



National League of Cities

Supporting Early Childhood Success

Issue #6

action kit for Municipal Leaders



Institute for Youth, Education, and Families

How well children learn and grow during their early years has long-lasting consequences for them, their families, and the communities in which they live. Efforts to promote the full and healthy development of young children pay multiple dividends for cities and towns. In fact, some studies suggest that every \$1 invested in early childhood yields \$7 in long-term benefits to society.

Municipal initiatives to support parents, promote child health and safety, and improve access to high-quality child care can help cities in five key ways:

Positive experiences between birth and school entry boost a child's healthy development and future prospects. Research clearly demonstrates that the "hard wiring" of a child's brain occurs during these early years. Children who get off to a good start are less likely to be held back or to get into trouble in school. Studies have even shown that early childhood success can lead to higher college graduation rates, lower crime rates, and reduced need for emergency services many years later.

Families are more stable when the needs of their young children are met. When children are healthy and in reliable care, their parents are more likely to maintain steady employment and are typically more productive workers.

When children enter school ready to learn, schools are better able to meet high standards and student needs. Successful schools benefit all students, improve a city's livability, and help develop a strong future workforce.

Strong early childhood programs are a valuable asset for local economic development. In the short term, these programs can help attract better workers and support working parents. In the longer term, a city that has made the necessary investments to maintain a quality workforce over time is likely to be more appealing to businesses looking for a stable location.

Early childhood initiatives that expand access to quality services help level the playing field. Economic, racial, and ethnic disparities are too often perpetuated from one generation to the next unless children from disadvantaged households have the kinds of early childhood opportunities that are commonplace among their more advantaged peers.

This action kit outlines a wide range of steps that municipal leaders can take to reap these benefits by supporting parents and promoting early childhood success.

City officials are well positioned to spearhead or support community initiatives that help young children succeed. Even in smaller communities, mayors and city councilmembers can play key roles in improving outcomes for young children and their families. Municipal leaders can take action to promote early childhood success by:

- ◆ **Assessing community needs** to better understand how young children and their families are currently being served and prepare locally-appropriate strategies to help more children enter school ready to learn;
- ◆ **Making early childhood a priority** in the community and throughout municipal government;
- ◆ **Strengthening families** to ensure that parents have access to the information, tools, and supports they need to get their children off to a good start in life;
- ◆ **Promoting child health and safety** through public outreach and education campaigns;
- ◆ **Enhancing early learning opportunities** to ensure that more child care settings provide high-quality developmental programs; and
- ◆ **Expanding access** to high-quality and affordable child care.

NOTE: This list differs slightly from but covers the same spectrum of roles and issues that are explored in the NLC Advisory Council's 2002 Futures Report, "Our Children, Our Future: Promoting Early Childhood Success in America's Cities." This Action Kit provides detailed implementation strategies, building on the broad roles for municipal officials emphasized in the Futures Report.

Because federal funds for early childhood programs are often controlled by state or county agencies and channeled directly to families or service providers, many mayors and city councilmembers assume they have no role in promoting early childhood success. In fact, even in the absence of an explicit early childhood strategy, municipal leaders in every city and town make spending and policy decisions—in areas ranging from zoning and building code enforcement to parks, libraries, and public safety—that have a substantial impact on young children and their families. The question is not whether city officials play a role in early childhood; it is whether or not they will do so in a thoughtful and purposeful way.

For municipal leaders who recognize the importance of early childhood success to their cities and towns, there are many potential places to begin. In some communities, the first challenge will be to focus attention on an issue that has long been ignored. In others, a substantial base of local programs and past efforts will provide a strong foundation on which to build, but new leadership and resources will be required for future progress.

The key is to identify a promising opportunity and get started. By choosing comfortable roles and activities at the outset, mayors and other city leaders can build upon their strengths and work over time toward a more ambitious agenda that involves community partners and diverse local constituencies. The result in many instances will be a community-wide vision for early childhood success, one that pays dividends for years to come.

Whether city leaders have been working on early childhood issues for decades or are becoming engaged for the first time, their efforts are most effective when guided by a clear understanding of the changing needs and emerging opportunities within their community. Municipal leaders can help assess local needs and resources by taking the following steps:

Convene organizations with a stake in early childhood development.

