NEW AMERICA

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Supporting Early Learning in America

Policies for a New Decade

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About New America

We are dedicated to renewing America by continuing the quest to realize our nation's highest ideals, honestly confronting the challenges caused by rapid technological and social change, and seizing the opportunities those changes create.

About Education Policy

We use original research and policy analysis to help solve the nation's critical education problems, crafting objective analyses and suggesting new ideas for policymakers, educators, and the public at large.

About Early & Elementary Education

The Early & Elementary Education Policy team works to help ensure that all children have access to a system of high-quality early learning opportunities from birth through third grade that prepare them to succeed in school and in life.

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Introduction

Over the last decade, there has been increased attention on early education, but real progress for children and families has remained out of reach. We want America's children to become lifelong learners who are able to think critically and inventively, manage their emotions and impulses, and make smart decisions by drawing upon a rich knowledge base about how the world works. To make this goal a reality for all children, New America makes eight recommendations, suggests specific actions, and pinpoints which actors—federal, state, and local policymakers, as well as educators and administrators—should help move the work forward.

→ OUR PAST WORK

In 2014, New America released two reports, reflecting on the period since the Great Recession and the first term of the Obama Administration. The first report, ***Subprime Learning: Early Education in America since the Great Recession***, looked at the state of early education birth through third grade (B–3rd) from 2009–2013. We found that not enough children had access to high-quality learning opportunities. Later that year, New America published a second report, ***Beyond Subprime Learning: Accelerating Progress in Early Education***, and put forward a vision for early education in America and policy ideas for how to achieve it. In this new report, we consider the successes, challenges, and failures of the last decade and build on our previous vision in order to offer new ideas on what policymakers and other actors should prioritize in the 2020s to build a better future for young children and their families.

Vision

We want America's children to become lifelong learners who are able to think critically and inventively, regulate their emotions and impulses, and make smart decisions by drawing upon a rich knowledge base about how the world works. Realizing this goal begins with ensuring a seamless continuum of high-quality, easily accessible early education for all families. Here is what our vision looks like in practice, from the years of infancy and toddlerhood through pre-K and the early elementary grades:

Family support

- Paid family leave for all parents
- Evidence-based home visiting programs for eligible caregivers
- Families as partners in children's child care, pre-K programs, and elementary schools
- Families empowered to facilitate positive interactions with their children and supported to ensure their economic security

Comprehensive services

- Children's basic needs met, including stable housing, nutritious food, and physical and mental health care

Children age 0–2

- Free early care and education for families living in poverty and a sliding scale of affordable access for others
- High-quality early care and education in all settings, including center-based child care, home-based child care, and informal arrangements

Children age 3–4

- Universal, voluntary, and high-quality public pre-K opportunities for three- and four-year-olds in diverse settings
- Implementation of **3 practices and 3 policies indispensable** for high-quality teaching and learning in pre-K:

- Practices
    - Engage in positive interactions with children and their families, recognizing the strengths and diversity of their backgrounds
    - Use learning trajectories in subject areas and domains, supported by effective curricula, to help meet learning and development goals
    - Promote social development and self-regulation in ways that reflect an understanding of the multiple biological and environmental factors that affect behavior
- Policies
    - Allocate increased, predictable, and sustainable funding to establish the conditions necessary for high-quality teaching and learning
    - Provide educators with professional learning (pre-service and in-service) based on the 3 indispensable practices and aligned with those outlined in the Every Student Succeeds Act
    - Use high-quality data to promote continuous quality improvement and better continuity from ages 0–3 to pre-K and pre-K to grades K–3

Children age 5–8

- Smooth transitions from pre-K to kindergarten and each grade thereafter, including coordination of standards, curricula, assessments, data, learning environments, and professional development for teachers
- Universal full-day kindergarten, with length of day equivalent to first grade

All children in early and elementary learning settings

- Research-based practices that recognize the importance of emergent literacy skill-building and encourage students' growth in content knowledge, oral language development, and early media literacy skills

- Greater access to high-quality STEM learning, including math instructors trained to build children's and parents' confidence in early math (while avoiding gender and racial stereotyping), as well as regular science courses and science practices designed for young children

- Attention to social-emotional development, executive function, and self-regulation

- Attention to individual needs, including dual language learners, children with disabilities, children from historically underserved populations, children from families with low incomes, and children who have experienced multiple traumas

- Appropriate and supportive discipline strategies

- Educators who understand how young children learn best and who create joyful learning experiences; have appropriate expectations; use strategies, materials, and assessments that best meet developmental needs; have access to instructional leadership that supports developmentally appropriate instruction

- Educators—teachers, caregivers, and program leaders—who reflect the diversity of the children and families they serve

The workforce

- High-quality degree programs and alternative pathways for early childhood educators that incorporate findings from the learning sciences and provide strong practical experiences

- Academic and social supports for early childhood educators pursuing credentials or degrees, including but not limited to courses offered in languages and at times based on their needs, supported by scholarships, mentors, tutors, child care, and transportation

- Well-prepared leaders—directors and principals—who promote appropriate learning environments and teaching

- Compensation on par with elementary school peers and supportive working conditions that provide time for planning and collaboration, professional learning, paid time off, and a culture of continuous improvement

→ RETHINKING EARLY AND ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

Many advocates, policymakers, educators, community leaders, and researchers now recognize that a strong start requires more than just a year of pre-K,* especially for children facing multiple risk factors. Research shows that children's success starts with helping parents recognize the importance of loving interactions and conversations with their babies. It includes the provision of affordable, high-quality child care and continues with the immersion of children in nurturing, language-rich learning environments before and after entry into school, including pre-K and the early elementary grades. Developmental science shows that by age nine, when children have entered middle childhood, they are able to accomplish complex intellectual tasks, provided they had opportunities to build a good foundation in those first eight years. For public schools, rethinking early and elementary education means recognizing the role of the principal in supporting young learners, embracing young learners and their families in the school community, building relationships with early learning providers outside of the school, valuing professional learning and collaboration across grade levels and sectors, and striving for vertical alignment in areas including standards, curricula, assessments, and instruction before children enter kindergarten and as they traverse each grade level in elementary school.

* Some notes on terminology: We use "early education" to encompass the learning that happens in the birth-through-third-grade years, sometimes known as B-8, B–3rd, or P–3. As much as possible we will note specific age ranges or grade levels (birth-through-five or K–3, for example) when policies pertain to specific age spans. When we use "pre-K" as a stand-alone word, it is an abbreviation for pre-kindergarten settings. New America's definition of a pre-kindergarten setting is one that employs trained teachers to lead educational experiences in a classroom or learning center for children who are a year or two away from kindergarten. This includes Head Start for three- and four-year-olds and many other programs known as "preschool." Finally, we use the term "dual language learners" for children between the ages of birth to eight who are in the process of learning English in addition to their home language; this is often shortened to DLLs.

Eight Policy Recommendations for Accelerating Progress

To realize the vision above, we make eight recommendations and suggest specific actions for each recommendation. In the pages that follow, we outline these actions and pinpoint which actors—federal, state, and local policymakers, as well as educators and administrators—should help move the work forward.

1. Realize a seamless early and elementary learning continuum
2. Improve systems to better attract, prepare, empower, develop, and retain high-quality educators
3. Develop two-generation strategies to engage families
4. Embrace children's language and culture as an asset
5. Put more attention on kindergarten and the early grades
6. Promote efficiency and coordination to improve outcomes for children
7. Emphasize continuous improvement as the goal of data collection
8. Secure predictable, sustainable, and increased funding for children's earliest years

1. Realize a Seamless Early and Elementary Learning Continuum

To set the foundation for lifelong learning, children need access to aligned and high-quality early and elementary education. Policymakers should try to avoid creating additional silos and instead stimulate robust connections and more emphasis on learning and engagement across the continuum.

