



# Equity Starts Early:

## How Chiefs Will Build High-Quality Early Education

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A Policy Statement of the Council of Chief State School Officers

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THE COUNCIL OF CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS

The Council of Chief State School Officers is a nonpartisan, nationwide, nonprofit organization of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in the states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity, and five U.S. extra-state jurisdictions. CCSSO provides leadership, advocacy, and technical assistance on major educational issues. The Council seeks member consensus on major educational issues and expresses their views to civic and professional organizations, federal agencies, Congress, and the public.

**Equity Starts Early:  
How Chiefs Will Build High-Quality Early Education**

Author:

Deborah Roderick Stark

Fortney H. Stark, III, Research Assistant

Acknowledgments:

Support from the Alliance for Early Success

Tom Schultz, CCSSO Project Director

COUNCIL OF CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS

Tony Evers, Executive Board President and Wisconsin State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Chris Minnich, Executive Director

One Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Suite 700 • Washington, DC 20001-1431  
Phone (202) 336-7000 • Fax (202) 408-8072 • [www.ccsso.org](http://www.ccsso.org)

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*“Early education through our Four-Year-Old Kindergarten Program (4K) is an essential piece in our efforts to close achievement gaps. Kids who have a strong start in 4K will be more likely to graduate ready for college and careers.”*

– Wisconsin State Superintendent Tony Evers

Chief state school officers are united in our commitment to ensuring that students of all backgrounds attain college and career readiness. To achieve this goal, we are committed to leading new efforts to close opportunity and achievement gaps right from the start – in the early childhood years.

Across this great country, parents are doing their best to raise their children while they earn a living, and early childhood educators are doing their best to prepare young children for success in school by fostering healthy development, social competence, and active engagement in learning. However, despite these efforts, over half of low-income children enter kindergarten lacking the skills necessary for a strong start to schooling; one quarter of their more affluent peers face the same challenges (Isaacs, 2012). For most children, these early disparities only widen over the course of their educational careers (Schoenfed and Stipek, 2012; Fairchild, McLaughlin and Brady, 2006).

The good news is that high-quality early education programs can improve outcomes, narrow achievement gaps, and convey long-term benefits for children in school and life. This is especially the case for children from low-income families (Minervino, 2014). However, just over one third of three- and four-year-olds from low-income families were enrolled in preschool in 2013 (Kids Count, 2015), and even fewer children participate in quality infant and toddler programs. Children at risk

**High-quality early education programs can improve outcomes, narrow achievement gaps, and convey long-term benefits for children in school and life.**

who do not participate in high-quality early education programs are 50 percent more likely to be placed in special education, 25 percent more likely to drop out of school, 60 percent more likely to never attend college, 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime, and 40 percent more likely to become a teen parent (Save the

Children, 2015). With the achievement gap beginning to manifest in children as young as nine months, and 90 percent of brain development occurring during the first five years of life, chiefs are committed to expanding and upgrading early childhood programs and strengthening early elementary teaching and learning to provide equal educational opportunities for every young child from birth through third grade.

Our commitment to early education is not new. In 2009, chiefs publicly acknowledged the “quiet crisis” threatening the future of young children from families of need, and outlined an agenda to (1) build more coherent state early childhood education systems aligned with kindergarten through third grade (K-3) schooling, (2) increase access to high-quality early childhood education programs, and (3) craft a new state-federal partnership to advance early learning opportunities, particularly for those children most at risk. Important work has been accomplished on these recommendations:

- States increased pre-kindergarten (Pre-K) program funding by roughly \$1 billion, including a 12% increase in the past fiscal year (Parker et al, 2016), to expand services to more than 200,000 additional children, including new programs in Alaska, Hawaii, Indiana, Mississippi, and North Dakota, as well as major local initiatives in Boston, Seattle, San Antonio, Denver, and New York City.
- States led implementation of major new federal early childhood initiatives, including the \$1 billion 20-state Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge, \$250 million in new funding for Preschool Development Grants to 18 states, and \$500 million in Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership grants.
- Chiefs and their partners in state government implemented significant reforms such as Kindergarten Entry Assessments/Inventories, Grade Level Reading initiatives, alignment of state early learning standards with more rigorous K-12 standards, creation of Quality Rating and Improvement Systems to upgrade the quality of early childhood programs, and efforts to link early childhood data with longitudinal education data systems.

