

Section V

The Challenges: Public Opinions and Conflicting Values Regarding Caring for Children and Families

Although Tim does play a bigger role in child care than most men Tara knows, she (like Tim) sees the children as her primary responsibility. Tim would prefer that she not work outside the home, but they need the money. Tara, on the other hand, likes the opportunity to be with other adults and to have a voice in money matters even though she does not like the work itself. Tara does get frustrated at times and is often tired. As the primary caregiver, she is always “working”.

Without extended family close, Tim and Tara frequently feel “alone” as parents. Tara’s primary sources of information on parenting are two other young mothers with whom she works and a Sunday School teacher at the church she occasionally attends with her children. She does not own a computer and is unaware of any parenting organizations in her community. She once responded to a flyer at the grocery store about a mother and child support and play group. After being transferred several times, she was told that the play group was full.

Tim is registered to vote (Tara is not); however, he does not often participate in elections. Politics seem much removed from his life. Both he and Tara have a general distrust of government involvement in family affairs.

American values regarding individual rights, family privacy, preferences for market forces over government action, self-sufficiency and the integrity of the home have often confounded family and child policy development. Standing behind one value can often appear contradictory to other values. In the end, results have most frequently been that national family policies focus on the economic roles of families and rarely address the caregiving role.³⁰⁷ Employment is assumed to be the key to self-reliance and success in the American way of life.

This chapter examines American values and their role in shaping family and child policies. It includes a review of the attitudes of Americans, how our ideals differ from other countries, and viewpoints specific to Florida. National and state polling data are examined. Taking the attitudes and values of Americans and Floridians into account and borrowing from successful programs worldwide, this chapter concludes with strategies that could be successful in making children’s well-being a priority in Florida.

³⁰⁷ Larner, Behrman, Young, & Reich, 2001

America's Changing (and Unchanging) Attitudes

Members of the Masai tribe in Africa always greet each other in the same way. They ask, 'How are the children?' The customary response is, 'The children are well.' With this tradition, the members of the tribe have achieved the two most important goals of every child advocacy organization. First, the tradition ensures that every member of the community continually asks about each child's well-being as if that child were his or her own. Second, the reply – 'the children are well' – reinforces the community's goal of protecting and nurturing its children. Unfortunately, most child advocacy organizations in the United States have yet to mobilize the necessary level of public interest to make the welfare of children an overriding concern in every citizen's life.

Emmett D. Carson in Who Speaks for America's Children, 2001, pg. xi

Americans are proud of their accomplishments and have long applauded their own efforts to “pull themselves up by their boot straps”. The U.S. pioneer spirit imbued strong feelings about families and independence, and these values regarding self-sufficiency and childrearing have mingled with attitudes regarding limited government to narrow the focus of social policy with an emphasis on family responsibility and privacy. Americans expect families to provide for their own needs through employment and for government to step in only if there is a family breakdown or loss of employment.³⁰⁸ Families, work, and equal opportunity are intrinsic to the nation's character.³⁰⁹

Primary Values

The American dream – hard work leads to a better life – has persisted for centuries and much of the nation's productivity and prosperity is attributed to its work ethic. The principle suggests that as long as people believe that they labor within a fair system that rewards effort, they will apply themselves more diligently. In the recent decades, however, the American dream is losing the power to motivate. Working full-time and year-round no longer guarantees a decent living and social mobility. Most low-wage earners are not and never have been welfare participants and welfare reform has not pulled participants out of poverty.^{310,311,312} Thus, for many, self-sufficiency is elusive despite their every effort.

Other beliefs also reluctantly persist. Despite dramatic changes in family life, women maintain primary responsibility for the home and child-rearing. In a 1994 survey, 73 percent of men and women polled said taking care of children was the woman's primary responsibility along with cooking (80%), grocery shopping (79%), the laundry (80%), the house-cleaning (76%), and the dishes (73%). Men took responsibility for one household chore: deciding how money would be spent

³⁰⁸ Larner et al., 2001

³⁰⁹ Sylvester, 2001

³¹⁰ Ehrenreich, 2001

³¹¹ Reich, 2000

³¹² Shore, 2000

(55%).³¹³ Even as they have entered the workforce in overwhelming numbers, women continue to assume primary responsibility for home life. Both men and women hold fast to the importance of mothers being home with children as they insist that welfare mothers should work, and accept or cast guilt on other mothers for working.