Create equitable learning opportunities for all children. The federal government and states should ensure that there are sufficient resources to make high-quality early and elementary education with a well-compensated, diverse workforce universally available. It also means embracing diversity and inclusion as strengths and working to eliminate structural inequities that limit the potential of children and families.

Invest in the construction, renovation, and expansion of facilities. The nation is experiencing a steady decline in the number of child care centers and family child care providers, leading to a lack of access in many areas of the country. Facilities that do exist may be inadequate and unsafe. When the Inspector General's Office of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services conducted unannounced site visits, it found hazardous conditions in 96 percent of child care facilities. Additional funding for construction of new facilities and maintenance and safety improvements of existing child care facilities and elementary schools are necessary both to increase the supply of early care and education and ensure the health and safety of children and staff. Rural areas should be prioritized by states and the federal government for new facility construction as these areas are especially vulnerable to a lack of child care options, with nearly two-thirds of rural residents living in areas where there are at least three children for every licensed child care slot. Urban public schools should be prioritized for renovation, to prevent the harmful effects of asbestos and lead present in many old buildings from irreparably impairing the health of children and staff.

Prioritize funding for children who need it most. Universal pre-K proposals should provide all three- and four-year-olds with access to high-quality, affordable education through a mixed-delivery system of child care centers, Head Start, public schools, and family child care. Federal policymakers should prioritize investment to make high-quality pre-K free for children from families with low and moderate incomes, while state pre-K dollars should expand on federal funding to provide quality universal programs. Families should be free to choose the setting that best meets their child care needs, whether in a center, family child care home, or with a family member, friend, or neighbor. All educators should earn a family-sustaining wage and receive benefits. Child care should be free for families with low incomes, with other families paying on a

sliding scale based on income. States and communities should also invest in children cared for by family, friends, and neighbors by supporting community activities like those found at libraries, in community playgroups, and in programming at local museums.

Encourage more pairing of siloed early learning providers. Breaking down the barriers that have historically existed between early learning providers and between early education and the formal elementary school system will take time. Uptake of the federal government's Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships grant program is a sign that providers of early learning and child care are eager to share lessons to improve quality. Programs in public libraries and other community programs should coordinate with family child care providers and informal providers. States should invest in family child care through networks and organizations, such as Connecticut-based All Our Kin, that invest in the sustainability and stability of family child care businesses while focusing on quality improvement. Early learning providers and elementary school leaders should consider it part of their job to reach out to each other and establish regular communication and cooperation. Such communication, which can be incentivized by states and the federal government, would help foster alignment and coherence in curriculum and instructional practices as students progress into elementary school.

Ensure a seamless transition between early education and elementary school. When early learning experiences are connected from birth through third grade through actions such as joint professional development and aligned instructional practices, children and families can more seamlessly transition between early care and education programs into elementary school. Smoothing transitions requires careful planning, effective policies and practices, and funding. The transition between pre-K and kindergarten is a particularly important one. States should use Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) funds to encourage transition activities and consider establishing a grant program to spur districts to plan more strategically for transitions. When financially possible, schools and districts should hire a coordinator to find and connect with families with children under the age of five, help them access needed services, and begin to build trusting relationships with school staff. Districts can establish cross-grade, cross-school learning communities that include early learning providers and elementary school teachers in order to break down the barriers that have existed between these two different sectors and discuss alignment of instruction and curricula. When children are enrolled at an elementary school for pre-K, their families should have the option to continue at the same school for kindergarten and the elementary grades that follow. States and school districts should look to Oregon and Connecticut for promising examples of work being done to ease the transition to kindergarten. The transition from elementary to middle school is another important transition point that would benefit from aligned curricula and instructional practices.

Include multiple domains of learning in all systems related to early and elementary education. Domains of learning should include, at least: language development (English language arts and dual language learners' home language), math, science, social studies, social-emotional development, approaches to learning, and creative expression. These domains should be integrated in activities throughout the day. For example, children building with blocks are practicing math when counting the blocks and learning pre-writing skills when writing down their design ideas prior to building. While multiple domains are common in birth-to-five programs, they are less emphasized in the K–3 grades where language arts and, to a lesser extent, math are frequently the dominant focus. States and school districts should make this shift so that a comprehensive approach extends at least through third grade, if not beyond.

References and Resources

- New America resources:
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  - **Using Local, State, and Federal Dollars to Improve Pre-K to K Transitions** (policy paper)
  - **Moving into Kindergarten: How Schools and Districts are Connecting the Steps for Children and Families** (policy paper)
  - **No Child Deserves to Attend a Crumbling School** (article)
  - **First 10 Schools and Communities: Helping All Young Children Grow and Thrive** (blog post)
  - **Policy Recommendations: Universal Pre-K**
- Other resources:
  - The National Association for the Education of Young Children, **NAEYC Position Statement: Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education**
  - Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley, **Four Ways Schools Can Support the Whole Child**

- Education Development Center, **All Children Learn and Thrive: Building First 10 Schools and Communities**
- Child Care Aware of America, **Checking in on the Child Care Landscape: 2019 State Fact Sheets**
- National Public Radio, **Pre-K: Decades Worth of Studies, One Strong Message**
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, **Child Care Providers: Compliance with State Health and Safety Requirements**
- Connecticut State Department of Education and the Office of Early Childhood, **Transition to Kindergarten: The Why, What, and How of this Important Milestone for Connecticut Students**

2. Improve Systems to Better Attract, Prepare, Empower, Develop, and Retain High-Quality Educators

Research has shown that teachers and school leaders are the most important in-school factors contributing to students' academic success. Early educators lay the essential foundation for children's future learning and development, but the current state of systems to attract, prepare, empower, develop, and retain these educators is mediocre at best. Policymakers should invest in human capital to professionalize the field, following the recommendations from ***Transforming the Workforce for Children from Birth through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation****, the seminal 2015 report from the National Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council (now the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine). The report calls for significant changes to how teachers, leaders, and other early childhood professionals are prepared, credentialed, and supported.*

Prioritize mechanisms that emphasize the quality of adult-child interactions. Too often, policies emphasize credentials and seniority without using objective measures of how well teachers teach. Yet children's advancements academically and socially are most significantly associated with having teachers who interact with them at a high level. Preparation programs and professional learning opportunities across the birth-through-third grade workforce should be required to emphasize strategies that improve teachers' abilities to help children develop language, social-emotional, and critical thinking skills, while also providing instructional support for the learning of foundational concepts in math, science, and literacy. Policies should encourage the use of valid and reliable observation tools that measure the quality of interactions between teachers and children. For instance, states and districts can look to Louisiana, where all early childhood educators are trained to use the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), a well-known tool for measuring the quality of and driving improvements in child-adult interactions.

Ensure educator voice in policymaking. Policies are too often designed without taking into account the opinions and experiences of those who they will most immediately impact. People working closest with students and schools have insight into what they need and how policy changes will affect them. Engaging educators in policy design can lead to stronger policies and improve buy-in and implementation. Policymakers should be wary of imposing top-down ideas that disregard the realities of practitioners, students, and families. For example, states should not increase educational requirements for early educators without *also* coupling those requirements with academic and financial supports for their successful completion, reform in higher education degree programs to ensure content aligns with the knowledge and competencies early educators need, and a plan for increased compensation after degree attainment. Including educator

voice from schools, centers, and family child care from development to implementation can help ensure policy is addressing the intended need and this may help avoid the unintentional consequences that sometimes arise after policies are implemented.