These accomplishments have resulted in tangible improvements in educational opportunities and outcomes for millions of children. Nevertheless, the majority of American students are failing to master college- and career-ready skills, and glaring achievement gaps still exist for underserved children and students of color (ACT, 2013). This honest assessment has led chiefs to conclude that we cannot confine our leadership to improving learning in K-12 grade classrooms. We also need to redouble our commitment to prioritize learning in the early years – birth through third grade – as an essential mechanism for tackling inequity and underachievement.

While state chiefs do not have full authority over all early childhood programs, we are crucial leaders in any effort to strengthen early learning opportunities and outcomes. Chiefs manage Pre-K programs in 37 states, services to

## Foundational Principles

- ❖ Chiefs believe that parents are their children's first and life-long teachers. We are committed to providing voluntary publicly-funded early childhood programs, in partnership with families, to enable all children to reach their full potential.
- ❖ Chiefs recognize the value of a diverse system of community-based early childhood providers and the importance of collaborating with them to expand access to affordable, high-quality programs.
- ❖ Chiefs know that high-quality early childhood programs address the developmental needs of children and advance their learning through a variety of teaching strategies and forms of engagement. Teachers ignite interest and curiosity in young children through play, exploration and discovery, whole group, small group, and individualized interactions.

preschool children with special needs in all 50 states, child care services in seven states, and Head Start State Collaboration Office projects in 19 states, totaling billions of dollars in public investment. We are also partnering with other state and federal officials to overcome the challenges of funding early childhood education through multiple programs with uncoordinated standards, assessments, accountability, data, and reporting systems.

Accordingly, chiefs have identified five action steps to leverage the value of early childhood education for their state's public education system.

**This honest assessment has led chiefs to conclude that we cannot confine our leadership to improving learning in K-12 grade classrooms. We also need to redouble our commitment to prioritize learning in the early years – birth through third grade – as an essential mechanism for tackling inequity and underachievement.**

- 1.** Engage families and communities in early learning.
- 2.** Connect early childhood programs and elementary schools.
- 3.** Accelerate improvement and innovation in early childhood programs.
- 4.** Build a high performing early childhood workforce.
- 5.** Increase investment to provide quality, voluntary early childhood education for all children.

Taken together, these five strategies – when coupled with high-quality K-12 education – will contribute to closing the achievement gap and strengthening student outcomes through college and career.

# 5 Action Steps to Improve Equity in the Early Learning Years

## I. Engage Families and Communities in Early Learning

### *Why is this a priority?*

The interactions families have with their children in the critical period of early brain development, and the choices families make about education, exert a tremendous influence on their children’s educational trajectory. For instance, children living in poverty hear on average 30 million fewer words by their fourth birthday than their high-income peers. This ‘word gap’ translates into reduced vocabulary, language development, and reading comprehension – all before children have started Pre-K (Hart and Risley, 2003). Research also shows that high-impact family engagement practices can significantly accelerate and sustain gains for low-income students (Henderson and Mapp, 2002; Westat and Policy Studies Associates, 2001). In particular, family engagement in the early years establishes habits and expectations for home-school connections that can benefit children throughout their schooling. However, family engagement is practiced unevenly, and many elementary schools fail to build on successful early childhood family engagement practices, such as home visits from teachers.

*“Learning begins long before a child sets foot into a classroom. It’s a journey that begins at birth and continues in the home, school, and community... when families, schools, and communities partner to promote learning and healthy development for all children, schools thrive and student outcomes improve.”*

– Illinois Superintendent of Education  
**Tony Smith**

Given the success of evidence-based home visiting models, parent education programs like Abriendo Puertas, and two-generation programs like Tulsa Community Action Program, Educare, the Harlem Children’s Zone, and the Jeremiah Project, there is significant potential to build parental skills and motivation to support healthy child development and early learning. New initiatives such as VROOM, Play and Learning Strategies, Ready Rosie, and Parent University are using videotaping, e-mails, and text messages to encourage positive interactions and dialogue between parents and their children. The 30 Million Words Program uses the LENA digital recording system to track parent and child vocabulary and verbal interactions (Guernsey and Levine, 2015).