Institutions to Protect American Values

For much of American history, family values and dreams were watched and protected by faith-based and federated membership organizations. They were the center of civic authority and served as advocates for child-rearing families. With weekly local meetings and ties to national conferences, these organizations sought to build the material and moral prospects of children and the well-being of families. Membership federations began to decline in the 1960s with racial integration, new ideas regarding women and work, and increased education and professional jobs that limited time for weekly meetings.³¹⁴ With their demise, local communities lost important entities that provided a voice for parents and united low and middle income families.

In place of the local federated membership organizations, professionally run and centrally managed national advocacy groups proliferated. In the 1960s, it was acceptable and expected for these non-profit entities to be politically active in policy making. These expectations quickly changed and now the focus of most non-profit advocacy organizations is public education.³¹⁵ Gauging, influencing, and projecting public attitudes are primary endeavors.

The locus of work for influencing and developing public policy has also shifted. Devolution has shifted responsibility for social legislation to state and local governments. Now policy outcomes are likely to vary across states and localities.³¹⁶ National organizations have opened state offices and/or have shifted resources and focus to the state level.³¹⁷ For example, the Child Welfare League of America and Fight Crime Invest in Kids have increased their presence in Florida in recent years.

Advocacy organizations have tremendous challenges in influencing public attitudes and policy development. They are largely dependent on philanthropic giving which tends to benefit more established charities in professional and research organizations rather than organizations promoting citizen participation. With a few recent exceptions, most foundations avoid public policy grant making and dedicate relatively few dollars to progressive social movements.³¹⁸

³¹³ Crittenden, 2001

³¹⁴ Skocpol & Dickert, 2001

³¹⁵ DeVita, Mosher-Williams, & Stengel, 2001

³¹⁶ DeVita, Mosher-Williams, & Stengel, 2001

³¹⁷ Covington, 2001

³¹⁸ Covington, 2001

Attitudes Abroad

Proclaiming the rights of families to make their own work and caregiving choices is mere rhetoric, unless it is backed up by supports that offer families across the income spectrum viable options for remaining home, securing quality child care, or combining the two.

Larner, Behrman, Young & Reich in Caring for Infants and Toddlers, 2001, pg. 12.

In comparison to other industrialized countries, the United States provides minimal child and family supports. Health care, parental leave, child care services, and parenting supports are common government services in most Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. OECD is made up of 30 member countries that produce two-thirds of the world's goods and services and is designed as a forum to discuss and improve economic and social policies.^{319, 320} Improved maternal and child health and child development outcomes are associated with these policies.

Health Care Services

Universal access to health care is common in OECD countries other than the United States. Switzerland and Sweden have compulsory health care requirements and provide free medical care. Finland, Sweden, and Norway utilize a system of municipal health care centers. In Luxembourg, the health insurance system includes maternity centers that provide care to mothers and children up to at least age 2. Seventeen other countries have a national system of health care with most providing universal coverage. Not surprisingly, these countries report positive health outcomes. Five of the OECD countries have infant mortality rates of less than five deaths before age 1 per 1,000 live births and another ten have rates between five and six (the United States has 6.33 deaths before age 1 per 1,000 live births).³²¹

Early Childhood Supports

Most OECD countries provide universal access to one or more types of early childhood supports; child care supports are viewed as a public responsibility and public good. Such supports are relied upon to provide important social experiences and to prepare children for school and adult life³²². In the United States, child care is principally viewed as a family responsibility and decision.

There are primarily three types of early childhood supports that are provided. These are parental leave, child care services, and early childhood benefits³²³. Parental leave, with or without wage replacement, guarantees employees time off to

³¹⁹ Foster, 2001

³²⁰ Waldfogel, 2001

³²¹ Foster, 2001

³²² Waldfogel, 2001

³²³ Waldfogel, 2001

care for children, elderly parents, or to meet other family obligations without loss of their position. Child care services range from universal government programs to subsidies to tax credits. Early childhood benefits are cash benefits that provide families with the option to stay home with their children, purchase private child care services, or a combination of the two.

Parental Leave

Parental leave with some percentage of wage replacement averages 10 months in OECD countries.³²⁴ Policies tend to be universal and typically include some wage replacement. First and foremost, parental leave policies are viewed as ways to protect the health of women and children. Leave times in Nordic countries range from 18 months in Denmark and Sweden to 3 years in Norway and Finland. In other European countries, leave varies from 11 months in Italy to 3.3 years in Germany. Wage replacement is generally some percentage of prior wages. Canada provides 6 months of child-related leave and all but two weeks are paid for at a rate of 55 percent of prior earnings.

