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Gesell Executive Director Speaks at Global Summit on Childhood

New Haven, CT (April 4, 2012) – Dr. Marcy Guddemi, Executive Director of Gesell Institute of Child Development, attended the first “Global Summit on Childhood” conference last week. The Summit was held in Washington, DC, March 28-31, 2012. It was organized by the Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI), in collaboration with Gesell Institute, Alliance for Childhood, Rutgers University Department of Childhood Studies, and the Division for Early Childhood-Council for Exceptional Children. The goal of the Summit was to raise public awareness about challenges facing childhood today. Participants from over 70 countries had the opportunity to explore a variety of key issues affecting the lives of children around the world. The Summit commenced the Decade of Childhood.

Dr. Guddemi and Dr. Kathleen Fite (Texas State University-San Marcos) presented “A Fresh Look at Child Development: Good News From Gesell Institute.” The presentation informed the audience about the rich contributions of Dr. Arnold Gesell, the Institute’s namesake, to the study of child development and it highlighted the results of the Institute’s recent nationwide GDO study on how children develop. In summary, the study found that children are not reaching important developmental milestones any faster today, despite the widespread use of computers and other educational media.

The results of the study, therefore, do not support the current push-down philosophy of highly academic Kindergarten curriculums. Guddemi stated, “When policy-makers and school leaders don’t utilize the research about how children learn, they can make mistakes that actually decrease the very test scores they are trying to increase. Trying to teach an academic skill before a child is developmentally able to understand that concept is a waste of time. They could otherwise be using their time more effectively by developing other skills that are relative to their age.” Media outlets, such as the *New York Times* and *USA Today*, have also published and posted related articles about other studies of similar findings.

High quality early childhood programs for age 3 to Grade 3 are essential because they provide the proper *experiences* and exploration which allows a child to access his or her greatest potential, relative to the developmental level they are at. These programs are not to help children learn more letters earlier or faster, but to learn to negotiate and problem solve with peers and engage in the work of making sense of their world alongside well trained teachers who are experienced, patient, and creative role models. Unfortunately, in an effort to close achievement gaps, both schools and parents endorse the “earlier is better myth,” believing that by “learning” academic skills earlier, developmental success will follow. Gesell’s recent data proves the opposite – **that developmental abilities must emerge before an academic curriculum has meaning for the child, and that it stimulates a corresponding motivation to learn.**

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Gesell Institute has been encouraging schools to reshape their curriculums to incorporate more age appropriate activities.

About Gesell Institute

Gesell Institute of Child Development is an independent non-profit organization that has been associated with how children grow and learn since 1950. The work of Arnold Gesell, PhD, MD (1888-1961), founding Director of the Yale Child Study Center in 1911, has had a profound influence on the field of child development. Based on Dr. Gesell's pioneering work documenting infant and child growth and development, Gesell Institute's programs and publications help parents and educators understand the ages and stages of childhood. Professional development and parent workshops cover a broad range of topics regarding child behavior, healthy growth and development, and positive learning outcomes. For additional information and resources, visit www.gesellinstitute.org.

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