

The Ounce: A Force For Change

CHANGE THE FIRST FIVE YEARS, AND YOU CHANGE EVERYTHING.

*“We must remember—the first few months of life are not a dress rehearsal.
This is the real show.”*

IRVING HARRIS

FOUNDER, OUNCE OF PREVENTION FUND



Harriet Meyer with
Ounce of Prevention Fund
founder Irving Harris
December 7, 1994



“In light of the social problems we face in this country, starting anywhere but at the beginning simply makes no sense. Children learn how to be, how to relate to the world, how to speak and listen, and how to love from the day they are born. Why would we wait five years to start fixing problems rather than have children begin on the right path?”

HARRIET MEYER

FORMER PRESIDENT AND CURRENT HEAD OF STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

OUNCE OF PREVENTION FUND

Focusing On The First Five Years

Irving Harris was a businessman with a vision: to create an organization that ensures that all children, no matter the circumstances of their birth, have the best possible start in life. He founded the Ounce of Prevention Fund to be an entrepreneurial, visionary force for change in the field of early childhood development.

The movement that Irving began continues to improve the lives of hundreds of thousands of children across the United States because of the way Harriet Meyer took his vision and pushed it to bold heights.

Since its modest beginnings in 1982—serving at-risk teen parents throughout Illinois—the Ounce has grown into a recognized leader with a national presence. In her two decades as president, Harriet seized

opportunities to position early childhood education as the fundamental cornerstone of any effective public education system and advanced the cause of birth-to-five development so that it became part of the state and national conversation.

While the Ounce’s vibrant history contains many success stories, three signature accomplishments stand out: a flourishing doula program, a growing network of Educare schools, and Illinois’s watershed Preschool for All legislation. These achievements stem from the efforts of a cadre of people passionate about early childhood development—both inside and outside the Ounce—but Harriet’s vision, leadership and tenacity were absolutely pivotal.



“Our doula program helps teenagers who are about to step into the unknown of parenting believe in themselves so they can do their best for their children from the very beginning. It’s a strategic approach that successfully helps create and nurture the all-important parent-child bond.”

NICK WECHSLER

DIRECTOR FOR PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Doulas: The Right Help At The Right Time

Since its inception, the Ounce has recognized that nothing matters more to children than their relationships with parents and other primary caregivers. The introduction of doulas into our work with young families was designed to set those relationships on the right path even before children are born.

The Ounce was the first organization to create a new model of intervention based on research showing troubling links between teenage pregnancy and cycles of poverty, abuse and neglect. Through our doula program, we pair pregnant teens with trained mentors who promote healthy prenatal practices, support them through labor and delivery and focus on fostering a strong parent-child attachment. That bond becomes the foundation for the child’s health and development, future relationships and eventual success in school.

Going To Scale

Our doula program was born in 1996, and the model quickly spread across the state. Today, the Ounce trains doulas who help usher in a healthy start for nearly 1,000 babies each year. Our network of community-based programs at 20 sites throughout Illinois is the first publicly funded program in the country to serve teen parents.

This program is an example of how the Ounce encourages innovation by using private dollars to build a case for public funding. We developed a promising intervention model with private money, demonstrated its effectiveness, and then advocated for public funds to deliver it at scale. Private money has come from a wide variety of funders, and public money from numerous sources, including the Illinois Department of Human Services, the Illinois State Board of Education, Chicago Public Schools, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Demonstrable Results

Early intervention makes a clear difference. The majority of teens the Ounce serves are still enrolled in school a year after delivering their babies, bucking national trends for teen mothers. They are also less likely than their counterparts to have another child within two years.

Nearly all children in Ounce-sponsored programs are screened for developmental delays in the first year of life, and more of the toddlers get immunized and make regular well-child doctor visits than the national averages.

Almost twice as many teens in Ounce-supported doula programs choose to breastfeed, compared to a national sample of teens.



“Educare sends a bold message that we will no longer accept less for children in poverty. We will make it possible for them to arrive at kindergarten meeting or exceeding national norms.”

PORTIA KENNEL

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BOUNCE LEARNING NETWORK

Educare: A New Model For A New Millennium

The first Educare school was born out of an earlier project that taught us we needed rigor, data and research to drive an intervention that would deliver results. We did not set out to build a replicable model; we simply wanted to do right for the families we served.

Educare of Chicago opened its doors in 2000 to 150 low-income infants, toddlers and preschoolers. At that time, we could not have predicted the degree to which early investments in our school would reverberate across the entire field of early education. Today, 12 state-of-the-art Educare schools across the country—known as the Bounce Learning Network—are dramatically changing the life trajectories of thousands of children growing up in poverty. Ten more schools are in various stages of development.

Taking A Different Road

Educare schools are attacking the achievement gap by challenging the idea of what is possible. The success of the Educare model demonstrates the effectiveness of both the Ounce’s mission of focusing on education at the earliest stages of life and its entrepreneurial approach of partnering with local schools and private philanthropists.