The right to parental leave is new to American workers and provides minimal benefits. The Family Medical Leave Act provides 12 weeks of job-protected parental leave for employees working in government positions and private firms with at least 50 employees. To participate, workers must have been employed for at least one year and have worked 1,250 hours in the prior year. There is no income replacement, and most of those who are eligible do not take it. Indeed, 78 percent of those who needed the leave but did not take it reported that they could not afford the time without pay. The median leave time used under the Federal Medical Leave Act in 2000 was only 10 days.³²⁵

Child Care Services

Child care assistance is typically provided through publicly funded programs in Europe. Whereas only 5 percent of children under age 3 and 54 percent of children between 3 and 6 years are in publicly supported early childhood programs (including tax credits, subsidies, publicly funded pre-kindergarten and kindergarten programs) in the United States, assistance ranges from 20 percent to 48 percent for children under age 3 and from 53 percent to 82 percent for children between 3 and 6 years in Nordic countries. In other European countries, assistance for zero to three year olds ranges from 2 percent in Germany to 23 percent in France.

However, it is noteworthy, that strong parental leave policies in these countries reduce the need for non-parental child care. For 3 to 6 year olds, child care assistance ranges from 78 percent in Germany to 99 percent in France. In addition, the government funds 68 percent to 100 percent of the child care costs in these countries. In the United States, the government covers 25 to 30 percent of the costs of child care.³²⁶

³²⁴ Waldfogel, 2001

³²⁵ Asher & Lenhoff, 2001

³²⁶ Waldfogel, 2001

In France, a publicly run and funded nursery school system enrolls all preschool children two-and-a-half years old through five whether or not their mothers work outside the home. There are no fees regardless of income. In France and other European countries, there is concern that the costs of care may decrease the willingness of families to bear children. This creates support for substantial subsidies for child care and family services. They also value the developmental benefits that good preschools confer. The value of early care and education is not as clear in the U.S. given the variability of quality in programs. In addition, there is a prevailing attitude in the U.S., subtly but consistently expressed, that single or low-income families should not have more children than they can afford, and that they should not be encouraged to have additional children by government help of any kind.³²⁷

Early Childhood Benefits

Viewed as the predecessor of current early childhood benefits, Hungary introduced the child-rearing allowance that provided a cash benefit to mothers who stayed home with their young children in 1967. In 1985, Finland introduced the first early childhood benefit that provided a cash grant and a choice to families with young children. The money is provided to all parents with children under age 3 regardless of whether or not they work in the labor market. It is designed to provide parents with a choice of providing parental care for their young child or purchasing private child care. Norway has passed similar legislation, and Austria is considering it.³²⁸

The Effects of Early Childhood Supports on Parents' Decisions

The type of benefit that is provided does seem to influence the choices that parents make. For example, strong parental leave benefits with wage replacement result in more mothers choosing to stay at home with their young children. There are fears that lengthy leave times may have negative effects on gender equity in employment.^{329,330} Others argue that the benefits (improved maternal and child health and child development outcomes) outweigh the concerns.

An emphasis on child care supports results in more parents remaining in employment, as is the case in the United States. Although the research is not conclusive, there are concerns about child development outcomes associated with this choice, particularly for very young children.³³¹ In most of the OECD countries, publicly operated and universal programs ensure a level of quality. This is not the case in the United States.³³²

³²⁷ Helburn & Bergmann, 2002

³²⁸ Waldfogel, 2001

³²⁹ Helburn & Bergmann, 2002

³³⁰ Waldfogel, 2001

³³¹ Waldfogel, 2001

³³² Helburn & Bergmann, 2002

Giving parents a choice between providing parental care or obtaining child care for their young children seems to be the best option. Other countries are carefully watching the early childhood benefit programs in Finland and Norway. Both countries provide good quality publicly funded child care systems, and the increased use of private child care with the early childhood benefit funds may threaten the public system. In a country like the United States with a long history of a varied public-private child care market, such concerns would not be warranted.

Assistance for Parenting

Parent skill-building programs are typically limited in scope and reach in the United States. In other industrialized countries, home visiting and parent support programs are often integrated within the larger system of comprehensive maternal and child health and social services systems. In most cases, services are available to all families in Europe. Australia, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden provide voluntary, free home visiting services focused on children under the age of three and provide linkages to other social services.³³³

Influences on Florida Attitudes

Groups must consider the social conditions and public values that shape policy alternatives, since public perceptions affect the willingness of politicians and the public to address the plight of children.