**Family engagement in the early years establishes habits and expectations that can benefit children throughout their schooling.**

Community partners also play a vital role supporting young children and their families. Community-based learning opportunities can help level the playing field for children in poverty through tutoring, mentoring, and enrichment programs offered at libraries, parks, and community

centers. For example, the Tutor Mate Program and In2Books provide one-on-one reading tutoring through internet-based conversations. Raising a Reader is an evidence-based program organized by schools, libraries, and other community partners which promotes the value of parents reading to their children.

### *What chiefs can do:*

- Develop a research-informed family engagement policy that sends a clear message that culturally and linguistically responsive family engagement should happen everywhere children learn, from cradle to career. Support this policy by providing clear guidance, materials, and training on high-impact family engagement practices, including approaches to engaging non-English-speaking and recent immigrant families.
- Prioritize family engagement in standards for teacher and administrator certification, and standards for documenting and improving the quality of early childhood programs and public schools.
- Work with colleges and universities to offer family engagement coursework, and provide ongoing professional development so that teachers and administrators can deepen their knowledge, skills, and practices to meaningfully engage families in children’s learning.
- Encourage school boards and administrators to mobilize community partners to support high expectations for all young children, reach out to families whose children are typically under-enrolled, and expand community-based opportunities for children’s learning and healthy development above and beyond participation in early childhood programs and public schools.
- Leverage public-private partnerships to improve access to technology for low-income families, including low-cost content, improved broadband access, and coaching in how to use technology-based resources with their children.
- Recruit a family and community engagement specialist to work within the state department of education to ensure that family and community engagement practices are embedded in state early childhood and K-12 policies and initiatives.

### *Examples of state leadership:*

- The Colorado State Advisory Council for Parent Involvement in Education is a legislated body that advises public schools and organizations on strategies to promote family-school partnership in service of children’s academic achievement. A subcommittee focuses specifically on early childhood education.
- The Kansas Family Engagement and Partnership Standards for Early Childhood provide information and guidance for early childhood programs and elementary schools. The standards include a self-assessment tool to help programs identify strengths and opportunities for growth.

- The Illinois State Board of Education created a Family Engagement Guide that brings together research, best practice, and legislative requirements to guide schools toward implementing family-school partnerships that support student learning, healthy development, and school improvement.
- Massachusetts includes family engagement as a metric in the state’s Quality Rating and Improvement System. Early childhood education providers are rated on their family engagement policies, practices, professional development efforts, and their use of tools to assess family satisfaction.
- 22 states participated in CCSSO’s 2015 National Summer Reading Challenge to combat summer learning loss by linking more than 2.5 million students and parents with books that adhere to their individual interests and reading levels.

## II. Connect Early Childhood Programs and Elementary Schools

### *Why is this a priority?*

Chiefs understand that young children learn best when they can participate in multiple years of high-quality early childhood education in settings that are well connected with full-day kindergarten and first through third grade classrooms. Building a well-planned pathway between diverse early childhood programs and elementary schools depends on mutually respectful partnerships between local early childhood and elementary educators. Early childhood teachers need to understand teaching strategies that help to prepare children for success in elementary school, such as strategies for children to acquire early math skills through exploration and discovery. It is equally important that K-3 grade teachers build on best practices from their early childhood colleagues, such as intentional strategies to promote children’s social competence and executive functioning skills. Early childhood, K-3 grade teachers, and administrators need to work together to ensure that classrooms reflect developmentally appropriate expectations and engaging, standards-based learning opportunities across all domains of development. These partnership efforts depend on elementary school principals reaching out to diverse early childhood programs in their neighborhoods and communities. Partnership efforts can lead to ongoing joint professional development and collaboration to study and use assessment data to improve teaching and learning opportunities. State leadership can stimulate and support these partnerships by aligning early childhood and elementary grade standards, assessment, data systems, and guidance on curriculum and teaching.

