This month’s issue of the Child Policy Project Newsletter focuses on RAND research at the state and local level that has national implications.

**CALIFORNIA**

**Class Size Reduction**
As part of the Class Size Reduction (CSR) Consortium, RAND has studied implementation and impact of smaller classes in California for the past four years. The final report, *What We Have Learned About Class Size Reduction in California*, suggests that the CSR program’s effectiveness could be improved by better integrating and coordinating it with other statewide education reforms. It also recommends giving school districts more flexibility to come up with CSR programs that best meet local needs.

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**Neighborhoods: Growing Up in Los Angeles**
In *Our Backyard*, a new RAND study, provides insights into the health, behavior, and school performance of children from 91 families in three diverse Los Angeles neighborhoods. The study looks at connections between children’s well-being and the neighborhoods in which they grow up. It also describes the environment in which the children live, the demographics of the neighborhood inhabitants, their different views of what constitutes a neighborhood, and their commitment to neighborhood welfare.

A large-scale survey of children living in 65 Los Angeles neighborhoods is currently being conducted to learn more about what aspects of family and neighborhood life make a difference for these children. More information about this study, called the Los Angeles Family and Neighborhood Survey (L.A. FANS), is available on our Web site at www.lasurvey.rand.org.

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**Pennsylvania**

**Lessons Learned in Early Care and Education Services for At-Risk Children**
The Early Childhood Initiative (ECI) was an ambitious effort launched in Pittsburgh in 1996 to provide high-quality early care and education services to at-risk children, on a countywide scale and under the direction of local neighborhood agencies. Its goal was to improve the preparation of these children for kindergarten, promote their long-term educational attainment, and give them the early tools to help them become productive, successful members of society. A *Noble Bet* in Early Care and Education, a recent RAND report, summarizes ECI’s organizational history, analyzes and explains critical weaknesses that hindered ECI’s ability to succeed, and articulates lessons to inform the design and implementation of future large-scale reform initiatives, whether in early care and education or in other areas of social services.

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**Kentucky**

**Test-Based Accountability**
In an effort to improve education, more and more states are adopting policies that make teachers accountable for student scores on statewide assessments.

The Kentucky program, the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS), uses a variety of testing techniques in an effort to guard against negative effects of teaching to the test. Despite enthusiasm for this new approach to assessment-based accountability systems, however, there has been little evidence until now indicating whether performance-based testing is immune to the problem of inflated scores. A RAND report, *The Validity of Gains in Scores on the KIRIS*, offers the first comprehensive evaluation of the effects of Kentucky’s assessment program on achievement. The evidence suggests that KIRIS scores have been inflated and are therefore not a meaningful indicator of increased learning.

Because Kentucky has been in the forefront of the test-based accountability movement, many states have looked to Kentucky when designing their own accountability systems. Hence, the study’s main conclusions will also be immediately relevant to other states.

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**UPCOMING HILL BRIEFING**

What We Know About After-School Care
Presented by: Megan Beckett
Date: Oct. 21, 2002
Time: TBA
Room: TBA
For more information, email wea@rand.org.

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