Increase educator diversity at all levels. Children of color are a majority among the birth-to-five population, and about one-third of young children in the U.S. speak a language other than English at home. Students benefit from having teachers who share their cultural, racial, and linguistic background, and yet 80 percent of teachers in public schools are white. The early education workforce, while almost exclusively female, is more racially, ethnically, and linguistically reflective of the children it serves than the K–12 workforce. However, in both child care settings and elementary schools, racial and linguistic diversity is present mostly in non-managerial positions. In the birth-to-five space, those in leadership positions are more likely to be white and monolingual English speakers. In elementary schools, most linguistic and cultural diversity is at the paraprofessional level. Federal, state, and local policymakers can take steps to increase diversity in leadership roles by creating pathways and providing supports to ensure that higher education and training are truly accessible for all members of the workforce.

Pre-service learning, licensure, and higher education

Create teaching licenses that reduce grade level overlap. Teachers often choose to pursue the broadest license available in an effort to be more marketable to school districts and principals. But this approach does not guarantee that young children receive what they need. Licensure structures should reduce overlap to promote specialization. For instance, most states have an elementary teaching license that spans from kindergarten or first grade to fifth or sixth grade and a separate early childhood license, beginning with birth or pre-K and ending at third grade. Instead, early childhood education licenses should extend to third grade and elementary (or middle childhood) licenses should begin at third or fourth grade. It is important for all teachers to have a broad understanding of children's learning and development, birth through twelfth grade, but teachers of the youngest learners need specialized knowledge and competencies that equip them for laying the foundation for future learning.

Revamp how prospective early education teachers are prepared. Traditional teacher preparation programs do not generally prepare early education teachers well. States should update guidelines for preparation to better align with state standards, national frameworks, and the science on how young children learn. This includes ensuring that infant, toddler, and pre-K teachers *and* early grade teachers are skilled to best engage with families, have a strong base of content knowledge and deep understanding of the stages of child development, and are able to help young children build their knowledge and confidence in areas including executive functioning, social-emotional skills,

language and literacy, and early math and science. Preparation programs need to equip teachers to work with students with a diversity of needs from a variety of backgrounds. This means having a strong understanding of special education, equity issues, trauma-informed practice, strategies for supporting dual language learners, and culturally responsive teaching. Prospective teachers should have opportunities to practice or at least observe teaching in a diverse mix of classrooms, settings, and grade levels. School districts, community-based child care, and family child care should work with preparation programs to pair prospective teachers with current teachers suited to serve as mentors. These partnerships could lead to opportunities for professional development, university course offerings at school or provider sites, and research projects to improve the effectiveness of teachers or the quality of programs.

Improve higher education programs that prepare early educators. Changes are needed at the federal, state, local, and institution of higher education level to better support the challenges that the early education workforce faces, such as low wages, full-time employment, and family obligations. For example, states can build incentives to encourage articulation agreements between two-year early childhood associate degree programs and university bachelor's degree programs and allow and encourage community colleges to develop bachelor's degree programs.. Registered Apprenticeships offer on-the-job learning and coursework aligned with professional knowledge and competencies. Apprentices are employees receiving paid, specialized, on-the-job training with ongoing mentorship as well as classroom-based, related technical instruction that can result in college credit, and they earn a nationally recognized credential. Those in degree apprenticeship models also receive an associate degree, or in some cases, a bachelor's degree following completion. A handful of states have early childhood educator apprenticeship programs; exemplars are running in Oakland, CA and Philadelphia, PA. Finally, financial supports such as scholarships and guaranteed wage increases, and academic supports such as cohort models and tutoring can also be instrumental to student success in higher education. As policymakers increasingly build accountability structures for colleges and universities around labor market outcomes, the increases to compensation for early educators will become more and more important. Meanwhile, policymakers must also work to ensure that students with low incomes who are entering child care can access the quality higher education that they—and the children for whom they care—need, without forcing them to take on unaffordable levels of debt.

Expand Grow Your Own (GYO) programs. GYO has risen up as a national strategy for addressing teacher shortages and increasing teacher diversity within proposed federal legislation, including the College Affordability Act and the Classrooms Reflecting Communities Act of 2019. GYO programs rely on partnerships between educator preparation programs, school districts, and community organizations that recruit and prepare local community members (e.g., parents, paraeducators, high school students) to enter the teaching

profession and teach in their communities. Often designed to remove common barriers to earning a credential, GYO programs can increase access to higher education, improve persistence in preparation programs, and lead to greater retention in the profession. States should develop competitive grant programs to fund high-quality GYO programs benefiting all early learning settings, along with mandating specific reporting requirements to ensure that programs are achieving stated goals. Several states already fund comprehensive GYO programs (IL, MN, TX, WA), while others provide scholarships to help finance the additional education necessary to earn a bachelor's degree (CA, NM).

Encourage faculty members to visit the classroom. Early childhood and elementary higher education faculty should spend time in early learning centers and schools so they maintain a firm understanding of how to translate theory into practice in the classroom. Faculty members themselves need high-quality professional learning opportunities to stay up to date on the science of learning and exchange ideas across disciplines and academic departments that are too often siloed, such as psychology departments, family and consumer science departments, and math and science departments. As early childhood development and early childhood education degree programs are often dependent on adjunct faculty to deliver courses, degree program leadership should include these part-time staff members in professional learning opportunities, meetings, and planning when possible. While institutions of higher education can place value on practice and make faculty development a priority, state leadership and philanthropic organizations can direct dollars to further encourage such activities.

In-service learning for educators in the classroom

Ensure quality professional learning that meets standards for effectiveness. Effective professional learning is sorely lacking across the country, and the field of early education is not immune. ESSA sets a high bar by establishing six criteria for quality: the law states that professional learning should be sustained, intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, and classroom-focused. Accreditors of teacher preparation programs should also take steps to align their standards for preparation with the ESSA standards for professional learning. These accreditors should look at how well preparation programs meet those standards before offering or reaffirming accreditation. The quality criteria mentioned above can lead educators to reflect on what they are currently doing in the classroom and develop a continuous improvement mindset, enabling them to alter their practice for the better. Collaboration through professional learning communities (PLCs) or one-on-one coaching has also been shown to be effective when implemented well. Combining different methods of professional learning, such as workshops, coaching, and PLCs, around a specific content area may more effectively influence teacher practice than isolated methods.

Augment professional learning for educators across the birth-to-age-eight continuum. All early childhood educators, regardless of the age of children they work with or the setting in which they teach, should be trained and treated as teachers, not babysitters. Teachers should be trained in child development, with a focus on high-quality teacher-child interactions and the latest science on why those interactions are critical for the development of executive function, as well as in a host of language and literacy skills. Teachers in pre-K, kindergarten, and the early grades also need opportunities to hear and apply the latest science on how young children learn best. Communities and school districts should find opportunities for shared professional development opportunities that, for example, enable child care professionals who work with three-year-olds to learn alongside early grades teachers. All adults working with young children should understand how to capitalize on situations that enable rich back-and-forth conversations that encourage children to practice language and communication skills and should know how to respond to and help children who have experienced trauma. States should require that all lead and assistant teachers and early childhood administrators participate in high-quality, sustained professional development, which is timely, relevant, and provides opportunity for practice, feedback, and reflection.