*“There is no denying the importance of a strong start to a child’s education, and districts and programs across the state are stepping up to provide rich learning opportunities for our youngest Minnesotans.”*

– **Minnesota Education Commissioner  
Brenda Cassellius**



### *What chiefs can do:*

- Align standards for children, teachers, programs and school across the early childhood through K-3 years.
- Support joint professional development for early childhood, kindergarten, and primary grade teachers to increase understanding of the standards, curricula, and teaching strategies in other birth through third grade settings. Build a shared commitment to high expectations for children and teaching practice, and shared accountability to improve child outcomes and reduce achievement disparities.
- Link data from early childhood programs with longitudinal education data so that elementary school teachers can benefit from early childhood assessments, and early childhood programs can receive feedback on children’s progress in grades K-3 and beyond.
- Convene early childhood and K-3 grade teachers to study and use data on children’s progress, teaching/classroom quality, and family engagement efforts to improve teaching and learning opportunities.
- Provide training and support to enable elementary school principals and early childhood program managers to build mutually beneficial partnerships.
- Create a focal point with adequate staffing in the state Department of Education to lead birth through third grade initiatives, ensure that K-12 policies and initiatives are inclusive of and appropriately adapted for early childhood programs, and that K-3 programs are informed by research-based best practices from the early childhood field.

### *Examples of state leadership:*

- Maryland created Leadership Academies to build stronger relationships between early childhood and elementary education. Teams from schools, including principals, and early childhood education programs come together to learn about best practices in early childhood.
- Hawaii’s P-3 Initiative recognizes the importance of strong foundations for young children. With support from several foundations, the Hawaii Department of Education is working to establish partnerships with early learning providers to promote a cohesive continuum of experiences from birth to age eight.
- Washington organizes “Starting Strong Institutes” that bring together principals, early learning directors, and other early care and education professionals to learn about the birth-to-eight developmental continuum and strategies for effective practice. To facilitate a smooth transition to school, the state is using a new Kindergarten Entry Inventory; bringing together families, early childhood teachers, and elementary school teachers to share information about each child; and requiring kindergarten teachers to meet with families to build a home-school relationship.

- The West Virginia Department of Education’s Office of Early Learning is supporting implementation of recent state legislation to close the third grade reading proficiency gap, including initiatives to improve children’s school readiness, reduce chronic absenteeism, and promote extended learning opportunities and high-quality instruction across Pre-K through third grade settings. Families receive assistance for providing rich experiences in language and literacy. Teachers are offered sustained, professional learning opportunities specific to the Foundational Reading Skills, formative assessment, and high-quality instruction to ensure that all children are working toward mastery of West Virginia’s state standards.

### III. Accelerate Improvement and Innovation in Early Childhood Programs

#### *Why is this a priority?*

Chiefs recognize we must work to accelerate improvement and innovation across birth through third grade classrooms and programs. More than 3 million children are enrolled in some form of formal early childhood program, but many of these programs are not providing well-planned, engaging learning opportunities. Some use research-based curricula and assessments and invest in training and coaching of staff, but the vast majority of programs do not. Limited resources prevent many programs from hiring adequately prepared teachers to work effectively with young children. Poor-quality programs can have a detrimental effect on children’s learning or at best, make no positive impact on their readiness for school (Minervino, 2014).

*North Carolina has implemented many new initiatives to raise achievement and close gaps for all of our students. If we succeed, it will be because we have paid attention to the needs of individual children as all of them transition throughout their years in the public school system.”*

– North Carolina Superintendent of Public Instruction June Atkinson

Just as we lead public education accountability reforms, chiefs are engaged in efforts to document and improve the effectiveness of publicly-funded early childhood programs. States are expanding their efforts to use research-based tools to assess the quality of early childhood teaching and learning environments. Quality Rating and Improvement Systems recognize and reward program improvement and provide parents with better information on the quality of early childhood programs. Expanded assessments of young children, including Kindergarten Entry Assessments/Inventories, are providing better information on children’s progress in multiple domains of child development and early learning, which has the potential to improve instruction.

**Chiefs are engaged in efforts to improve publicly-funded early childhood programs.**

However, these recent efforts to focus on accountability in early childhood have been met with serious challenges. Early childhood agencies and school districts must cope with multiple, uncoordinated accountability standards, monitoring, and reporting requirements. Furthermore, states struggle to incorporate meaningful early learning metrics in teacher and school accountability efforts. Fortunately, passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) creates new opportunities for states to re-examine their approach to K-12 accountability, including evidence from early childhood efforts.

