



A Path to High-Quality Child Care Through Partnerships

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Our series, [A Path to High-Quality Child Care Through Partnerships](#), has featured stories from Network organizations' Partnerships across the country, to provide powerful examples of how the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships (Partnerships) model supports family child care homes and child care centers, even during temporary closures from the pandemic, to deliver vital education, health, and nutrition services to young children and families, and help sustain these small businesses on a path to recovery.

The early care and education systems in this country need visionary reform now, not after the pandemic is over. Decisions leaders make today about policies, funding strategies, and business models must set the stage for a future where early care and education is supported as a public good, in recognition of the social and economic benefits that come from a strong start for children, well-supported families, and a well-prepared, well-compensated early childhood workforce across settings.

This much is certain, Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships work for children, families, and communities. We have curated our lessons learned from throughout our 8-part series below, which culminate in our [broader recommendations](#) to leverage Partnerships to rebuild a better, more comprehensive, sustainable early childhood system.

Partnerships Supports Strengthen Child Care

High-quality child care is a two-generation strategy with a multiplier effect that promotes educational success and economic stability for the whole family, particularly for children whose families earn low wages. Nationally, 5.3 million children under age 5 live in under-resourced communities, but most do not have access to quality early learning opportunities that fuel improved outcomes for children to thrive.

The [Educare Learning Network](#) (Network) embraces [Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships](#) as a solution to address longstanding challenges working families face when seeking child care that is accessible, affordable, and of high quality.

Flexibility with Accountability

Bringing together the best of Early Head Start and child care, Partnerships expand access to high-quality infant toddler child care for working families with incomes below the federal poverty level. Early Head Start grantees partner with child care businesses to provide flexible, comprehensive services that meet the unique needs of families and communities *and* adhere to rigorous quality standards that improve learning. Community child care programs receive funding, resources, and increased staff capacity to deliver education that helps children learn more and better at an earlier age, basic necessities like food and diapers, health screenings, employment and parenting supports, and professional development opportunities that grow the pool of well-qualified infant toddler professionals.

Navigating Evolving Realities

From Miami to rural Maine, Tulsa and Oklahoma City to Milwaukee, New Orleans to Denver and in our nation's capitol, the Network's Partnerships and dozens of recent state and national reports attest to the financial devastation of COVID-19 on the already fragile child care sector, while underscoring just how essential these programs are for children, families, employers, and state and local economies. With no end to the pandemic in sight, child care providers face increased expenses to meet stringent health requirements and to reduce group sizes, but lower tuition revenues as enrollments are reduced. Without significant and increased financial commitments and tangible supports from the private and public sectors, child care providers simply cannot cover the mounting costs of rent, supplies, and staff salaries. Many child care businesses have permanently shut down just when the economy needs them most.

The need for high-quality early education and care has never been greater. A recent [Urban Institute report](#) highlights challenges facing families with children due to the pandemic – job loss, food insecurity, inability to pay for housing, utilities, and medical costs, and difficulties managing work and caregiving responsibilities. The report also underscores many ways in which the pandemic poses risks to children's health, development, and well-being, with Black, Latinx, and Native American families and child care providers disproportionately suffering greater negative impacts.

As states and communities shift from “flattening the curve” to reopening, all working families with young children need high-quality options. We need tested models and innovative, cost effective solutions to ensure families can access early care and education services that meet their needs, while protecting the health and safety of children and the early childhood workforce who are experiencing adversity, fear, and trauma.

But we cannot simply return to the pre-pandemic status quo to navigate these evolving realities. We must build back an early childhood service delivery system that is financially sustainable and gives families affordable, safe choices that meet standards of quality and connect families to health, mental health, and other critical community services.

Partnerships Build Back Better

For close to 20 years the Educare Learning Network has delivered high-quality, comprehensive early education services - in collaboration with community partners - to children and families from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds in urban, suburban, and rural communities. We urge federal, state, and local governments and systems leaders to act on the recommendations below.

- **Focus on Equity.** Allocate resources first to where they're needed most to address historical, persistent opportunity gaps experienced by families and communities rooted in racism and other inequities – to children of color, children from low-income families, and children with special needs; educators and program leaders of color; and providers serving under-resourced communities.
- **Make Care Truly Affordable and Accessible:** Maintain eligibility for families regardless of job status and eliminate parent fees and co-payments. Implement policies that encourage greater flexibility and reduce administrative burdens in family eligibility determination and enrollment processes for publicly funded early care and education programs.
- **Fund the Cost of Quality:** Allocate resources to community-based family child care homes and centers to effectively implement program standards and two-generation practices rooted in research that address the comprehensive domains of child development, engage parents, and eliminate systemic biases that lead to disparities in children's experiences and outcomes. Commit

funding to support continuous quality improvement through teacher/caregiver coaching, curriculum and assessment, instructional leadership, job-embedded professional learning, monitoring, data systems, and physical environments, including supplies for instruction, health and safety.

- **Make Funding Stable, Predictable, and Efficient.** Direct public funding to providers to ensure sustainable, predictable revenue that covers the cost of quality and allows for parent choice. Pay providers for enrollment or capacity, use contracts or grants to pay individual providers and networks for a consistent number of slots programs can count on, and leverage multiple funding sources in new ways to support quality and efficiency.
- **Coordinate Funding Streams.** Allow greater flexibility to align policies, funding, professional development, and service delivery across Head Start and child care to achieve and sustain quality, continuity of care, and equity in parent choice across early education systems. This requires building stronger connections between Head Start and child care leadership at all levels.
- **Invest in Partnerships:** Ensure policies and funding mechanisms incentivize the use of provider networks through approaches like [Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships](#), which offer funding, expertise, resources, and staff capacity to increase program quality, deliver comprehensive services, adequately compensate teachers and caregivers, and strengthen [business operations and management through training](#) and administrative efficiencies.

A Call to Action

The COVID-19 crisis compels our nation to rethink our social contract with each other. Join us in advocating for the [series' policy recommendations](#) that strengthen supports for families, providers, and early care and education systems to give every child a fair chance to realize their fullest potential and create healthier families and communities for generations to come.

We also invite you to join with families, providers, and leaders from across the country to participate in and/or host virtual conversations in service to rebuilding a better, more comprehensive, sustainable early childhood system. Through these “Build It Back Better” dialogues, we will identify themes, experiences, and ideas from different perspectives to determine how we can collectively ensure a stronger, brighter future for young children and those who care for them. A “Build It Back Better” Toolkit will soon be available on the [Early Childhood Connector](#), a new online community serving the early childhood community.