Train all teachers to identify needs and flag potential learning differences. Research shows that early intervention leads to lower levels of special education services in later years (and thus lowers spending). The U.S. Departments of Education and Health & Human Services have jointly outlined the national need to increase the inclusion of young children with disabilities in high-quality early childhood programs. States should increase their commitment to and investment in early intervention for students with disabilities by raising awareness among the public, parents, educators, and pediatricians about the legal and educational foundations that support inclusion in early childhood programs; increasing the quality and availability of early developmental screenings; investing in training for early educators, therapists, and home visitors; and improving alignment between disability support and service agencies and smooth transitions between Part B (ages 3–21) and Part C (ages birth to 3) of IDEA.

Train all teachers to support dual language learner linguistic and academic growth. DLLs—children who are learning English while still developing proficiency in their home language—represent a growing segment of the early childhood population, yet many teachers lack the skills and training to effectively teach these students. To that end, with assistance from the federal government, states and preparation programs should endeavor to attract and train bilingual teacher candidates in order to provide DLLs with instruction in English and their home language. Second, states should set licensure standards that require all teacher candidates to take (at minimum) one course on specific instructional strategies for supporting English acquisition, home language development, and academic growth for DLLs. These standards should be aligned

with—and enforced by—standards used to approve and accredit teacher preparation programs in each state. Third, in-service teachers should be provided with robust professional development and coaching to help them learn effective strategies for supporting DLL language development and academic growth.

Train educators to evaluate technologies that foster learning and well-being. Educators need training on how to apply their knowledge of pedagogy and child development to decisions about technology for teaching and how to judge the quality of apps, software, and other tech tools. They need broadband internet access in their facilities and ample opportunities to test whether a particular piece of digital media or tool will be relevant to their teaching and learning objectives, instead of handing out tablets to children without planning or practice. They also need support from other professionals who specialize in how to effectively use digital media in learning environments (such as instructional technologists in elementary schools, children's librarians in public libraries, school librarians, and other experts) who keep up with new platforms, have skills in curation, and know how to apply critical thinking skills in using media. These professionals, increasingly known as "media mentors," need up-to-date professional development too, coupled with opportunities to learn from family and community members about their diverse wants and needs. Policymakers and program leaders should revamp professional learning for these educators and media mentors by aiming for high standards and developmentally appropriate integration of technology—not siloed "Technology 101" courses or workshops that only focus on how to manage "tech time."

Support for district, school, and center administrators

Equip principals to be strong PreK-3rd grade instructional leaders. School principals are central to building high-quality PreK–3rd settings, but current preparation and professional development programs rarely help them to understand how these grades are different from others. To ensure that principals are able to lead all students and teachers under their charge, states should require principal preparation programs to embed early learning and childhood development throughout coursework, as is the case in Illinois. Prospective elementary school principals should also have exposure to the early grades through clinical experience and/or prior teaching experience. To reach incumbent elementary principals and ensure that all principals are up to date on best practices, states and districts should also invest in ongoing, job-embedded professional learning opportunities on early education. In addition to Illinois, states such as Minnesota and Alabama, and the New Teacher Center in San Antonio have initiatives to develop principals as early education instructional leaders.

Ensure center director qualifications and supports align with job responsibilities. Center directors and family child care providers, like school principals, are often expected to be both programmatic and instructional leaders.

They must know how to run a business but also understand how young children grow and develop. They should be equipped with the knowledge and skills to support their staff in fostering high-quality adult-child interactions and learning opportunities. Some states only require a high school diploma for center directors and do not provide high-quality in-service professional learning. States should increase qualifications and provide professional learning opportunities to better reflect these responsibilities and teach the full breadth of competencies required to be an effective leader.

Working conditions

Compensate birth-to-five teachers and leaders on par with elementary school educators. Working with children from birth to age five is demanding and important work that involves specialized knowledge and skills. Yet those working with younger children are grossly underpaid; child care workers earned an average of roughly $11 per hour in 2018, often without benefits such as paid sick leave and retirement. Over half of these workers rely on government assistance to make ends meet. According to the National Institute for Early Education Research, only 14 states with public pre-K programs require salary parity between pre-K teachers and K–3rd teachers. Teachers and leaders working in child care centers and pre-K programs deserve compensation commensurate with the complexity and importance of their work. Adequate compensation is key to recruiting and retaining a high-quality workforce. Given that the cost of child care for families is already too high in most places, more public investment will be required to increase early educator compensation. Some states are experimenting with wage supplements and tax credits for early educators. Other states have increased the minimum wage. While these initiatives are a start, they do not adequately value the critical role of early educators. The federal and state governments must make high-quality early education, which includes a well-prepared and well-compensated workforce, a priority and fund it as such.

Provide early and elementary school teachers with paid planning time. Beyond the need for better compensation, teachers in both child care settings and elementary schools need more supportive working conditions. Many teachers do not have sufficient time for lesson planning, assessments and observations, or collaborating with peers. School districts, schools, early education programs, and policymakers must understand the full breadth of teachers' responsibilities and take steps to avoid burdening them with unnecessary additional responsibilities. This may mean providing additional staff to cover non-instructional duties, streamlining paperwork, and innovating models that provide teachers with sufficient planning time within their paid work hours.

References and Resources

- New America resources:
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    - **Building Early Education Leaders: A Closer Look at How States and Districts Are Equipping Principals to Support Young Learners** (policy paper)
    - **Paving the Way for Latinx Teachers: Recruitment and Preparation to Promote Educator Diversity** (policy paper)
    - **Getting in Sync: Revamping the Preparation of Teachers in Pre-K, Kindergarten and the Early Grades** (policy paper)
    - **Lessons from the Bayou State: Three Reforms for Improving Teaching and Caregiving** (policy paper)
    - **Essential Policies and Practices for Grow Your Own Programs** (policy paper)
    - **Chicago's Bilingual Teacher Residency: A Partnership to Strengthen the Teacher Pipeline** (policy paper)
    - **Paraprofessionals Could Help Solve Bilingual Teacher Shortages** (blog post)
    - **A New Day in California: Training Teachers to Support Bilingualism** (blog post)
    - **Are ECE Degree Programs Preparing Teachers to Work with DLLs?** (blog post)
    - **Extracting Success in Pre-K Teaching: Approaches to Effective Professional Learning across Five States** (policy paper)
    - **Early Learning in the Digital Age: An Interactive Toolkit for Family Engagement** (toolkit)
    - **STEM Starts Early: Grounding Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math in Early Childhood** (policy paper)

- **Tap, Click, Read: Growing Readers in a World of Screens** (web resource)
- **Earning While Learning with Early Educator Apprenticeship Programs** (policy paper)
- **No Panacea: Diagnosing What Ails Teacher Professional Development before Reaching for Remedies** (policy paper)
- **From Frenzied to Focused: How School Staffing Models Can Support Principals as Instructional Leaders** (policy paper)

• Other resources:

- National Institute for Early Education Research, **Special Report: Dual Language Learners and Preschool Workforce**
- Migration Policy Institute, **Supporting Dual Language Learner Success in Superdiverse PreK–3 Classrooms: The Sobrato Early Academic Language Model**
- Association for Library Service to Children, **Becoming a Media Mentor: A Guide for Working with Children and Families**
- Early Childhood STEM Working Group, **Early STEM Matters: Providing High-Quality STEM Experiences for All Young Learners**
- National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, **Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation**
- Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, **Early Childhood Workforce Index**
- Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, **Higher Education Inventory**
- T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood National Center, **Identifying and Addressing Barriers in Higher Education for Early Childhood Educators**

3. Develop Two-Generation Strategies to Engage Families

Healthy development is bolstered when children grow up in nurturing environments. When parents have access to information about parenting, have resources to cover basic needs, and feel engaged in their child's learning, children are more likely to thrive. Two-generation strategies can effectively improve outcomes for both children and their parents, creating positive early learning experiences as well as empowering parents with knowledge of child development and increased educational attainment levels.