**ESSA creates new opportunities for states to examine accountability, including evidence from early childhood efforts.**

States can also accelerate program improvement by building awareness of new research-based tools and resources. Local educators lack the time to review evaluations of new curricula, assessment tools, and family engagement resources. States can promote innovation by helping teachers and parents access ratings and reviews of new digital learning programs and applications designed for young children.

#### *What chiefs can do:*

- Work with other state and federal leaders to build a shared system of quality standards across early childhood programs – birth through third grade – and a shared commitment to meeting these standards. State Quality Rating and Improvement Systems may be an effective mechanism to align and coordinate these standards.
- Conduct ongoing assessments of program quality. Recognize and reward high-performing school districts and early childhood agencies; support programs to address weaknesses in quality; and defund persistently low-performing programs.
- Work with other state and federal leaders to coordinate and simplify multiple accountability and reporting systems to reduce administrative burdens and provide more coherent feedback to local programs and schools.
- Build a culture of continuous improvement so that parents, teachers, and administrators use child assessment data, assessments of classroom/teaching quality, and key indicators such as chronic absenteeism to guide and motivate improvement.
- Build awareness of innovative approaches and new curricula, assessment tools, and technology-based resources that can be used to improve teaching and learning for young children.

#### *Examples of state leadership:*

- Alabama uses the “First Class Standards” in the state’s voluntary Pre-K program to ensure all programs provide a safe and high-quality learning environment for children. The state has trained teams of program monitors and coaches to conduct monthly visits to Pre-K classrooms to assess program quality and provide professional development.

- Kentucky is implementing a new accountability system to improve the quality of programs, encourage integration of skills across content areas, ensure equal access to learning, and allow students to demonstrate understanding beyond a paper-and-pencil test. Each year, schools must conduct a program review in one of five areas, including K-3. The K-3 review examines curriculum and instruction, assessment, professional learning, and administrative support and monitoring. As a result of this review, schools are able to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for growth that are then used by school leaders to improve programs.
- Louisiana is working to unify accountability for all publicly funded early childhood programs to give all families equitable access to quality programs. Local early childhood networks will offer training on curricula, tools, and assessments; provide ongoing observations and feedback from Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)-reliable observers; and support goal setting, planning, and collaboration. The networks will provide reports that parents can use to understand a program’s progress in meeting quality standards. Further, networks will administer a coordinated enrollment system so that families will be aware of available slots and eligibility criteria for all programs in their communities.
- Multiple states are developing and implementing Kindergarten Entry Assessments/ Inventories and linking them to K-12 efforts. New Jersey is aligning the Kindergarten Entry Assessment with student learning outcomes included in K-12 teacher evaluation. Doing this helps educators at all levels understand the value of connectivity for a quality PreK-12 system. The state also issued *First through Third Grade Implementation Guidelines* that outline best practices and suggest ways that teachers can fuse academic rigor and developmentally appropriate practices. North Carolina is using their Kindergarten Entry Assessment as the beginning of a K-3 formative assessment system to guide instruction in the early years.

#### IV. Build a High Performing Early Childhood Workforce

##### *Why is this a priority?*

Chiefs understand that highly competent teachers and effective program leaders are the most powerful influence on children’s learning. Increasing teaching quality is the highest-impact investment that can be made to improve early childhood program effectiveness (Minervino and Pianta, 2013). As states work to build a pipeline to improve the K-12 education workforce, chiefs believe that a concomitant effort is needed to prepare, develop, and support highly effective

*“Children who start kindergarten ready to learn are far more likely to succeed throughout their K-12 education and beyond.”*

– Washington Superintendent of Public Instruction Randy Dorn

early childhood educators. Ideally, states and higher education institutions should coordinate efforts to support professional development and credentialing that spans early childhood and the elementary grades. States must also address early childhood teacher compensation in order to attract and retain the most effective educators. In 2012, teachers in child care centers with Bachelor's degrees earned average salaries of only \$28,912/year, compared with \$42,848 for similarly-qualified teachers in school-sponsored Pre-K programs and \$53,030 for kindergarten teachers (Whitebook et al, 2014). A recent study of the lifetime earnings of college graduates found that students who majored in early childhood education were ranked at the very bottom (Carnevale et al, 2013). The landmark National Child Care Staffing Study found higher wages to be predictive of high program quality, better educated and trained staff, and low turnover rates, whereas low wages were a key determinant of high turnover. Chiefs can turn the tide from mediocrity to excellence by building an early childhood workforce system to attract, prepare, support, and retain highly skilled teachers and administrators in all forms of early childhood programs and elementary schools.