Key stakeholders—such as child care and early education providers, schools, child care resource and referral agencies (CCR&Rs), local health agencies, and employers—can help evaluate how well current programs are addressing the needs of children and families.

Consult parents about their needs.

Mayors and city councilmembers, working with faith-based or neighborhood groups, can hold community dialogues to learn more about what parents of young children need and identify barriers that prevent them from making use of existing resources. Local youth or other outreach workers can also be hired to canvass their neighborhoods interviewing parents, and mapping out local resources.

Use city planning agencies and data.

Many municipalities collect a wide range of data about children and families through various city departments. City leaders can draw upon these data in assessing early childhood needs. For example, geographic information systems used by local planning departments can map out where services are located, show

whether early childhood programs are accessible to low-income families, and help target services to areas of greatest need. Census and industry data collected by local economic development agencies can also shed light on growth patterns and future needs.

Enlist the help of local colleges to analyze data.

Local colleges or CCR&Rs may be able to help cities track child outcomes, population, and economic development trends. For example, indicators such as immunization rates or pre-reading skills at school entry can serve as benchmarks for tracking progress over time. Additionally, by staying on top of changing demographic and industry trends, municipalities can anticipate and prepare for new demands. For instance, will there be a need to focus on bilingual services due to a growing immigrant population? Will it be important to increase services for preschoolers in response to a recent spike in births? Will more care be needed during non-traditional hours for new industries requiring shift work?

Community Assessment Tool: NLC has developed a tool to help municipal leaders gather critical information on the condition of young children and assess the availability of early childhood activities in their cities. The tool also provides a set of questions that can be used to gain a deeper understanding of the local context through discussions with parents and other community stakeholders. To download a copy of the tool, go to www.nlc.org/iyef.

To improve outcomes for young children, early childhood success must be a community- and government-wide priority. When city leaders focus attention on early childhood issues, mobilize support for action, and lead by example, they help build a local infrastructure that promotes high-quality early care and education and strengthens families. Here are some ideas to consider:

Use the “bully pulpit” to raise awareness and build support.

Municipal officials can use their influence and visibility with the general public and other policymakers to foster widespread support for local action. Opportunities to highlight the importance of early childhood success include: public speeches to community members; town hall and city council meetings; business roundtables; newspaper editorials; television interviews; and special programs on cable TV local access channels.

Spearhead an early childhood coalition.

Bringing key stakeholders together increases community buy-in for early childhood initiatives and allows for more effective and coordinated planning. Strong coalitions often include: public school officials; child care and early learning programs; local child care resource and referral agencies; faith-based organizations; health care providers; employers and business organizations; community-based groups; and parents.

Ask all city agencies to join the effort.

City officials can challenge all municipal staff—from librarians to police officers—to think specifically about how they can support young children and their families as they carry out their core missions. A city “children’s budget” can also be an effective tool to highlight and track where local money is being spent on children’s services throughout city government.

Designate an early childhood advisor or coordinator.

In large communities, an advisor to the mayor or senior agency official who is focused on early childhood success can increase the city’s capacity to be a leader on these issues. For instance, the City of San Diego, California’s child care coordinator works to create public and private sector collaborations to expand the supply of quality child care.

Augment and leverage early childhood funding.

City leaders can propose that a local tax levy—or a specified portion of existing taxes—be earmarked for early childhood programs. The City of Santa Fe, New Mexico, allocates three percent of its gross receipts tax to programs involving low-income children and youth. Municipal officials can also bring in private resources by reaching out to philanthropy and business leaders. The City of Seattle, Washington, has challenged local philanthropies to invest in city priorities for children and matches every \$2 of foundation funding with \$1 of city funding, up to a set limit. Finally, as highly visible leaders, mayors and city councilmembers can be effective advocates for increased federal and state funding for early childhood programs.

Model best practices as an employer.

Municipal leaders can communicate the importance of the early years by ensuring that all city employees have access to parental leave. To help working parents pay for quality care, cities can allow employees to put pre-tax money into a “dependent care account” for child care expenses, or offer direct child care subsidies. Municipalities can also establish on-site child care centers for city workers.

Parents nurture, teach, advocate for, protect, and promote the health of their children. Whether or not a young child is cared for outside of the home for a portion of the day, a strong family remains the most important ingredient to ensure early childhood success. Municipal leaders can take the following actions to strengthen families—through parent education and information on key resources—so that parents are better able to meet their children’s needs:

Lead a public education campaign.

