



National Academies Background Information:

The National Academy of Sciences was established in 1863 by an Act of Congress during the Lincoln administration as a private, nongovernmental institution to advise the nation on issues related to science and technology.

The disciplines of engineering and medicine were added in 1964 and 1970, respectively. Today, the three Academies work together, still tasked with providing independent, objective analysis and advice to the nation on issues related to science, technology, and medicine. They also conduct other activities to solve complex problems and inform public policy decisions. The 524 -page *Parenting Matters: Supporting Parents of Children Ages 0-8* Report "**Report**" was issued by the National Academy of Medicine (NAM) in 2016.

The Report's Purpose and Funders

In the fall of 2014, multiple federal government agencies and private foundations requested that NAM form "**The Committee on Supporting Parents of Young Children**" (**The Committee**) to assess the research on parenting and strategies for supporting parenting in the United States.

The Committee's major task was to a) identify parenting **knowledge, attitudes, and practices** associated with positive developmental outcomes in children ages 0-8, and then b) **to find if there are programs that actually support these outcomes.** (emphasis added)

The organizers and funders of the Report were four agencies affiliated with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the following four private foundations:

- Bezos Family Foundation (Amazon);
- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation;
- David and Lucile Packard Foundation; and
- Heising-Simons Foundation.

On page 2 of the Summary Section, The Committee identified its mission as follows:

*"...The committee was asked to make recommendations directed at an array of stakeholders, for promoting the **wide-scale adoption of effective programs and services for parents and on areas that warrant further research to inform policy and practice.** The resulting report would serve as **a roadmap** for the future of parenting policy, research, and practice in the United States."* (Emphasis added)

The Summary Section of the Report then sets forth ten recommendations, all of which task the Federal government with the leadership responsibility for establishing a wide-scale, effective program to support parents in the U.S. At the same time, The Committee recognizes a difficulty in implementing such a program:

“As noted above, the committee’s task included making recommendations related to promoting the wide-scale adoption of effective strategies for supporting parents and the salient knowledge, attitudes, and practices. Cost is an important consideration for the implementation of parenting programs at scale.”

The Foundation would add that, in addition to the cost of such a program, challenges would undoubtedly arise due to the inevitable politicization that accompanies government programs.



The Fragile Family and Child Well-being Study

One oversight of the National Academy of Medicine’s Report was the Fragile Family Study. The Committee did **not** consider the following important finding from the extensive and ongoing Fragile Family Study undertaken by Princeton and Columbia Universities:

“When [parent] intervention is begun at the hospital during the “magic moment,” such programs have a better chance to succeed in the long-term. The parents’ dedication is more sustainable when they become excited about the program at the very beginning of the child’s life because their motivation and optimism about their future is strongest at the child’s birth. Programs that take advantage of this motivation are more likely to have long-term success.”

Engaging parents of newborns in the hospital has a host of advantages, including (A) the near universal interception of parents, (B) cost-effective enrollment, (C) a generally more enthusiastic response from the parents, and (D) ongoing effective delivery of periodic parenting information applicable to the child’s age after leaving the hospital.

The *Begin with the Children* project takes advantage of the “wide-scale” recommendation of the National Academy of Medicine’s **Report** and the significant findings of the Fragile Family **“Study.”**

The Study and the Report are Significant Independent Validations of the Foundation’s Mission from Prominent, Well-Respected Institutions

On page 9 of the Report is this clarifying statement:

“As noted...parents with knowledge of child development compared with parents without such knowledge have higher-quality interactions with their young children and are more likely to engage in parenting practices associated with children’s healthy development.”

The Foundation's mission is to provide parents of newborn children with the best available parenting information and principles, through its *Begin with the Children* parenting program, to help them update and enhance their parenting skills to meet the challenges of rearing a productive family in today's anti-family environment.

The objective of the Foundation's mission and the support advocated by the Report are the same, namely, a universal program is needed to support parents by providing parent educational information and principles to enhance their knowledge, understanding, and practices associated with children's healthy development.

The *Begin with the Children* parenting plan is a proven, cost-effective, broad-based, family-friendly way to support parents of children ages 0-8

The Committee's recommendation of creating a federal government-led program to intervene with parents and its accompanying cost to support parents of children ages 0-8 as discussed in the 524-page Report briefly highlights the complex challenge the government would face to find a practical, user-friendly way to help parents.

On the other hand, the *Begin with the Children* project already validates the findings of the Fragile Family Study by successfully engaging more than 6,300 parents of newborns in the birthing center and fulfills the call of the Parenting Matters Report for wide-spread intervention by engaging almost all parents of newborns in participating Newborn Centers.

Also, the *Begin with the Children* project follows recommendations found in both the Report and the Fragile Family Study by supporting parents each month after they leave the hospital birthing center with parent educational materials designed to enhance their parenting knowledge, attitude, practices and skills.

Since most parents want to be good parents, this added understanding and support received on a monthly basis significantly increases their likelihood of leading a happy and productive family.

The information in this report was compiled from the Parenting Matters: Supporting Parents of Children Ages 0-8 Report and the Fragile Family and Child Well-being Study by Vibert L. Kesler.