**Chiefs can turn the tide from mediocrity to excellence by building an early childhood workforce system to attract, prepare, support, and retain highly skilled teachers.**

#### *What chiefs can do:*

- Build public awareness that the work of teaching young children is just as complex, skilled, and valuable as the work of teaching older children.
- Be a champion for parity of compensation for teachers across early childhood programs and with K-12 teacher salaries.
- Develop competency-based standards for early childhood teachers on par with those for teachers of older children, and ensure that teacher certification standards reflect the competencies needed to teach infants, toddlers, and preschool-aged children.
- Work with colleges and universities to ensure that early childhood preparation programs are research-based, aligned to the state standards, include in-depth practicum experiences with young children from diverse families and backgrounds, and provide articulation between associate's and bachelor's degree coursework and credit hours.
- Support ongoing coaching, mentoring, and professional development for new and experienced early childhood teachers.
- Adapt teacher evaluation policies and tools for PreK-3 grade public school teachers to align with research-based teaching strategies for young children, and support school districts in devising appropriate methods for including evidence of student growth in evaluations of early childhood educators.

- Build a preparation pipeline for early childhood administrators and instructional leaders (e.g., teacher educators, mentor/coaches, program administrators) and ensure that elementary school principals receive training in early childhood education.

*Examples of state leadership:*

- Alabama’s First Class Pre-K programs are assigned a coach by the Office of School Readiness. The First Class Coach supports classroom teachers so that they can adhere to the First Class Classroom Guidelines. Coaches provide feedback, coaching, and assessments via regular site visits.
- The University of Washington’s Early Ed University is an online bachelor’s degree program for early childhood teachers that includes a suite of 15 courses, and videotapes. Participating teachers are videotaped to document their efforts to implement research-based strategies with students.
- The District of Columbia’s new universal Pre-K legislation includes a focus on improving the early childhood workforce. All D.C. Public School early childhood teachers are required to hold a bachelor’s degree and to have experience working with young children. Pre-K and kindergarten teachers are included in the district’s teacher evaluation system, known as IMPACT, and receive five observations each year based on a rubric that reflects early childhood best practices. Early childhood teachers are also part of the district’s pay scale, which has some of the highest starting salaries in the area and includes bonuses and pay increases. Finally, the early childhood program provides an intensive coaching model to help teachers improve their practice, develop individual professional development plans, and set goals for students. Coaches also work with school leaders to improve their knowledge of child development and high-quality early learning environments.
- Illinois is sponsoring a comprehensive initiative to help elementary school principals and early childhood program managers become more effective instructional leaders using tools and strategies from an I3-funded research and demonstration project. Further, Illinois requires that certification programs for principals include early childhood content to drive improvements in student learning and alignment with PreK-3 curricula.

## V. Increase Investment to Provide Quality, Voluntary Early Childhood Education for All Children

### Why is this a priority?

Chiefs recognize that increased funding is needed to attract and retain teachers, improve program quality, and provide equal access to high-quality early childhood programs for all children, especially those with the greatest needs. While school finance systems are imperfect, they at least provide universal access to K-12 education, reasonable salaries, weighted formulas to accommodate English language learners and other student groups that require more intensive instruction, and an infrastructure for accountability and workforce development. By contrast, early childhood education is financed through substantial contributions from parents, as well as resources from state Pre-K, child care, Head Start, and early childhood special education funding streams, with differing funding rates and mechanisms, as well as varied reporting requirements and eligibility standards. Rates of funding are often not sufficient to support program effectiveness and compensation for well-trained teachers. For example, in

*“Money buys more early childhood opportunities for children in families with a higher income, but that leaves the working class families– who don’t qualify for subsidies, don’t qualify for Head Start, and don’t qualify for low income based programs – out of the mix. I think we can do a much better job for increasing access to quality early education for all.”*

– Wyoming Superintendent of Public Instruction Jillian Balow

**Financing mechanisms must be overhauled significantly so that early childhood programs and schools can focus energy on what matters most -- delivering quality educational opportunities.**

2013, the average funding per child in state Pre-K programs was \$4,679, compared to \$12,449 for the average K-12 student. Financing mechanisms must be overhauled significantly so that early childhood programs and schools can focus energy on what matters most – delivering quality educational opportunities taught by skilled teachers to all children, prioritizing the children who need it most.

