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Mythbusting: Facing the Facts in Public Policy

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In their traditional form, myths can provide cultural cohesion, preserve a version of history, and teach shared values. For example, the myth of the founding of Rome by Romulus and Remus being raised by a wolf provided Romans of the day a great sense of uniqueness and destiny that served their public discourse about their exceptionalism. However, though they may offer a wavery reflection of the culture from which they arose, myths by very definition are untrue.

Because of this fundamental untruth, myths can take on a more ominous character however, especially within the realm of public policy. Many of these “myths” are taken as indisputable fact and thus lurk among the perceptions of the public, parents, school leadership, local governance and policymakers disguised as truth but carrying dangerous implications. These myths may present as problems requiring immediate resources to address (which are then pointlessly squandered) or may masquerade as solutions to be implemented in vain, leaving the underlying issue to worsen. With the potential of these myths to harm and misdirect, we feel it is high time that we turned our focus on dispelling some of the most pernicious.

Accordingly, this issue of the Journal of Family Strengths is dedicated to tackling some of harmful myths that affect children. This cohort of fabrications certainly includes some attached to education, especially in regards to early learning. In this vein, The Myth of the Well-Known “Solution” of Push-Down Academics examines the mistaken belief that children should be hammered with rigorous academics at ever-younger ages. Myths abound around the efficacy of high-stakes testing and school accountability as well, and this issue takes aim at what really underlies some related popular conceptions in Examining the Myth of Accountability, High-Stakes Testing, and the Achievement Gap.

Sometimes, a “myth” may arise around the way we think of a certain subject so that it effectively blots out compelling alternatives. This issue also examines this “myth mindset” with respect to human trafficking, and reveals that modern-day slavery just as much a health and a social justice issue for the victims as it is one of criminal law.

Of course, there can be no thorough scholarly examination of the myths surrounding children’s issues without including the host of misinformation obscuring childhood vaccines. This issue dismantles many of these

pervasive urban legends from the claim that vaccines cause autism to the mistaken apprehension that immunizations are given too early.

Myths take many forms, and many hide in plain sight. Our intention is to expose these, and many other myths because our society cannot implement effective policies for or provide even competent services to our children when these systems are based on fundamental untruths. Whether they stem from tradition, poor data, or media hyperbole, myths must be uncovered for what they truly are if effective work is to be done. For these reasons, we believe that this is one of the most necessary and important issues of the *Journal of Family Strengths* yet published. We hope you find it as equally enlightening and useful. Our hope is that armed with some facts, the readers of this issue will feel emboldened to challenge the myths discussed herein and to begin a dialogue with colleagues and members of the public as the opportunity arises.