Mayors and city councilmembers can help get the word out to parents about the importance of the early years in determining future life outcomes through: public service announcements; billboards and transit signs; and printed materials or “new baby kits” for all new parents that are distributed through local hospitals.

Offer or advertise parenting classes.

Cities can sponsor parent education classes that provide a better understanding of child development, useful parenting techniques, and suggestions for promoting positive early childhood development (such as reading or singing to children, limiting exposure to television, or finding loving ways to discipline children).

Establish a home visiting program.

Home visitation programs that utilize nurses or other professionals have been proven to enhance child outcomes. Home visitors observe and teach parents one-on-one in the setting where they most often care for their children. Visitors can discuss parenting tips and can also connect new parents to key community resources.

Example: The City of Boston, Massachusetts, developed the Boston Family Guide with activities and services available to children and their families, and Countdown to Kindergarten Boston, an initiative that engages families, educators, and community members in a city-wide effort to celebrate and support the transition into kindergarten.

Support or create family resource centers.

Often housed in local schools, recreation centers, health clinics, or other neighborhood meeting facilities, family resource centers are places where parents can go to get information on raising and educating their children. For example, the City of Lansing, Michigan, helps support eleven family resource centers that provide home visits, parent education, parent-child playgroups, and information and referral.

Publish a community resource guide for families.

Many parents may not be aware of resources available in the community. To help connect families to support, cities can distribute a resource guide through local libraries, community centers or public offices, and make it available on the city’s website. City leaders can also establish a public information “help line” to answer questions about community services and programs for young children.

Help connect families to federal and state benefits.

Through a small investment in outreach and enrollment assistance, municipalities can help families gain access to federal and state programs that improve family stability. For example, mayors and city councilmembers can promote the Earned Income Tax Credit, the Food Stamp Program, free or low-cost health insurance, public housing supports, and available child care or transportation subsidies—all of which can make a huge difference for low-income, working families struggling to make ends meet. City-led outreach efforts to ensure that eligible families receive the help they need can boost significantly the number of children who reap the benefits of proper nutrition, preventive health care, a safe home, and reliable child care.

Another key component of early childhood success is good health. During the formative years between birth and school entry, children need preventative care to ensure their healthy physical and emotional development, and protection from dangerous hazards that can cause injury, sickness, and even death. Municipal leaders can help promote child health and reduce the risk of harm by supporting outreach and parent education initiatives, enforcing local building codes, and developing child safety campaigns. Specific steps include:

Prepare information kits for new parents.

Many new parents feel overwhelmed at times with the job of caring for an infant or toddler. Cities can offer support by providing information kits for parents leaving the hospital with newborns on how to ensure the healthy development of their child. This information might cover immunizations, well-child check-ups, breastfeeding, and nutrition as well as information on child development, parenting, and community resources. Kits can be developed and distributed with the help of local health and child care providers.

Publicize health insurance and resources for families.

Many families do not know that they are eligible for free or low-cost health insurance programs such as Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). Mayors and city councilmembers can highlight health insurance options through media campaigns; public service announcements; posters and pamphlets; transit ads; and speeches or public appearances. Cities can also support outreach training for health care providers who have direct contact with families. These partners can help with enrollment, and inform parents of available programs.

Example: The City of Laredo, Texas, produced a public service television ad featuring the mayor, created 25 city-wide billboard displays, and aired information on the local cable system's public access channel to promote the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).

Sponsor an immunization day.

Municipal leaders can work with local health clinics or community centers to offer free child immunizations. Brochures can also be used to stress the importance of immunizations and to advertise where parents can go for services. The City of Detroit, Michigan's health department works with a local television station to sponsor an annual immunization fair that provides parents and children with a fun day in the park and free immunizations for children and youth, ages three months-18 years.

Protect young children from lead poisoning and unsafe housing.

Lead poisoning is a particularly serious threat to early childhood development in communities with older housing stock. Mayors and city councilmembers can inform parents of the dangers of lead paint and promote abatement efforts through partnerships between local public health agencies, building inspectors, and landlords. In addition, municipalities can use their regulatory powers to ensure compliance with building codes, responding promptly to housing complaints from tenants and using fines or other sanctions to eliminate risks posed by unsafe electrical wiring or structural deficiencies in residential units.