Engage families in creating ecosystems of support. Families are best positioned to identify the barriers to their success and to design programs that meet their realities. Publicly funded programs in a community, from health clinics to libraries to home visiting programs to child care providers to community centers, should be easily navigable and truly support the families they serve. The government agencies awarding grants to intermediary organizations and direct service providers should include in the grant making process a requirement that the applicant describe how it will engage families in the service design process and should incent collaboration among programs serving a similar population.

Integrate adult education or workforce programs and early childhood programs. States should align their child care subsidy eligibility policy with adult education and workforce development program enrollment. They could establish child care subsidy eligibility priority for adults enrolled in adult education programs or workforce programs, engage in coordinated outreach activities, and conduct eligibility determinations and enrollment for the adult program and child care simultaneously. The government could also provide incentives for carving out classroom space at adult education facilities for on-site child care for enrolled students and employees.

Better integrate home visiting programs into early childhood systems. Home visiting is a powerful, evidence-based two-generation program, which promotes healthy births, improves school readiness for children, improves parental employment outcomes, and links families to other services including physical and mental health care and social services. Federal and state governments should vastly increase funding for home visiting programs. In 2018, only 286,000 families out of a possible 18 million were served. States should ensure home visiting programs are integrated into early childhood systems: home visiting should have representation on early childhood advisory councils. Program enrollment should be integrated with other child- and parent-serving programs. Transitions from home visiting to early learning programs should be seamless, including enrollment feeder patterns or data sharing agreements. Screening and referrals should help families identify any special needs a child

might have and link them to appropriate health, mental health, dental, and early intervention providers. Early childhood workforce systems should include training, scholarships, and a career lattice for home visiting staff that recognizes the specialized knowledge and skills required. There should be quality standards for home visiting programs and evaluation systems linked to quality improvement resources.

References and Resources

- New America resources:
  - **Centering the Margins: A Framework for Equity and Inclusive Social Policy** (policy paper)
  - **Supporting Caregiver Students: A Two-Generation Model** (blog post)
- Other resources:
  - Migration Policy Institute, **Serving Immigrant Families through Two-Generation Programs: Identifying Family Needs and Responsive Program Approaches**
  - Ascend at Aspen Institute, **New Federal Opportunities to Advance Two-Generation Approaches to Improving the Lives of Children and Parents**
  - Ascend at the Aspen Institute, **States Leading the Way: Practical Solutions that Lift Up Children and Families**
  - U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, **Home Visiting's Two-Generation Approach: Supporting Primary Caregiver Education, Family Self-Sufficiency, and Children's Well-Being**
  - National Home Visiting Resource Center, **2019 Yearbook**
  - ZERO TO THREE, **Think Babies Voluntary, Evidence-Based Home Visiting Resource List**

4. Embrace Children's Language and Culture as an Asset

Dual language learners (DLLs) and their families are often viewed from a deficit-oriented perspective that ignores their considerable linguistic and cultural assets, an approach that can negatively impact efforts to engage families and lead to misinformed policies and practices around how to best support language acquisition. Research suggests that DLLs' linguistic and academic development is best supported by programs that support the development of English and the home language.

Adopt policies that promote bilingualism and biliteracy. States should enact policies in support of bilingualism and biliteracy that span the birth to grade 12 system. In the early years, states can look to Head Start's Performance Standards, which require programs to "recognize bilingualism and biliteracy as strengths and implement research-based teaching practices that support their development" and to assess children in both English and their home language to get a fuller picture of what they know and can do. At the PreK–12 level, several states, such as New York and Illinois, have bilingual mandates that specify for DLLs to be educated using bilingual instructional models. These policies, and those of other states, should place a stronger focus on ensuring DLLs develop strong proficiency in their home language and English through additive models (e.g., dual language immersion) that promote bilingualism and biliteracy.

Maintain DLLs' access to dual language immersion programs. Several states have implemented policies to support the development and implementation of dual language immersion programs that provide students with instruction in English and a partner language such as Arabic, Mandarin, or Spanish. Many of these initiatives are framed as a workforce development strategy that will strengthen state economies and business prospects. At the same time, these programs are being leveraged as a form of enrichment that will help all students reap the cognitive, academic, and economic benefits of bilingualism. While these are laudable efforts, policymakers at all levels must recognize the equity implications of policies that fail to prioritize and maintain access for DLLs. These programs are strengthened by the inclusion of DLLs and are critical to ensuring that these students not only maintain and strengthen their bilingualism and biliteracy but also stay linked to their culture and community. State and district policy must include provisions specific to maintaining DLL access, which can include holding aside spaces for DLL students, placing programs in areas that serve a high concentration of DLLs, choosing languages that are widely spoken by DLLs, and/or creating a bilingual mandate to codify DLL access to programs.

Create a system that welcomes DLL and immigrant families. Children who are DLLs enter the school system with tremendous assets, strengths, and needs, as do their parents and caregivers. To support DLL families, community

partnerships and home visiting programs should be established between schools, agencies, and families in the community. This collaboration should administer linguistically and culturally appropriate screenings for trauma and potential delays; provide guidance to families about nurturing children's home language and academic and physical development; and connect families to a range of services available in their home language. Schools and child care centers should warmly welcome and engage immigrant and dual language families with information, resources, and activities that resonate with their cultural identities, experiences, and daily lives. Children of all linguistic and cultural backgrounds thrive when their families are supported, respected, embraced, and empowered.

References and Resources

- New America resources:
  - **Walking the Bilingualism Tightrope** (article)
  - **A Voice for All: Oregon's David Douglas School District Builds a Better PreK–3rd Grade System for Dual Language Learners** (policy paper)
  - **A Critical Mass: Creating Comprehensive Services for Dual Language Learners in Harrisonburg** (policy paper)
  - **Educating California's English Learners: Westminster Brings Students' Home Languages into the Mainstream** (policy paper)
  - **From Blueprint to Building: Lifting the Torch for Multilingual Students in New York State** (policy paper)
  - **Dual Immersion Programs: How States Foster Expansion, Face Challenges** (blog post)
  - **How to Bring Immigrant Families into Schools** (blog post)
  - **How Omaha Public Schools is Weaving Together Resources for Immigrant and Refugee Families** (blog post)
  - **New Brief Highlights Ways to Improve Home Visiting Programs for Immigrants and Dual Language Learner Families** (blog post)

    - **Supporting Immigrant Families Through Community Partnerships in Lincoln, Nebraska** (blog post)

- Other resources:

    - National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine, **Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures**

    - Migration Policy Institute, **Leveraging the Potential of Home Visiting Programs to Serve Immigrant and Dual Language Learner Families**

    - Migration Policy Institute, **Dual Language Learners: A National Demographic and Policy Profile**

    - Migration Policy Institute, **Growing Superdiversity among Young U.S. Dual Language Learners and Its Implications**

    - Stanford Center for Education Policy Analysis, **The Promise of Bilingual and Dual Immersion Education**

    - California's State Advisory Council on Early Learning and Care, **California's Best Practices for Young Dual Language Learners: Research Overview Papers**

5. Put More Attention on Kindergarten and the Early Grades

Over the last two decades, state and federal actors, researchers, and other stakeholders have increased attention on pre-K for four-year-olds. During roughly that same period, grades 3–12 have drawn the focus of the U.S. Department of Education as well as states and school districts. Kindergarteners and first and second graders aren't getting the attention they need and deserve. A major reason for the focus on third grade and up is that states concentrate attention on areas valued by accountability and improvement systems. Without making kindergarten and first and second grades part of those systems, in an appropriate way, there is little impetus for schools and school districts to do things differently. However, before including young children in accountability systems, those systems have to fundamentally change from their current state. More research, meaningful stakeholder engagement, and piloting are needed to determine what measures would be most appropriate. But states do not have to wait for a new iteration of accountability systems before injecting K-2 with new energy and ideas grounded in best practice in early childhood education. To give children the best possible path to success in the later grades, it is important to shine a light on teaching and learning in kindergarten and the early grades.