Elizabeth Reid in Who Speaks for America's Children, 2001, pg. 113.

Attitudes are often aligned with political preferences in Florida. Although the platforms of both the Republican Party and the Democratic Party emphasize child and family issues, the approach can be quite different. Florida has gone from a solidly Democratic southern state to a more partisan and competitive state. In 1980, nearly two-thirds of Floridians were registered as Democrats. By 1996, the proportion had slipped to less than half. Although party strength varies by region, there is near parity in voter registration between Democrats and Republicans today, and thus, policy approaches change more frequently.

The senior voter yields a great deal of power relative to public policy in Florida, and seniors have demonstrated their support of child and family issues in several elections. Seniors constituted 18 percent of the state's population, 27 percent of the state's registered voters, and 32 percent of all voters in the 1998 gubernatorial election. By 2025, 22 of the state's 67 counties are expected to have senior populations larger than 30 percent, and it is predicted that seniors will be the single most influential group in state politics.³³⁴

³³³ Foster, 2001

³³⁴ Colburn & deHaven-Smith, 2002

Senior “baby boomers” will not be easy to categorize. Baby boomers tend to be much more politically independent than their parents were and have a more progressive, rather than conservative, policy orientation. More of them categorize themselves as liberals, they are less supportive of military expenditures, and they tend to champion programs for racial and gender equality and environmental protection. Colburn and deHaven-Smith predict that the senior vote will be more volatile in the 21st century.

When elections are highly contested or existing political alliances are unstable, parties and candidates must reach out to less institutional and well-known voices. Child advocates can use these periods of electoral instability to gain leverage and amplify their voices in politics.³³⁵ Such is the current case in Florida. Given the parity in political party registration, analysts suggest that political power now resides with the minor and independent voters.³³⁶

Polling

Changing the status of mothers, by gaining real recognition for their work, is the great unfinished business of the women’s movement.

Ann Crittenden in The Price of Motherhood, 2001

National Polling

The 2000 Public Agenda national survey concluded that there is overwhelming consensus that a parent at home, either mother or father, at least for the first few years of a child’s life, is preferable. Several national polls found that a great majority of adults think that parents should be spending more time with their children, especially their young children.³³⁷ However, by a 3 to 1 margin, parents support public child care assistance for parents to work or go to school rather than stay home and receive government assistance.

This finding stands in spite of concerns regarding child care. More than 6 in 10 parents are very concerned about abuse and neglect in child care centers. A further complication is distrust of government. Although there is a general level of distrust, people trust local and state governments more than the federal government, and 58 percent believe religious, charitable, and community organizations do a better job than government in providing services to people in need.³³⁸

³³⁵ Imig, 2001

³³⁶ Scicchitano & Scher, 2001

³³⁷ Sylvester, 2001

³³⁸ Sylvester, 2001

Although Americans appear skeptical regarding government assistance, they do agree that more needs to be done to assist parents. In their national study of adult knowledge of child development, DYG, Inc.³³⁹ found that although there were gaps in knowledge about how children develop, there was widespread support by parents and non-parents alike for various policies that support young children and their families. More than 60 percent of surveyed parents of young children indicated that neither government nor employers were doing a very good job at making changes in the workplace to meet the needs of workers with very young children. Eighty-eight percent of parents with young children and 80 percent of all adults in the sample supported paid parental leave, and strongly supported (89% and 84 percent respectively) the expansion of disability or unemployment insurance as a vehicle to pay for the leave. Furthermore, 73 percent of parents of young children and 65 percent of all adults supported government financed child care assistance. In a 2000 Fight Crime Invest in Kids poll³⁴⁰, 68 percent of respondents rated “providing access to after-school programs and early childhood programs like Head Start” as a higher priority than cutting taxes.

Researchers have also found that terminology is important in gauging public attitudes. The public still views early childhood education and school readiness in a more positive light than child care. Adults are more likely to support proposals and policies that provide benefits to children than those that provide assistance to families. In addition, scientific arguments for early care and education are not well understood by the public and information that includes lots of research information is generally not well received. Furthermore, programs designed to benefit all children receive more support.³⁴¹

Sylvester³⁴² concluded that there are three main lessons from national polling. First, Americans believe parents should be the primary influences in children’s lives and it is best if mother stays home with the very young. Second, individuals value self-sufficiency and understand that low-income families may need help with child care assistance to balance work responsibilities and child rearing. Finally, Americans are skeptical about government involvement in the family domain. Thus, public support for government to act directly to provide or improve child care is tenuous.