### What chiefs can do:

- Increase funding to reflect the costs of high-quality early childhood education across the birth-third grade years. For example, chiefs can work with legislators to incorporate Pre-K program funding in the state’s school finance systems, and work with partners in state government to increase reimbursement rates in child care subsidy systems.
- Provide technical assistance and incentives to help district and school leaders make the best use of all publicly funded programs for high-quality early childhood programs and full-day kindergarten.

- Work with state legislators and federal policy leaders to develop a more equitable and stable funding system that simplifies access for families and minimizes administrative burdens so that early childhood leaders can focus on delivering high-quality programs rather than scrambling to navigate multiple funding streams.
- Encourage public-private funding partnerships and tax credits to increase in the number of children who have access to high-quality early childhood education. For example, chiefs can engage the philanthropic community to provide funding that is matched with state or federal funds.

*Examples of state leadership:*

- Across fiscal years 2014 and 2015, the Michigan legislature approved an increase of \$130 million to expand their Great Start Readiness Program and enroll an additional 13,627 children. This investment was stimulated by positive results from a longitudinal program evaluation, including higher high school graduation rates for Great Start participants, in particular for African-American students, when compared with peers who did not participate in the program.
- New Hampshire conducts outreach to superintendents, principals, and school districts to promote use of Title I funds to support voluntary Pre-K programming. Outreach is conducted through an annual Early Childhood Summit, an annual Early Childhood Leadership strand at the New Hampshire Educators Summer Summit, and through technical assistance. Between 2013 and 2015, the state was successful in increasing Title I funding for voluntary Pre-K by 300 percent, to serve 20 percent of all four-year-olds in the state.
- 97% of Wisconsin’s 413 elementary school districts participate in the state’s Four-Year-Old Kindergarten or 4K program, serving more than 48,000 young children. 4K funds are provided through the state’s system for funding public education. Of these districts, 115 report using 4K funding to partner with child care programs, Head Start, or private schools in serving young children.
- The Washington state legislature created the Home Visiting Services Account in 2010 to blend federal, state, and private dollars to efficiently and effectively serve families across the state with high-impact, home visiting services. Home visiting is part of the state’s commitment to early learning. A strong public-private partnership – inclusive of the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Department of Early Learning, the Department of Health, the Department of Social Services, and Thrive Washington – guides implementation of the state’s Early Learning Plan and Birth to Three Plan.

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## In Conclusion

Despite years of diligent work to promote equal educational opportunities, early learning programs are still limited in most states and disparities in academic achievement still threaten the lifetime potential of far too many children. Chiefs recognize that real education reform begins in the critical early years, from birth through third grade.

The recommendations we outline in *Equity Starts Early* represent essential steps we can take to ensure all children get off to a strong start. We know that families play a critical role in children's development and that children do best when parents and educators work together to support learning at home and school. Pathways that connect early childhood education from birth through third grade ensure developmentally appropriate scaffolding that best prepares children for the future. Finally, a focus on improvement and innovation helps us to continuously consider options that might better meet ever-changing student needs and educational resources.

It is imperative that we recognize that these first action steps – family and community engagement, pathways between early childhood and early elementary school, and improvement and innovation – are dependent on both a high-performing workforce and sufficient funding

**Our leadership is needed to move the conversation toward long-term solutions that benefit young children and lay the foundation for later achievement.**

to support quality programs and ensure equal access. We can take steps to engage families and communities or to integrate new technology in teaching, but if we do not enhance the quality of educators and establish a dedicated and secure funding mechanism for early childhood education, these other efforts will not bring the necessary change to achieve equity for all children. Concerns about the quality of the early childhood education workforce and inadequate and complicated financing mechanisms are long-standing. Despite the complexity of these issues, chiefs recognize that our leadership is needed to move the conversation toward long-term solutions that benefit young children and lay the foundation for later achievement.

