpose

The primary purpose of *The Future of Children* is to disseminate timely information on major issues related to children’s well-being, with special emphasis on providing objective analysis and evaluation, translating existing knowledge into effective programs and policies, and promoting constructive institutional change. In attempting to achieve these objectives, we are targeting a multidisciplinary audience of national leaders, including policymakers, practitioners, legislators, executives, and professionals in the public and private sectors. This publication is intended to complement, not duplicate, the kind of technical analysis found in academic journals and in the general coverage of children’s issues by the popular press and special interest groups.

This issue of the journal focuses on the financing of child care and early education services in the United States. Such services have become necessities for most families and the norm for most children in America. The nature of child care can powerfully affect children and their families: good quality care can prepare children cognitively and socially for school, and child care services that are stable and of high quality can help parents find and keep jobs. But, only sufficient investment can provide the quality and quantity of child care services that will produce benefits for all families, and evidence suggests that current expenditures are insufficient.

The articles in this journal issue review the history of federal child care financing in the United States and today’s public and private expenditures that benefit both rich and poor, the current status of child care services in America, and the relationship between the cost and quality of child care. These articles suggest that (1) most child care is of mediocre quality, (2) spot scarcities of care exist, (3) low-income families face complex eligibility rules and long waiting lists for child care subsidies, and (4) the child care work force is paid wages so low that staff turnover averages 40% annually, to the detriment of children’s well-being.

Addressing these problems will require additional resources, and several articles in this journal issue propose and analyze approaches to securing those additional resources. These include financing child care through the public K-12 education system, creating a child allowance, and implementing a parental leave system. Although no single approach to financing child care is endorsed, this journal issue suggests that the current approach of sharing the costs among parents, government, business, and philanthropy should continue, and that a universal system of support for child care and child rearing for all families with children under the age of five should be created.

The articles presented here summarize knowledge and experience in selected areas that we believe are relevant to improving public policies in the United States that have an impact on the financing of child care. We hope the information and analyses these articles contain will further understanding of the important issues and thus contribute to reasonable changes in policies which will benefit children.

We invite your comments and suggestions regarding this issue of *The Future of Children*. Our intention is to encourage informed debate about financing child care and early education services. To this end we invite correspondence to the Editor. We would also appreciate your comments about the approach we have taken in presenting the focus topic and welcome your suggestions for future topics.

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Editor