



World Bank Advises Moving toward Integrated Early Childhood Development Services

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China could consider moving toward integrated early childhood development services for all covering prenatal services to services for 0-3 year olds, 3-6 year olds and even aligning with primary school education, and developing related policies and measures, advises a World Bank report. After achieving nearly universal 9-year basic education, China is increasingly emphasizing policy development and service delivery in early childhood education. A bilingual report titled Challenges and Opportunities: Early Childhood Education in Yunnan, recently published by the World Bank in collaboration with Yunnan Department of Education, has analyzed the key challenges and proposed policy interventions for expanding the coverage and improving the quality of early childhood education particularly in the rural areas. "Globally and scientifically, there is consensus that early childhood development is one of the most effective measures in alleviating poverty as well as in improving economic competitiveness and labor productivity. More and more countries are prioritizing early childhood education on the national development agenda, said Xiaoyan Liang, World Bank Senior Education Specialist and lead author of the report. "In China, the demand for education is particularly strong. Even though early childhood education is not yet part of the compulsory education, government still has a critical and important role to play in ensuring access to and quality of early childhood education particular for the disadvantaged population, she added. The report presents findings from five interrelated studies: (i) a survey of existing early childhood development policies and institutions in Yunnan and China; (ii) the financing of preschool education; (iii) a household survey of a representative sample of 3-to 6-year-olds in rural Yunnan; (iv) a survey of preschool quality in Kunming using the internationally recognized Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale - Revised for Pre-Schools scale; and (v) a comprehensive study of preschool teachers covering qualifications, career development, working conditions and salaries, as well as demand and supply. Based on research results and comparison with relevant international trends, the report put forward the following recommendations for improving the access to and quality of preschool education in Yunnan province: - Increasing public financing on preschool education, in particular for the disadvantaged. The incorporation of at least one year preschool education into the free public education system, targeted funding for preschool provision in poor, border and minority counties, and a diverse and innovative set of demand-side, private-public partnership financing and delivery mechanisms are potentially effective measures. - Expanding service delivery models. Models employing flexible service delivery could be adopted in addition to formal center-based care. Home-based care, parenting education, and communication and media campaigns have been used in other countries to improve access to early childhood services, parental knowledge and practices, and ultimately childhood development outcomes. - Improving quality and atmosphere of existing preschools. More sophisticated instruments need to be developed for assessing the quality of preschools, going beyond the traditional focus on physical infrastructure but with much more attention to curriculum, activities, teacher-child interactions, parent and community outreach, and other process indicators. - Strengthening family and parental education. Families play an instrumental role in childhood development. Parents can provide more quality stimulation and interaction with their children by talking, reading, and playing with them. Parents ability for caregiving can be enhanced through home visits, guidance and support from health providers, and group parental training. - Increasing awareness of secondhand smokes harmful effects. Given that approximately 90 percent of households in the survey have members smoke in the presence of children, it is crucial to increase public awareness of the negative health impact of secondhand smoking to ensure that children are in a smoke-free environment. - Developing a preschool teaching force. The adequate provision of qualified preschool teachers presents the biggest challenge for Yunnan. Preschool teachers as a group have become marginalized from the rest of the teaching force. There is a need to improve preschool teachers pedagogical competency, as well as awareness of and sensitivity to childhood development needs. The shortage of qualified preschool teachers is particularly acute in rural and poor counties. - Moving towards integrated early childhood development provision for all, including early childhood development for 0-to 3-year-olds. Increasingly, global trends move toward more integrated provision of services for young children - bringing together prenatal, health, early stimulation/education, nutrition, and child protection services - often under an umbrella child development agency. In the long term, Yunnan could start developing the early childhood development concept and related policies and institutions, covering prenatal services to services for 0-to 3-year-olds, 3-to 6-years-olds, and even aligning such services with primary school education. The World Bank
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