Promote a well-rounded curriculum. In too many early grade classrooms, a student's day is limited to reading and math instruction with very little attention over the school year to science, social studies, and other areas. Learning across content areas is essential for young students to build their background knowledge about the world, our past, and beyond. Skilled teachers will find ways to incorporate science, history, geography, and so forth into lessons, but all teachers need resources and support to ensure their students have well-rounded learning experiences. In addition to the common subject areas included in K–12 state standards (English language arts, math, science, social studies, the arts, and physical education), K–3 standards should also include standards related to social-emotional development (managing emotions, interactions with peers and adults, and appropriate self-expression) and growth in approaches to learning (curiosity, persistence, attentiveness, etc.) that are aligned with birth-to-five early learning and development standards. Broadening the focus of K–3 standards to include these other domains would send an important signal to educators that children's development in these areas is equally important to their success in school and later in life. States can develop curriculum implementation guidance, as New Jersey has done, to support teachers in following standards *and* providing learning experiences and environments aligned with how young children learn best. States can also provide grants to encourage school districts to commit to well-rounded learning and prioritize grant dollars to those districts that are already doing it.

Embrace a whole-child emphasis in the elementary grades. Instead of narrowly focusing on academic achievement, school districts should embrace practices that promote the long-term development and success of children. This means emphasizing four major components: education, health, family involvement, and social services. Elementary schools should partner with local organizations to provide health services, such as immunizations and nutritional services, engage parents as partners in their child's education, and assist families in connecting with needed social services. A community school model is one method of adopting a whole-child emphasis in the early elementary grades. Another approach is First 10 school hubs and community partnerships, which combine a community school model with a focus on birth to third grade alignment.

Take stock of assessment in kindergarten and the early grades. Assessment is important in the early years and grades. Screenings, diagnostic assessments, and summative assessment all play an important role. The challenge with assessment comes when there are too many or duplicative assessments throughout the year and when they are used inappropriately. School districts should review what kind of and how many assessments are being used in schools and work to reduce duplicative measures where possible. Districts should also look at how teachers use results to adapt curricula and instruction and how parents use results to understand their child's progress. The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) should do a study of assessment implementation and make updated recommendations to states for appropriate use. This should include reviewing whether assessments in use meet the needs of both monolingual and multilingual students. There *are* multiple benefits to having consistent statewide data, particularly about kindergarten readiness. States can and should use these data to inform how they target resources across the state.

Rethink kindergarten. As states and communities continue to rapidly expand pre-K for four-year-olds, it is time to take a close look at kindergarten. While most kindergarten-aged children attend school, in most states, kindergarten is not compulsory. In fact, eight states do not even require districts to offer it. Kindergarten *is* offered in those states, but a full-day kindergarten equivalent to a full-day of first grade is not the standard. Some children attend only a half-day of kindergarten; some parents must pay tuition for a full day in a public school. States should fund a full day, equivalent to the length of a day in first grade, signaling their commitment to giving all children access to a strong kindergarten experience. Complicating kindergarten further are ongoing debates about whether kindergarten should be more academic or play-based. Recent research has looked at whether kindergarten has become "the new first grade." Kindergarten classrooms today in many communities look and feel more like classrooms for older children. It should not be that way. Developmental science tells us that young children learn best through play, inquiry, and exploration (think experiential learning for older kids). It is important to structure kindergarten classrooms in a way that supports this kind of learning, as Boston

Public Schools is doing. States and school districts need to invest in professional development for principals and kindergarten teachers, promote smoother transitions and alignment between pre-K and kindergarten, and provide funding to ensure kindergarten classrooms are sufficiently resourced to include space and materials for play-based centers, STEM learning, and at least two educators in the classroom. One way to make this happen is by establishing a federal grant program for states or districts to promote quality in kindergarten. Federal grants should focus on quality and prioritize states or districts that are ready and willing to transform kindergarten by implementing promising practices around curricula, instructional strategies, transitions, classroom environment, and professional development.

Move away from retention in third grade. Eight states and the District of Columbia require students to be held back in third grade if they are not reading proficiently according to the state's reading test. All states should make literacy a priority. To improve children's literacy outcomes, however, state strategies must begin much earlier than school entry and must be comprehensive and coordinated with other initiatives. Researchers, such as Nonie K. Lesaux, professor of education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, argue for an approach that includes teacher professional development, early identification of reading difficulties, comprehensive assessment systems, and more. But most states are not taking this kind of approach. The dismal 2019 NAEP reading results show that a different approach is needed. Instead of primarily focusing policies at third grade, states should focus on better supporting children's literacy development from birth. This could include investments in developmental screenings, home visiting that supports family literacy, public libraries, transition and alignment across pre-K and the early grades, social-emotional learning and executive function, and quality interactions, early literacy learning, and building children's background knowledge in center-based and family child care, pre-K, and kindergarten.

References and Resources

- New America resources:
    - **Moving into Kindergarten: How Schools and Districts are Connecting the Steps for Children and Families** (policy paper)
    - **Using Local, State, and Federal Dollars to Improve Pre-K to K Transitions** (policy paper)
    - **A Focus on Teaching and Learning in Pre-K through 2nd Grade: Lessons from Boston** (policy paper)

- **Connecting the Steps: State Strategies to Ease the Transition from Pre-K to Kindergarten** (policy paper)
- **From Crawling to Walking** (policy paper)
- **Principal's Corner: Perspectives on Teaching and Learning in PreK–3rd Grade** (policy paper)
- **Don't Use Kindergarten Readiness Assessments for Accountability** (blog post)
- **As Spotlights Grows on Pre-K, We Can't Forget the Early Grades** (article)

• Other resources:

- Education Commission of the States, **50-State Comparison: State K–3 Policies**
- Early Learning Network, **Welcome to the Early Learning Network**
- Foresight Law + Policy, **Why the K–12 World Hasn't Embraced Early Learning**
- Council of Chief State School Officers and the Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes, **Birth to Grade 3 Indicator Framework: Opportunities to Integrate Early Childhood in ESSA Toolkit**
- Council of Chief State School Officers and the Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes, **Third Grade Reading Laws: Implementation and Impact**
- EdPolicyWorks, **Is Kindergarten the New First Grade?**

6. Promote Efficiency and Coordination to Improve Outcomes for Children

Early education is funded and delivered by multiple federal and state agencies and offices within agencies. These agencies and offices often operate in silos. Even when there are actors who seek to engage colleagues and work across these silos, collaboration can still be daunting. State leaders must establish governance structures that promote efficiency and facilitate coordination even in the face of turnover of policymakers and officials who set priorities and staff members who carry them out. To determine the effectiveness of implementation and promote continuous improvement, states must also strengthen data systems, ensuring vertical alignment between early childhood, K–12, and post-secondary data and horizontal alignment across other systems serving children and families.