State Polling

In a statewide telephone research poll commissioned by the Children’s Campaign, Inc. and conducted by Barcelo and Associates³⁴³, 800 interviews were conducted in Florida with likely voters (95% confidence factor). All respondents indicated that they always or usually voted in elections. Males and females were represented in approximately equal numbers, and 40 percent of respondents had children living at home. Forty-four percent identified themselves as conservative, 24 percent as liberal, and 33 percent as middle of the road.

³³⁹ DYG, Inc., 2000

³⁴⁰ Fight Crime Invest in Kids, 2000

³⁴¹ Beatty, 2001

³⁴² Sylvester, 2001

³⁴³ Barcelo & Associates, 2001

When asked to identify the primary election issue among a variety of choices, Florida's respondents chose "improving the quality of education" as the top priority (52%). Other responses included "doing more to help families and children" (19.4%), "holding the line on local taxes" (9.5%), "helping senior citizens in your community" (9.4%), "improving local roads and transportation" (5.5%), and "adding more police officers" (4.8%).

When asked specifically about early childhood issues, Florida's respondents expressed concern and support. Ninety-seven percent agreed that children need more assistance to get ready to learn, and 93 percent agreed that working parents need help. Seventy-seven percent agreed that middle-income families "fall through the cracks", and a majority (58%) also recognized that too many children enter school not ready to learn. Although respondents were about equally split as to whether the State of Florida had a responsibility to provide public education earlier than kindergarten, 74 percent agreed that every 4-year-old should have a "learning opportunity".

Florida's respondents agreed that early care and education programs should include specially-trained teachers (88%), faith-based institutions (60%), and neighborhood and community organizations (90%). They also agreed that such programs should emphasize academic and social skills (92%), assist lower and middle income families (73%), be provided on a voluntary basis (73%), and offer a statewide, voluntary preschool program (77%). Scholarships (69%), tax breaks (54%), tuition rebates (53%), and financial aid (50%) were identified as good or excellent funding mechanisms to help low and middle income families pay for quality early care and education.

Framing the Issues

Predictions that we will soon see a national social movement for children are premature. Social movements require more than the presence of shared grievances to develop and sustain momentum. Advocates can succeed only when grievances are channeled into political action through organizational networks and when favorable conditions advance their cause.

D. Imig in Who Speaks for America's Children?, 2001 pg. 203.

Inconsistencies

Raising children is at the top of American values; however business and government laws and policies do not reflect this value. Crittenden³⁴⁴ concluded that individuals who assume the role of nurturer are punished and discouraged from performing the very tasks that everyone agrees are essential. Workplaces guarantee that women will have to cut back on, if not quit, their employment once they have children. Marriage is an unequal financial partnership. With the exception of 3 states – California, Louisiana, and New Mexico – mothers do not have an unequivocal legal right to half of the family's assets. Although nannies earn Social Security credit, mothers at home working to care for family members do not.

³⁴⁴ Crittenden, 2001

For these reasons, motherhood is the single biggest risk factor for poverty in old age. American women have smaller pensions, and those over 65 are more than twice as likely to be poor as men of the same age. The devaluation of mother's work extends to those who do similar work for pay such as child care providers. In sum, there is a heavy financial penalty on anyone who chooses to spend any serious amount of time with children.³⁴⁵

Complicating this matter is the fact that women are as conflicted as men regarding work and family issues. In a 2000 Washington Post Election poll, 79 percent agreed somewhat or strongly with "it may be necessary for mothers to be working because the family needs money, but it would be better if she could stay home and take care of the house and children". In a 1997 Pew Research Center poll of women, respondents preferred to work at least part-time, but only 17 percent believed that mothers working is a good thing for society.³⁴⁶ Two core American values – mothers have primary responsibility for children and families should be economically self-sufficient – conflict.

Furthermore, survey after survey finds Americans concerned about problems facing children, frightened by youth crime, and worried that other parents are not taking responsibility for raising their own children. At the same time, they are unsure of the role government should play in child policy. Religious differences provide further complications. About one-third of Americans identify themselves as fundamentalist Christians, and they generally oppose social policies that seem to promote nontraditional family structures, women working, and reliance on child care.³⁴⁷

The growing geographic divide between poor and middle-class families also separates opinions and consensus.^{348,349} With a greater concentration of low-income families in inner cities and more and more middle-class families living in suburbs, there is little opportunity to find common ground. Poverty and joblessness are increasingly concentrated in central cities and political power in the suburbs. This geographic divide undercuts the potential to mobilize parents around a shared identity.