Distribute child safety materials to parents.

Simple booklets, magnets, and posters can increase public awareness of potential hazards to young children, including automobile accidents, guns, fire, and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). City officials can work with community groups to distribute information at community fairs and events, city offices, and through partnerships with local grocery stores and financial institutions. Tip sheets can be included in municipal employees' paychecks or on grocery bags and store receipts. Additionally, police and fire departments can offer free car safety seat inspections or provide low-cost smoke alarms.

When children have access to high-quality early learning environments, they are more likely to develop the social and cognitive skills they need to enter kindergarten ready to learn and to succeed in school. Municipal leaders can help expand the supply of early education programs in their community and improve the quality of early learning opportunities in the following ways:

Sponsor family literacy activities.

Family reading programs at local libraries or in other community settings are one effective way to increase early learning programs available to families and their children. The City of Monrovia, California, provides a variety of early literacy activities through the public library, including: storytelling sessions; reading clubs for children ages 3-6, where parents read aloud to their children; and field trips to the library by local child care centers.

Expand parks and recreation programs for young children.

Many city recreation departments tend to focus primarily on school-age children. However, even children who cannot yet walk or talk can benefit from stimulating music, art, and movement activities. Cities can augment regular parks and recreation programming to include classes where parents are encouraged to engage in early learning activities with their young children.

Launch new preschool or Head Start programs.

Mayors and city councilmembers can take the lead—or serve as important partners—in local efforts to create new early learning programs. Some cities, such as Albuquerque, New Mexico, receive direct federal funding to run Early Head Start (for pregnant women and children ages 0-3) and Head Start (for children ages 3-5) programs. Municipal leaders may also consider working with a local school district to secure state or federal resources for pre-school programs or other early intervention services.

Example: In Jackson, Mississippi, the city's Early Childhood Development Division sponsors five early childhood centers that are licensed to serve 450 children. Funding has been secured to serve approximately 340 at-risk children at the centers. To ensure that the centers are effectively preparing children for kindergarten, the city also conducts evaluations (including one-on-one testing, interviews with teachers, and observation of students) through its "Tracking the Graduates" program.

Build support networks for child care providers.

Child care providers often work long hours with low pay and have few opportunities to learn new child development skills. This is a particular problem for those who work from home, such as family day care providers or informal caregivers such as neighbors or relatives. Support networks sponsored or funded by municipal governments can help relieve stress and provide opportunities for caregivers to learn from one another. These networks also provide vehicles for the provision of more formal training or pooled purchasing of supplies or employee benefits.

Provide wage supplements and retention grants.

According to the Foundation for Child Development, the average wage nationally for early care and education workers is \$6.61 per hour—less than that of parking lot attendants and food servers. Publicly-funded wage supplement programs can provide funding to early childhood workers or child care programs to increase wages above what centers (or families) could otherwise pay. Grants frequently vary in size based on the caregiver's position, level of education/training, and child care experience. In San Francisco, the WAGES *Plus* program provides funding to child care centers to raise the salaries of their staff up to or above the wage floors set by the program.

Support and reward professional development.

Professional development programs can help ensure that providers have the resources and incentives to get advanced training in early childhood development and education. One of the best-known programs of this sort is the Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (TEACH) model that was started in North Carolina and has spread to many other states, but other communities have developed a range of similar programs as well. These programs provide funding for tuition, travel, and paid release time. As providers receive more training, they are rewarded with increased wages or bonuses. Municipal funding and leadership can play an important role in getting such programs off the ground.

In order to be both responsible parents and reliable employees, working parents must have access to quality and affordable child care. In many communities, however, difficulties in finding, paying for, and getting to quality child care impede parents' ability to work. Municipal leaders can help address these barriers in the following ways:

Provide information about available child care.

Local child care resource and referral (CCR&R) agencies play vital roles in collecting information about child care arrangements in the community and helping parents find appropriate care for their children. CCR&Rs also provide information about eligibility requirements for child care subsidies, licensing rules, and child care quality so that parents can make more informed choices. Some municipalities operate the local CCR&R or provide funding to support key services. City officials can also advertise CCR&R programs through city offices and community facilities.

Build the supply of child care.