Coordinate legislation when reauthorizing. As Congress and federal agencies address points of connection or overlap within the Elementary & Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG), the Higher Education Act (HEA), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and the Head Start Act, they should eliminate conflicting requirements and reduce implementation barriers for states, school districts, and early education programs. Several of these laws that touch early education are overdue to be revamped; when reauthorizing, Congress should take care to align them. CCDBG and ESEA (as the Every Student Succeeds Act) were reauthorized fairly recently, but new iterations of the others have yet to be passed into law. Now, in 2020, may be an opportunity for HEA reauthorization, as bills are being discussed in the House and Senate. This makes the time right for connecting, for instance, Title II of ESSA and Title II of HEA. Both govern the development of teachers, but there is limited coordination between them. In one way, ESSA can serve as an example when it comes to coherence with the Head Start Act. The law now requires LEAs to have reciprocal memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with Head Start, which is helpful because it makes *both* LEAs and Head Start programs responsible for coordinating with each other. As Congress and federal agencies address points of connection or overlap within these and other laws, they can eliminate competing requirements and reduce implementation barriers for states, LEAs, and early education programs.

Harness the power of open licensing and open educational resources. OER are free and openly licensed teaching and learning materials that can be shared, downloaded, and edited by anyone, such as guidebooks for teachers, frameworks for curricula, and content for young children's learning activities. Unlike proprietary textbooks and instructional materials, OER allows educators to access content for free from several repositories, tailor it to their particular classroom needs (keeping inclusion and representation in mind), and redistribute

the customized materials to other educators to use and reuse. OER provides opportunities for cutting costs and increasing access to instructional materials that are potentially more relevant to young students' and families' local experiences and cultural backgrounds. In order to encourage more effective use of these materials, leaders in both state education agencies and school districts should ensure that educators have targeted professional learning on searching for, discovering, and customizing materials; implementing them in the classroom; and sharing resources in repositories where other educators can find them. Similar to the **U.S. Department of Education's open licensing requirement**, where recipients of competitive grants must openly license resources created with grant funds, departments of education and school districts would benefit from sharing their created resources with open licenses to provide efficient and coordinated access to all educators.

Experiment with Head Start Grants to ready states. Funding for Head Start programs is currently channeled from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services directly to thousands of local providers, bypassing state agencies. This system causes headaches and costs in monitoring and communicating regulations and it creates silos between Head Start and state-funded pre-K programs, other early learning providers, special education, and elementary schools. To better coordinate Head Start with these other state programs, Congress should direct HHS to award pilot grants to states that signal readiness by agreeing to meet quality standards in pre-K and assure continued access. These grants could help to eliminate redundancy in state and federal regulations. HHS should collect information from these pilots about the advantages and disadvantages presented by state-level streamlining across pre-K programs and use that information to strengthen subsequent pilots.

Commit to federal cross-agency collaboration and state early learning councils. The Early Learning Interagency Policy Board was established in 2010 to improve alignment and coordination across federally funded early learning programs. While it began as only an ED and HHS board, over time representatives from other agencies participated. This kind of cross-agency collaboration is important and should be expanded and formalized. Furthermore, rekindled federal investment in state coordination via early learning councils that also strengthens connections to K–12 could go a long way to improving vertical and horizontal alignment of programs serving children birth through age eight and families.

Promote regional and community hubs to improve efficiency and coordination. States often offer a variety of programs led by health, human services, and education agencies, each with different eligibility criteria and enrollment processes. Creating a regional or community hub is a strategy to streamline and coordinate a family-centered system. Regional hubs can help support coordinated policies, systems, and funding opportunities. For example, Oregon employs regional hubs to coordinate early childhood systems and link

education systems with health care and human services. Community hubs can help with service coordination for a family. These hubs bridge otherwise siloed service providers into a coherent and comprehensive network to serve whole families. Community-level organizations often have the benefit of being staffed by people with the cultural and linguistic competence to serve their own community. When housed at community-based organizations, hubs can provide an important perspective on system-level and organization-level barriers families face accessing services. The input of hub organizations should be honored by government agencies and incorporated into strategic planning and quality improvement efforts.

References and Resources

- New America resources:
  - **Voices from the Social Safety Net** (article)
  - **How to Fuel Government Innovation That Lasts** (article)
  - **Making Connections: PreK–12 OER in Practice** (policy paper)
  - **How a Hashtag Catalyzed PK–12 Open Educational Resources: Reflections and Recommendations** (policy paper)
  - **Creating Systems of Sustainability: Four Focus Areas for the Future of PK–12 Open Educational Resources** (policy paper)
- Other resources:
  - Oregon Early Learning Division, **Early Learning Hubs**
  - U.S. Department of Education, **Early Learning Interagency Policy Board Report to the Secretaries of Education and Health and Human Services**
  - Bellwether Education Partners, **Renewing Head Start's Promise: Invest in What Work's for Disadvantaged Preschoolers**
  - Teachers College Press, **Early Childhood Governance: Choices and Consequences** (book)

- Build Initiative, **A Framework for Choosing a State-Level Early Childhood Governance System**

- U.S. Department of Education, **Open Licensing Requirement for Competitive Grant Programs**

7. Emphasize Continuous Improvement as the Goal of Data Collection

For years, education policy debates have focused on increasing the transparency and accountability of American public education. In early education, this has taken the form of considerable public investment in building systems for evaluating and monitoring the quality of programs. The purpose of any evaluation process should be to drive quality improvement. Results can inform classroom practice, guide the design of pre-service and in-service training, and inform investment in quality improvement and human capital at the state and federal levels.

Approach teacher evaluation as an opportunity to improve instruction. Evaluation systems should treat teachers as the professionals they are by being focused first and foremost on professional growth. In addition to providing data on professional needs and areas for growth, teachers should have the opportunity to work with their leadership teams to set goals and reflect on their practice with peers and mentors. Principals and center directors must have the knowledge, expertise, and resources to match teachers with the help they most need. This may include individualized coaching, use of video for reflection and improvement, or visits with colleagues with specific strengths. Teachers who are consistently identified as effective should be identified as instructional resources for peers and should be recognized and rewarded with a formal teacher leader role and additional compensation. Similar strategies can be adapted for cohorts of family child care providers or teachers from child care centers using data from environmental rating scales, classroom observations, or quality rating and improvement systems.

Use valid and reliable measures to gauge student learning and empower teachers to use data to improve their practice. States must ensure that each child-level assessment is appropriate and used solely to measure the discrete skill the tool was designed to measure. States should provide teachers technical and content expertise, time, and flexibility for explaining how to use formative and observational student-level data to inform instructional practices. Data literacy among teachers and administrators is important at the early and elementary levels across all settings.

Use quality rating and improvement system data to inform strategy. QRIS are not only important for providing quality ratings to families, but also for their role in guiding policy and program improvement. States should use program evaluation data to support strategic investments in professional development, coaching, professional learning communities, teaching resources, and content specialists. Data can also be used to inform quality improvement projects targeted to deficits or strengths identified by program evaluation tools and

providers can be offered the opportunity to work in cohorts to improve their practice.