The network of Educare schools was formed when the Buffett family chose to support the model we created. The network now consists of

the Ounce of Prevention Fund and the Buffett Early Childhood Fund, other major philanthropies,¹ and public-private partners in more than a dozen states across America.

Demonstrable Results

Independent research shows that Educare works. Children who experience Educare for a full five years demonstrate school-readiness skills that are on par with average kindergarteners, and their parents continue to be highly engaged in their children’s education. These children also develop strong social skills, including self-confidence, persistence and ways to manage frustration. All of these abilities are sound predictors of later success in academics—and in life.

Educare’s success reaches far beyond the classroom. Experience shows that Educare is also a powerful channel for improving early childhood practice, informing early childhood policy, and cultivating new private and public investments in the first five years of learning.

¹Major philanthropies that have invested in the network of Educare schools: Buffett Early Childhood Fund; The Children’s Initiative, a project of the J.B. and M.K. Pritzker Family Foundation; Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; The Irving Harris Foundation; George Kaiser Family Foundation; W.K. Kellogg Foundation; and W. Clement & Jessie V. Stone Foundation.



“With Preschool for All, Illinois became the first state to tie together two critical things: expanded access to preschool and resources for the most at-risk infants and toddlers. It drew a clear picture of the birth-to-five vision that leaders at every level are now embracing.”

NANCY SHIER

DIRECTOR, KIDS PUBLIC EDUCATION AND POLICY PROJECT

Preschool For All: A Blueprint For Successful Advocacy

When the state legislature resoundingly approved the Preschool for All legislation in 2006, Illinois became the first state in the nation to offer voluntary, high-quality preschool to all three- and four-year-olds. The momentous plan expanded services to thousands of additional children—particularly those most at-risk—and guaranteed quality standards.

It also preserved a healthy set-aside for programs serving the most at-risk infants and toddlers.

Early childhood advocates and funders across the nation have since looked to this state for lessons on how to push for public policies that reflect research findings about the importance of a child’s first five years.

Forming A United Front

Preschool for All would not have become a reality without bold leadership from many stakeholders, including the governor’s office, legislative chambers, community groups, service providers, philanthropies and advocacy organizations.

While many groups had promoted quality and equity for Illinois’s young

children over a quarter century, three organizations led the advocacy efforts: the Ounce of Prevention Fund, Illinois Action for Children and Voices for Illinois Children. Each organization has a unique mission and each takes a different approach to advancing the quality agenda, yet all worked together for this transformational change.

The governor created the Illinois Early Learning Council—naming Harriet Meyer as a co-chair—to formulate recommendations for a new state policy on preschool education. Under Harriet’s leadership, the Ounce ensured that the Council would become a forceful and necessary agent of change by investing energy and financial resources to build and house its professional staff. Today the Council’s work is supported by a variety of public and private funders.

The Council overcame tough opposition and steep budget cuts to score a victory for all Illinois children and families. As a result, thousands of children across the state arrive at kindergarten ready for school success. The Ounce is using this blueprint for early childhood education to coach other states and the federal government on how to expand the birth-to-five vision.



Accelerating Change: The Next Decade

Investment in early education is on the cusp of moving from a special-interest policy to a mainstream value with wide political support, and we believe the Ounce is well positioned to lead the charge. Our recognized leadership in developing relationships, establishing public-private partnerships and mobilizing champions position us to serve as a catalyst for a broad movement.

Continuity And Growth

One of Harriet Meyer's greatest achievements in her 20 years as president of the Ounce was the steadfast way in which she recruited dynamic board members and built a strategic organization that continues to attract and nurture talented experts. Diana Rauner has worn two hats—she served as a member of the Board of Directors for five years and as executive director for three years. Diana became the Ounce's president in January 2011.

Harriet has been a remarkable force at the Ounce. We are fortunate that we will continue to benefit from her wise and inspirational leadership as she assumes her new role as head of Strategic Initiatives.

Moving forward, the Ounce will expand its work in catalyzing the field as Diana mobilizes the organization to achieve its strategic future vision for 2019. Our benchmarks for success: an American public that embraces early education starting in the first year of life as a vital part of our nation's education system; federal and state policies that provide access to early learning opportunities for children and families in poverty; and annual public funding allocations that increase two-fold for birth-to-five education programs, many of which are patterned after the Ounce's evidence-based programs.

Nationally, far more children in poverty will participate in high-quality, center- and home-based early education and development programs. Families in poverty also will benefit from a publicly supported network of voluntary home-visiting programs that help parents build strong bonds with their young children, while creating healthy home environments that promote school readiness.

We will settle for nothing less.

“We often say the Ounce is in the business of building human capital one relationship at a time. This approach applies beyond the children and parents we serve. It includes the partnerships—both public and private—we forge in the name of narrowing the achievement gap in this country.”

DIANA RAUNER

PRESIDENT, OUNCE OF PREVENTION FUND

the **Ounce**

**OUNCE OF PREVENTION FUND
33 WEST MONROE STREET, SUITE 2400
CHICAGO, IL 60603
312.922.3863**

www.ounceofprevention.org

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