³⁴⁵ Crittenden, 2001

³⁴⁶ Sylvester, 2001

³⁴⁷ Imig, 2001

³⁴⁸ Imig, 2001

³⁴⁹ Reich, 2000

Influencing Attitudes

Despite the inconsistencies in attitudes and the barriers to reaching consensus, there have been successes in garnering support for child and family policies. The universal kindergarten movement, the Family and Medical Leave Act, North Carolina's Smart Start Initiative, and Vermont's Success by Six provide lessons on framing the issues. Notwithstanding strong opposition in all these cases, advocates won widespread support for their policy changes.

The advocates of the universal kindergarten movement carefully crafted their message. "Early education" rather than "child care" was used. They addressed the concerns raised regarding mothers working and the dangers of out-of-home care. Utilizing the education framework and trained teachers convinced the public that kindergarten would be a positive benefit for children and mothers. Furthermore, by focusing on universal access and voluntary attendance, they allayed concerns about family privacy and rights.³⁵⁰

Supporters of the Family and Medical Leave Act recognized the need to reframe their issue. First identified as "maternity leave", opposition touted concerns regarding mothers working and infringement into family rights. The issue was reframed to one of providing minimal labor standards to enable families to balance work and family priorities after childbirth and during serious illness. Support was gained by focusing on the well-being of children, respecting the integrity of family, providing benefits to working families, and ensuring no intrusion into family life.³⁵¹

Another example of how successful initiatives heed public values is North Carolina's Smart Start. Recognizing that all parents were concerned about high quality child care, the initiative aimed to improve all programs through better training, and honored Americans' reverence for work, self-sufficiency, and parent choice. Opposition forces argued that the program would take responsibility of child-rearing away from families. Supporters responded by emphasizing that parents were the decision-makers and the goal of the initiative was to make sure that whatever decision parents made, the care would be of high quality. A core tenet of the proposal included offering resources and support to private and faith-based programs as well as relative caregivers.³⁵²

Vermont's Success by Six is another example of successful issue framing. Avoiding the stigma of special services for poor families, the program provides home visits for all families with newborns. Home visitors deliver "Welcome Baby" bags complete with diapers, books, and toys. People from local communities are trained to provide the home visits in order to alleviate fears regarding government.³⁵³

³⁵⁰ Beatty, 2001

³⁵¹ Sylvester, 2001

³⁵² Sylvester, 2001

³⁵³ Sylvester, 2001

Projecting Future Policy Development

Some advocates conclude that parenting struggles are widespread and believe that a parents' movement is in the near future. They argue that concerns cut across racial and economic lines. Such changes, however, require the convergence of numerous efforts and events. Imig³⁵⁴ identifies the importance of patterns of social change, the timing of dramatic and critical events, shifting political landscapes, the efforts of influential allies (such as media and faith-based supporters), and the focus of public attention as key factors affecting how strongly a society mobilizes in response to a cause.

Currently, there are many obstacles to a national social movement for children and families. First and perhaps foremost, there is no clearly discernable legislative agenda for children and families. Rather, multitudes of individuals and organizations with different agendas, send mixed messages about what's best for children. Child advocates have not agreed on the central issues facing children, the long-term value of community organizing, successful strategies that should be considered, or whether the focus should be at the national, state or local level.^{355, 356} Sylvester concludes that advocates may need to consider whether the existence of fewer child advocacy organizations could lead to better coordination, more effective advocacy, and increased stable funding.

The lessons from past efforts appear clear. Policies should respect the rights of parents to raise their children by ensuring options and choices. Public programs should help families struggling economically to balance work and family responsibilities through flexible assistance that allows families to secure the services they need and want. In addition, community-based early childhood programs should be utilized in lieu of government operated programs.

Support for family and child policies can come from many sources. With increased numbers of women in the workforce and assuming professional positions in social work and law, more and more women are likely to be powerful allies in social policy issues. Additional efforts are needed to tap the potential of women and parents.^{357, 358} In addition, organizations with members of higher income and education are generally more successful at bringing attention and action to issues, and faith-based communities are among the few types of organizations that bring together low and middle income families and could serve as powerful advocates. Furthermore, organizations that promote community capacity building, network development, and mobilizing collective action may be the keys to the success of future reforms.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁴ Imig, 2001

³⁵⁵ Reid, 2001

³⁵⁶ Sylvester, 2001

³⁵⁷ Reich, 2000

³⁵⁸ Reid, 2001

³⁵⁹ Imig, 2001