Chiefs are committed to improve early childhood learning opportunities and outcomes by:

- Speaking out on the importance of quality early childhood education for every child from birth through third grade, and incorporating early childhood in the state's strategic vision for education reform.
- Engaging school boards, superintendents, principals, early childhood teachers, and parents to build a shared commitment to high expectations for all young children, increase support and recognition for early childhood teachers, and collaborate to create a more coherent and powerful continuum of birth through third grade learning opportunities.
- Raising the profile of early childhood education in state departments of education by increasing resources, recruiting talented early learning experts as staff members, and incorporating their perspectives as new policies and initiatives are developed across the educational continuum so that early childhood is front and center in all planning and decision-making.
- Using our collective voice to influence federal policy to increase permanent funding for high-quality early childhood programs, simplify administrative burdens, and improve policies across federal agencies to support a cohesive cradle to career commitment.

Chiefs know that equity starts early. We stand ready to redouble efforts to see that every child across America has an opportunity to access high-quality, voluntary early childhood learning opportunities.

# Attachment A

## CCSSO Early Childhood Policy Recommendations

<u>A Quiet Crisis: Building Early Childhood Systems for Children Birth to Age 5 (2009)</u>	<u>Equity Starts Early: How Chiefs will Build High-Quality Early Education (2016)</u>
I. Build Coherent State Systems	I. Engage Families and Communities in Early Learning
II. Ensure High-quality Early Childhood Programs	II. Connect Early Childhood Programs and Elementary Schools
III. Align and Integrate Early Childhood Education and Kindergarten to Third Grade	III. Accelerate Improvement and Innovation in Early Childhood Programs
IV. Craft a New State-Federal Partnership	IV. Build a High Performing Early Childhood Workforce
	V. Increase Investment to Provide Quality, Voluntary Early Childhood Education for All Children

## Attachment B

### High Impact Comes From High-Quality Early Education

The case for high-quality early education is rooted in a strong body of research. Some studies, including the Head Start Impact Study and the recently-released evaluation of Tennessee’s state Pre-K program, show a pattern of short-term positive effects on children’s learning that are not sustained when children progress into the early elementary grades. However, data from dozens of evaluations of large-scale local, state and federal programs and smaller demonstration projects show that high-quality programs generate educationally meaningful short- and longer-term benefits for children.

**Immediate Impact:** Studies of state-funded preschool programs have determined that quality programs can have significant impacts on school readiness and achievement. Specifically, studies have found that investing in early education:

- increases gains in vocabulary, literacy, and numeracy (Lamy et al., 2005)
- increases rates of first-grade school readiness (Denton, 1999)
- increases scores on third-grade readiness tests (Henry et al., 2001)
- increases attendance in middle and high school (Gilliam and Zigler, 2004)
- increases standardized test scores in elementary, middle, and high school (O’Brien, E. and Dervarics, 2007)
- decreases special education placements and grade retention (Denton, 1999)
- decreases racial achievement gaps (Gormley et al., 2004)

**Long-Term Impact:** Several landmark longitudinal studies – including the High Scope/Perry Preschool Project, the Abecedarian Project, and the Chicago Parent-Child Centers study – tracked students in high-quality early childhood programs through adulthood and found that, when compared to students who did not attend preschool, they were:

- more likely to have completed high school (Jurkiewicz and Schweinhart,, 2004)
- more likely to have enrolled in college (Campbell et al., 2008)
- more likely to be employed (Jurkiewicz and Schweinhart, 2004)
- less likely to be incarcerated (Reynolds et al., 2001)
- less likely to have needed special education services (Lazar et al., 1982)

These studies estimate that through a combination of increased earnings and productivity, and less spending on special education and incarceration, every \$1 invested in early education programs saved the state from \$3.78 – \$10.15 (Committee for Economic Development, 2006).

**Markers of Quality:** Mere enrollment in early education programs will not make a difference on its own – quality matters. Thorough teacher training and curriculum that is aligned with K-12 learning objectives are hallmarks of quality programs that leave lasting impacts (Lamy et al., 2005). Children who attend low – quality schools are most at risk for “preschool fadeout” – losing the gains that early education provides (Bogard and Takanishi, 2005).

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One Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Suite 700  
Washington, DC 20001-1431  
voice: 202.336.7000 | fax: 202.408.8072