Cities and towns have used a wide range of funding sources to help build new child care facilities, including federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and public housing funds as well as local tax revenues. Direct grants, donated space in city-owned buildings, and revolving loan funds can also provide much-needed assistance to start new child care programs. Municipalities can promote private development by providing incentives or requiring local developers to include child care facilities in their plans.

Review zoning regulations for family child care.

Local zoning policies can make it difficult or impossible for residents to provide family child care services in their homes. Mayors and other city officials can modify zoning or licensing requirements to facilitate the development of new child care programs in previously off-limits commercial or residential areas. For example, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the mayor established an Office of Child Care, which in its first year worked with the city council to remove zoning barriers for family child care programs in local neighborhoods.

Develop creative partnerships to fill service gaps.

Because Head Start and pre-kindergarten programs are often offered only part-day during a portion of the year, many working parents forgo these high-quality options in order to obtain full-day, full-year care. City officials can address this problem by linking early learning programs with child care providers that offer "wrap-around" care during uncovered portions of the day or year. Additionally, many communities face shortages of child care during non-traditional hours (i.e., nights, weekends, and holidays). Municipal leaders can facilitate partnerships between child care providers and local employers operating on such schedules that may be willing to help cover the additional costs of evening or weekend care.

Address transportation barriers.

Many families struggle to get to and from child care facilities. Mayors and city councilmembers can work with regional transit agencies to overcome transportation barriers by modifying bus routes, offering van or shuttle service to underserved areas, and by providing funding for fare vouchers or discounted transit passes. Establishing child care facilities at transit hubs can also alleviate transportation difficulties. For example, in San Jose, California, the Tamien Child Care Center is located at a joint CalTrain and Light Rail station so parents can drop off their children at the center and then ride public transit to their final destination.

Make child care more affordable.

Municipal leaders can support the use of general funds for child care subsidies to families who do not qualify for federal or state government assistance but still cannot afford quality care. City officials can also encourage local businesses to provide low-cost, on-site child care, or set up a public-private fund for "early learning scholarships" to support children's attendance in high-quality programs. Finally, mayors and city councilmembers can lobby for increased state and federal funding for child care subsidies to working families.

Example: The City of Madison, Wisconsin, provides child care tuition assistance to low-income parents who are working, looking for work, or going to school. The program benefits families with incomes too high to qualify for state or county assistance. To emphasize quality, the vouchers can only be used at city-accredited child care centers.

Aspen, Colorado: Targeting Local Revenue (Pop. 5,914)

The City of Aspen is one of a handful of municipalities that have a dedicated local tax for early childhood programs. With revenues from the .45% Affordable Housing/Day Care Sales Tax, Aspen funds the “Kids First” Childcare Resource Department, which administers a financial aid program to help defray the costs of child care to eligible families enrolled with licensed child care providers. For example, over \$190,000 was allocated to the financial aid program in 2002, helping more than 70 families meet their child care costs. Additional grant funding supports infant and toddler programs and provides professional development money and bonus incentives for early childhood providers. Contact: Shirley Ritter, Kids First, (970) 920-5363.

Austin, Texas: Improving Quality (Pop. 656,562)

To improve child care quality in the community, the City of Austin has funded several initiatives recommended by the Austin Child Care Council including: a resource center with materials and training for child care providers and parents; one-on-one consulting for administrative and caregiving staff of child care centers and family day care homes; a wage supplement program for early childhood teachers who work at high-quality, accredited facilities; funding for tuition, books, and small stipends for teachers to attend child development classes; and a “Master Teacher” demonstration program to recognize top teachers and test innovative curricula. Additionally, a city grant to a nonprofit helped create a Child Care Career Center that recruits and provides training to new child care professionals. Contact: Angelica Santacruz, Early Childhood Services Office, (512) 972-5028.

Deerfield Beach, Florida: Sponsoring Early Learning (Pop. 64,583)

The City of Deerfield Beach provides the space for and helps support an early learning program, the NE Focal Point Intergenerational Child Care Center that is housed on-site with three adult senior care programs. Child care staff salaries come primarily from parent fees, but teachers at the center are considered city employees and therefore receive city health insurance and other fringe benefits, including a 401(K) retirement plan to which the city contributes on behalf of the teachers. Contact: Vice Mayor Gwendolyn Clark-Reed, (954) 480-4262.