Close DLL data gaps. Dual language learners represent an estimated 32 percent of the young child population in the U.S., yet we lack comprehensive data on how these children are being served. Only one-third of state pre-K programs collect information about language use in the home—such as through a home language survey—and track DLL enrollment. That means a majority of state pre-K programs may be operating with little to no information on the languages DLLs speak and on their skills and knowledge in these languages. But the data gaps do not stop there: a majority of state QRIS lack indicators related to DLLs, while popular tools used to measure teacher-child interactions, such as the CLASS, have been criticized for failing to take DLLs' specific needs into account. State policymakers should adopt a uniform protocol to identify DLLs and collect this data across state early education programs, screen for language abilities in both English and the home language, adopt and prioritize DLL-related indicators in QRIS, provide technical assistance and outreach to linguistically diverse providers to encourage their participation in QRIS, and seek additional measures of classroom quality to fully capture the experiences of DLLs.

Monitor and report DLL outcomes over the long term. National, state, and district level data reveal disparities in academic outcomes for students who are classified as dual language learners. While these data points are vital to track, more attention needs to be paid to how DLLs perform over the long term once they achieve English language proficiency. DLLs are a unique subgroup in that the classification is intended to be temporary: ideally, all DLL students will achieve proficiency in English and shed the label. At the same time, the subgroup is dynamic, with different students entering and exiting each year. Strong accountability systems should (1) report all DLL outcomes, disaggregated by former and current status and (2) include an "ever-DLL" group to track the entire group of current and former DLLs over their PreK–12 years. Several states, including Illinois, Washington, and Oregon, have begun reporting on the performance of former DLLs. These data reveal that former DLLs perform at similar levels, and sometimes outperform, their never-DLL peers on standardized tests of English language arts and mathematics, on average.

Use high-quality data to promote continuous quality improvement and continuity across systems. States should be intentional about sharing data across government agencies and use data as a critical tool to deliver the best possible services to families. Families should have the option to share their personal information with other programs so that once they provide data, they can be notified of all services for which they are eligible regardless of their entry point, and assisted with enrollment. Agencies should employ technologists to ensure applying for and using government benefits is efficient and user-friendly. The government should employ best practices for ensuring data privacy and secure data storage. An emphasis on data for continual learning and

improvement should be the focus of its collection. States and school districts can facilitate data sharing at the provider level when children transition from early learning settings to schools. Elementary schools receiving children from child care providers, Head Start, or state pre-k should have access to student information that they can use for individualized planning and staffing to better support incoming students.

References and Resources

- New America resources:
  - **Dual Language Learner Data Gaps** (policy paper)
  - **Seeing Clearly: Five Lenses to Bring English Learner Data into Focus** (policy paper)
  - **Rethinking the English Learner Achievement Gap** (blog post)
  - **Indispensables for Quality Pre-K** (web resource)
- Other resources:
  - Migration Policy Institute, **Quality for Whom? Supporting Diverse Children and Workers in Early Childhood Quality Rating and Improvement Systems**
  - Stanford Center for Education Policy Analysis, **The Effects of Accountability Incentives in Early Childhood Education**

8. Secure Predictable, Sustainable, and Increased Funding for Children's Earliest Years

The fragmented system of early education financing leaves far too many children and families without access to high-quality, affordable care, and many early educators with unlivable wages. Investments in children are inarguably important, yet consistently inadequate public funding has perpetuated cycles of inequity, devalued early educators, segregated children by family income, and left education leaders and providers maneuvering limited funds with equally limited success. Far greater, stabilized federal and state investments are essential to provide affordable care for families and high-quality education to all young children.

Increase public investments in early care and education. The National Academies Press consensus study, *Transforming the Financing of Early Care and Education*, lays forth several recommendations to reform our current system. First, federal and state governments should establish standards for quality and ensure that providers receive incentives and adequate funding to meet those high standards. Critically, federal and state governments should significantly increase funding levels to meet that of other Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, shifting from a funding level of 0.4 percent of GDP to at least 0.75 percent of GDP. The National Academies' committee estimates this would require an increase of $53 billion in public investments, which would be added to the current public investment of $29 billion and anticipated $58 billion from family contributions. These costs should not come at the expense of cuts to other social services but should come from finding new revenue sources from employers, private industries, and businesses; revising tax structures; and creating efficiencies. State level coordinators can act as intermediaries for federal, state, and local funding streams, to lessen the responsibility of braiding and blending funding which is currently placed on providers and families.

Consider new revenue streams to support early education quality. Innovative funding models will be needed if a universal system of early care and education in the U.S. is going to materialize. International early education systems rely far more heavily on private investments. While substantial public funding increases are crucial, investments from business groups and philanthropic organizations can also generate needed revenue to support early education. Employer-sponsored child care can enable parents to access high-quality, affordable, and convenient early education for their children.

Stabilize federal and state funding. Public investments should be predictable and stable, so providers can anticipate staff and facility needs, and so all families can plan their future knowing they will have access to child care. Programs to support child care, like the Child Care and Development Fund, should be treated

as entitlement programs, with mandatory appropriations in the federal budget. Entitlement programs, like Pell Grants and Social Security, are popular and tend to be politically protected. Early education deserves the same promise of bedrock durability in federal and state budgets, with flexibility to evolve to changing conditions over time.

Use stable revenue sources to fund birth-to-five programs. Child care centers and family child care providers should be paid by contract, with an agreement that they will maintain 80 percent enrollment so that they have stable and predictable funding, which will better enable them to make quality investments, including in their teachers. Most school funding statutes apply to kindergarten through twelfth grade and do not include pre-K. In some states, pre-K is funded through relatively unstable sources, such as a state lottery or taxes on items like tobacco. Funding pre-K through general school funding streams (or state K–12 funding formulas) not only reinforces that pre-K is part of the public school system but can allow for more stability for these programs.

Shift the burden of funding from families and streamline eligibility. Just over half of ECE funding is paid by families, while the remaining funding originates from public investments at the federal, state, and local level, and a very small fraction derives from philanthropic and private programs. A typical family pays around 10 percent of its income for child care, while families with lower incomes pay up to 35 percent or more of their earnings. Federal and state government should establish a family payment structure on a sliding scale to mitigate the cliff effect, with no-fee access available for families with low incomes. Eligibility standards and enrollment processes should be standardized to more easily provide comprehensive services for early educational, nutritional, and developmental programs for children and families. As access to child care is expanded, research has shown that parental employment will rise. Punitive measures that remove access to care do not serve children, families, or the intended goal of incentivizing parental employment. Access to child care should be fully decoupled from parental employment mandates.

References and Resources

- New America resources:
    - **Federal Spending on Early Care and Education: Past, Present, and Future** (blog post)
    - **Transforming Financing in Early Care and Education** (blog post)

- **"Pay for Success" Gaining Traction as ECE Funding Option, But Should It Be?** (blog post)
- Forthcoming (March 2020): Transforming the Financing of Early Care and Education: A Guidebook

• Other resources:

- The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, **Transforming the Financing of Early Care and Education**
- Center for American Progress, **The Effects of Universal Preschool in Washington, D.C.**
- Center for American Progress, **The Economics of Caregiving for Working Mothers**
- Medium, **Yes, America, We Can Afford Universal Child Care**
- Results for Development, **Financing Early Childhood Development: An Analysis of International and Domestic Sources**
- Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, **Financing Early Educator Teacher Quality**
- First Five Years Fund, **Federal Funding for Early Childhood Programs: A Decade of Bipartisan Progress**
- Save the Children Action Network, **Innovative Financing for Early Childhood Education**
- U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, **Building Bridges: Creating Strong Partnerships for Early Childhood Education**
- Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, **Who's Paying Now? The Explicit and Implicit Costs of the Current Early Care and Education System**

Notes

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