Hampton Roads, Virginia: Engaging in Regional Efforts

In Southeast Virginia, local elected officials of 17 cities and counties joined other key regional stakeholders to form an economic development coalition called the Hampton Roads Partnership. This partnership recognized that the success of young children is critical to workforce development and launched an early childhood initiative called Square One in 1999. Square One’s key objectives include: 1) reporting on the well-being of children ages birth to 5 in Hampton Roads; 2) identifying and promoting programs and practices that increase healthy births and school readiness; and 3) offering regional-level training and networking opportunities for leaders and staff who provide early childhood services. In August 2001, Square One launched the Hampton Roads Ready to Read Initiative, which provided planning funds and technical assistance to nine localities to develop community action plans aimed at increasing the number of children who begin kindergarten ready to read. The cities involved in the partnership have contributed resources and funding to continue Square One’s work throughout the region. Contact: Rebecca Fishkin, Square One, (757) 552-0293, www.sqone.org.

Lansing, Michigan: Providing Parent Resources (Pop. 119,128)

Under the leadership of the Mayor, the City of Lansing, the Ingham Intermediate School District, and Ingham County officials joined forces in February 2001 to create the *All Children Connected to Succeed (ACTS)* program. This program is funded by a \$3.9 million grant from the Michigan Department of Education combined with an additional \$1.5 million in in-kind donations and local funding from the City of Lansing, area school districts, nonprofit organizations, and others. Families with preschool-age children who join the program gain access to services such as home visitations; developmental screening; parent-child playgroups; and parent group meetings. Additionally, a resource guide provides parenting advice, materials on child growth and development, and connections to community activities and resources. Contact: Lynne Martinez, Capital Area Youth Alliance, (517) 319-2121.



Monrovia, California: Utilizing Public Libraries (Pop. 36,929)

Working through the public library system, the City of Monrovia supports early literacy activities for young children and their families. Some key activities provided by the library include: a "Time for Two's" Story Hour for toddlers and their parents; a "Munchkin" Story Hour for children ages 3-5 with a craft program related to the theme of the story; and "Pajamania," an evening story time geared to children ages 4-7. Once a month, parents who are being tutored in basic literacy or ESL have a special session to help increase their comfort level with reading to their preschool children. Contact: Melinda K. Steep, Senior Librarian, (626) 256-8254.

New Haven, Connecticut: Conducting Comprehensive Planning (Pop. 123,626)

The Mayor of New Haven and the Superintendent of Schools established the Mayor's Task Force on Universal Access to Early Care and Education in September 2000 to develop a plan to ensure that all New Haven children arrive at kindergarten with the skills and support they need to be successful. A resource team of more than 60 people with expertise in early childhood education, child development, and family support advises the 18-member task force. The key goals of the task force include: increasing the supply of preschool, infant, and toddler care; improving the quality of care both in centers and in home-based care; establishing a funding collaborative to explore strategies for financing early care and education; and expanding the existing school readiness council. Work to implement the plan has resulted in: hiring a child care specialist to monitor the quality in all daycare settings in New Haven; increasing the number of child care slots by 123 in the last year; and the distribution of toolkits to unlicensed child care providers to help them improve their quality and obtain licensure. Sheila Allen Bell, Office of the Mayor, (203) 946-7909.

San Francisco, California: Supporting Early Childhood Teachers (Pop. 776,733)

In an effort to increase wages and reduce staff turnover in child care centers, the San Francisco Department of Human Services established the WAGES Plus program (Wage Augmentation Funding for Entry-level Staff Plus). City funding enables eligible centers to raise the wages of staff earning less than the wage floors established by the program (up to \$17.05 per hour). A survey of participating centers showed that approximately three-quarters of the centers reported improved retention, and 82 percent felt that teacher morale improved. The positive response and support of the San Francisco child care community led to the development and implementation of WAGES + Family Child Care, a family child care version of the WAGES Plus model, in Spring 2002. Contact: Elise Crane, San Francisco Department of Human Services, (415) 557-5671.

San Jose, California: Establishing Quality Standards (Pop. 894,943)

The City of San Jose has developed two program quality tools for use by both centers and family child care homes: 1) the Program Quality Standards, a list of program quality review instruments and measures that are recognized and accepted locally and nationally; and 2) the Ready For Kindergarten (RFK) criteria and assessment tool, which is consistent with State of California standards and recommendations. The city offers capital improvement grants to organizations that meet specific early care and education quality criteria. In 2001-2002, San Jose began implementing the RFK standards in 21 pilot sites serving 160 children. Additionally, the mayor and the city council recently approved "Investment in the Future—San Jose's Early Care and Education Strategic Plan 2002-2006" and allocated \$15 million to implement the plan's key goals that include: expanding the supply of quality child care; creating a public awareness campaign on early care and education issues; and integrating the city's strategic plan with local, state and national initiatives in order to increase resources and ensure a comprehensive service delivery system. Contact: Angel Rios, Jr., Office on Child Care, (408) 392-6750.

Seattle, Washington: Leveraging Funding for Early Learning (Pop. 563,374)

In 1990, the City of Seattle passed the Families and Education Levy. This property tax levy has collected \$69 million over seven years and has been a significant source of funding for early childhood programs run through the city's human services department. The city also provides funding to a nonprofit organization that facilitates business-child care partnerships, allowing local employers to contribute funding, supplies, equipment, or pro-bono services to a local child care program. Finally, Seattle has leveraged philanthropic funding through an innovative "Opportunity Fund." For every \$2 contributed to the fund by an association of philanthropies in the Northwest for any element of the city's child care "Blueprint for Change," the city invests \$1 in matching funds (up to a set limit). Contact: Janet Staub, Division of Family & Youth Services, (206) 386-1141.

Brain Development

Research shows that much of the brain's growth occurs during the first few years of life.

- ✦ A child's brain grows to more than 90 percent of its adult size by the age of three.
- ✦ Connections in the brain, called synapses, provide a foundation for future learning. An eight-month-old may have 1,000 trillion synapses in his or her brain, but as "pruning" occurs, unused connections are eliminated, and this number drops to half that total by age 10. Early experiences not only determine which synapses are retained, but can also cause the final number of connections to increase or decrease by as much as 25 percent.

Child Health and Well-being

Prenatal care in the first trimester is essential in identifying high-risk pregnancies and ensuring proper nutrition. After birth, proper health care, such as immunizations and well-child appointments, is important to continued healthy development.

- ✦ 17 percent of children were born to mothers who did not receive prenatal care in the first three months of pregnancy in 2000.
- ✦ 7.6 percent of babies were born with low-birth weight in 2000, putting them at risk of developmental disabilities, hearing and visual difficulties, and long-term illness.
- ✦ Almost a quarter (23 percent) of children were not fully immunized by the age of two in 2001.
- ✦ 12 percent of all children in 2001 did not have health insurance, and therefore may not receive adequate health care.

Early Learning Experiences

Several rigorous research studies—including the Abecedarian study in North Carolina and the Perry Preschool project in Ypsilanti, Michigan—have demonstrated that comprehensive, high-quality early educational intervention can have a dramatic impact on academic and social outcomes for children. At-risk children who received these early childhood services:

- ✦ Had higher scores on cognitive, reading, and math tests, with the differences evident into early adulthood;
- ✦ Were more than twice as likely to attend a four-year college and to delay parenthood; and
- ✦ Were five times less likely to be chronic lawbreakers as adults than those who did not.
- ✦ For every \$1 invested in quality early childhood programs, there is a long-term benefit of \$7 in public savings by increasing the likelihood that children will stay in school and become employed, and by reducing dependence on welfare and arrests for criminal activity.

Working Parents

- ✦ Sixty-five percent of mothers with children younger than six are in the labor force; 59 percent of mothers with infants (under age 1) are working.
- ✦ 12.4 million children under age 5 are in some form of child care each week. That is the equivalent of three out of five young children in America.

Quality and Affordability of Child Care

- ✦ More than 10 percent of care centers in the United States provide care that jeopardizes children's health, safety, and development. Among family-based child care programs, nearly a third provide harmfully low-quality care.
- ✦ Only one in seven U.S. child care centers provide good quality care, and only about one in ten home-based child care providers were actually enhancing the growth and development of children.
- ✦ Full day child care easily costs \$4,000 to \$10,000 per year — at least as much as college tuition at a public university. However, more than one out of four families with young children earns less than \$25,000 a year.

School Readiness

- ✦ More than one-third of children entering kindergarten are unprepared for school challenges.
- ✦ Of every 100 children who leave first grade as poor readers, 88 still will be poor readers at the end of third grade, limiting their chances of academic and future workforce success.
- ✦ Three-fourths (75 percent) of unemployed adults have reading or writing difficulties.

Key sources: Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics; Children's Defense Fund; Child Trends; National Research Council; US Census Bureau.



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NLC's Institute for Youth, Education, and Families (IYEF) assists municipal leaders in their efforts to promote early childhood success, providing them with a reliable source of advice and an array of ideas on how to use their municipal resources and roles to support early care and education. Contact: Kirsta Millar, (202) 626-3004 or millar@nlc.org.

For more information about why early childhood success matters to cities, see the NLC Advisory Council's 2002 Futures Report, *Our Children, Our Future: Promoting Early Childhood Success in America's Cities* available at www.nlc.org/iyef.

Additional resources and information about early childhood care and education are described below.

Child Care Bureau

(U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, HHS) is dedicated to enhancing the quality, affordability, and availability of child care for all families. The Child Care Bureau administers federal funds to states, territories, and tribes to assist low-income families in accessing quality child care for children when the parents work or participate in education or training. Contact: (202) 690-6782; www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/ccb/.

Children's Defense Fund's mission is to ensure every child a healthy start, a head start, a fair start, a safe start, and a moral start in life, and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. CDF is a private, nonprofit organization that educates policymakers about the needs of children and encourages preventive investments in the area of early childhood care and education. Contact: (202) 628-8787; www.childrensdefense.org.

The Finance CIRCLE is a demonstration initiative to improve financing for early learning and afterschool programs. Demonstration funds will be used to jumpstart both community efforts to provide financial aid for families and resources for programs and providers to support higher-quality services. Contact: (202) 628-4200; www.financeproject.org/financecircle.htm.

Head Start Bureau (HHS) operates the Head Start and Early Head Start programs that serve children from birth to age 5, pregnant women, and their families. They are child-focused programs and have the overall goal of increasing the school readiness of young children in low-income families. The Head Start program is administered by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), HHS. Contact: (202) 205-8572; <http://www2.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/hsb/>.

I Am Your Child Foundation is a national, nonprofit, non-partisan organization, founded in 1997 by actor/director Rob Reiner, to raise awareness about the importance of early childhood development and school readiness. Through public engagement campaigns and the development and dissemination of resource materials, IAYC creates interest among the public and policymakers about the first years of life. The organization also promotes public policies that help ensure that every child enters school ready to succeed. The website offers links to resources in 50 states and the District of Columbia and provides key messages municipal leaders can use to communicate with parents and caregivers about promoting healthy development in young children. Contact: (212) 636-5030; www.iamyourchild.org.

National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA)

gathers, analyzes, and shares information with families and child care providers, builds connections in states and communities to create policies on child care and other children's issues, and aids families in balancing the demands of work and family. The organization also offers child care referrals, consultations, and consumer education through parent workshops, books, and pamphlets. Contact: (202) 393-5501; www.childcarerr.org or www.childcareaware.org.

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

leads and consolidates the efforts of individuals and groups working to achieve healthy development and constructive education for young children. NAEYC Affiliate Groups at the state and local levels work to improve professional practice and working conditions in early childhood education and to build public support for high-quality early childhood programs. Contact: (202) 232-8777; www.naeyc.org.

National Child Care Information Center (NCCIC)

a project of the Child Care Bureau, is a national resource that links information and people to enhance the child care delivery system. Contact: (800) 616-2242; www.nccic.org.

Success By 6

a program of The United Way, helps build local coalitions of leaders from the public, nonprofit and private sectors who work together to develop community plans to: help children succeed when they enter school; leverage resources; address barriers to health development; and mobilize the community around children ages zero to six. For information about local Success By 6 initiatives across the country, Contact: 1-800-UWA-2757 ext. 262; www.successby6.org.

ZERO TO THREE

a national nonprofit organization, promotes the healthy development of infants and toddlers by supporting and strengthening families, communities, and those who work on their behalf. ZERO TO THREE disseminates key developmental information, trains providers, promotes model approaches and standards of practice, and works to increase public awareness about the significance of the first three years of life. Contact: (202) 638-1144; www.zerotothree.org.