

# REPORT OF RECOMMENDATIONS

103<sup>rd</sup> Arizona Town Hall





## Introduction

Early childhood care and education is the foundation of children’s later success. Through First Things First and a broad range of stakeholders in early childhood education we have begun to develop a strong, effective, regionalized infrastructure with built in accountability. To continue to affect change in early childhood education, we should build on this infrastructure. We have come a long way, have a strong vision, and have a long way to go.

Early childhood – that stage in human development spanning from birth to 8 years of age – is a pivotal time in an individual’s physical, cognitive, and social-emotional growth and development. Early childhood care and education has traditionally been viewed as a means to provide a safe place for children to be cared for before entering formal schooling, or an environment within which young children could develop social skills. Recent developments in neuroscience, research, practices and theory have indicated, however, that early childhood learning (birth to 8) is the most important predictor of a child’s future success in school and in the workplace. The field of early childhood care and education has transitioned from one focused primarily on custodial care to a systematic approach of teaching and learning.

Fundamental changes in the economy, family life, public awareness, public support, and public demand for high-quality preschool programs have had a profound effect on early childhood education. The opportunity to access high-quality programs is largely dependent on income, which has resulted in a significant gap in school readiness test scores between low income children and their more affluent peers. Arizona is at the epicenter of change, with rapid growth in the population of young children 0 to 5 years of age, a greater diversity in this population than the rest of the country, and a much larger share of its young children in state care (child protective services) growing up in poverty.

The recognition of the importance of early childhood development to an individual’s future success raises critical questions about the roles of families, the government, early childhood care and education providers, private enterprise, and philanthropy, among others, in making available those resources necessary to ensure that high-quality early childhood care and education is accessible to all of Arizona’s young children.

A diverse cross-section of Arizona residents from various communities and walks of life all interested in giving Arizona’s young children a strong start through high-quality early childhood care and education met as the 103<sup>rd</sup> Arizona Town Hall for three days of facilitated discussions.<sup>1</sup>

This report captures the consensus that emerged from those discussions. Although not every Arizona Town Hall participant agrees with every conclusion and recommendation, this report reflects the overall consensus achieved by the 103<sup>rd</sup> Arizona Town Hall.

## I. Setting the Stage

### A. The Current State of Early Childhood Care and Education in Arizona

The current state of early childhood care and education in Arizona is one of emergence. Voters showed their understanding of these needs by approving the First Things First initiative in 2006 and then by overwhelmingly rejecting an attempt to repeal it in 2010. The initiative created the first dedicated funding stream for building a system of early child development programs in education, health and wellness, and family support. Notable among these programs is Quality First. Quality First is an effort that significantly improved the quality of many – but not all – early childhood care and education centers and family childcare homes, through a rating system, increasingly sophisticated feedback and incentives. The program also uses scholarships to make early care affordable for some youngsters.

However, this funding stream is inadequate to the overall needs. Part of the progress made has been undercut by subsequent cuts to programs for young children that were previously funded by the state. Individual programs are isolated from one another, communication among them needs to improve to better serve all families and children, and access is unequal. Many children who live in disadvantaged economic situations, with transient families, or in rural or tribal areas are not receiving the benefits of these much-needed early childhood educational programs either due to affordability of services or geographical constraints. Arizona must address this inequality of access so that all children have access to high-quality early childhood education programs that meet their individual needs.

Support of early childhood educators is also lacking. Early education is not simply “daycare” – it is truly an important component of a child’s education, as cognitive, physical, and emotional development occur most rapidly during these years. Parents, legislators, and the community-at-large must understand that education begins at birth. Further, early childhood educators, as well as all educators, should receive greater professional respect, professional compensation, and wider access to professional development.

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<sup>1</sup> As part of the gathering, participants heard from an internationally-recognized expert in early child development and an economist with the Federal Reserve. Participants felt it important that all Arizonans have access to these presentations. Accordingly, the PowerPoint presentations from Dr. Adele Diamond and economist Rob Grunewald can be found on Arizona Town Hall’s website and are included as an appendix to this report.

## **B. The Effect of the Quality and the Availability of Early Education on Arizona**

The quality and availability of early education in Arizona has a profound impact on our communities in the sense that we either pay some now or pay a lot more later. We can either invest in teachers and provide students with the early education foundation they need for future success, or we can spend more resources on intervention and remediation, human and social services, access to healthcare, and the criminal justice system. Lack of a strong educational foundation creates dysfunction that ripples across generations – negatively affecting individuals, their families, and the greater society.

Studies robustly demonstrate that children who have access to high-quality education from birth to age 8 enjoy greatly enhanced avenues for social and economic success. Without a strong educational foundation, however, children struggle to catch up with their peers. Starting behind from an early age has a negative cumulative effect on young children. Many children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds enter school academically disadvantaged, averaging six months behind their affluent peers. By the end of fourth grade they are a full two years behind their affluent peers. As a result, many of the children facing these barriers are discouraged in school, are unable to catch up, and eventually drop out, which contributes to delinquency issues.

A poor early education foundation also has a profound impact on our state’s elementary and secondary educational institutions, which have to dedicate a large portion of their time and resources remediating rather than advancing children to the next level. Being required to retain – or hold back – large numbers of students who did not receive the benefits of early childhood care and literacy may have unintentional economic consequences. The problem of poor early education comes full circle when students without strong fundamentals enter our state’s higher education programs as college students, because these programs then have to spend their time and resources teaching missing skills to ensure the cycle does not continue.

Limited access to high-quality early education in Arizona also impedes economic development, both at the state and local levels. The state needs a high-quality education system – which includes high-quality early childhood care and education – to retain a strong, highly educated workforce and to attract new business. Arizona’s rank of 48th in preschool education and 45th in 4th grade reading proficiency stigmatizes our state’s reputation. Right now, Arizona is experiencing a “brain drain,” with parents leaving the state to raise their families in states with better education systems. A lack of high-quality early education also impacts Arizona’s ability to attract large businesses, because those businesses know that high-quality early education and care directly impact their own recruitment and retention efforts. Moreover, companies are discouraged by Arizona’s high drop-out rates and high school students’ lack of college readiness. Companies simply do not want to ask their employees to relocate to Arizona with its lack of high-quality education, much of which stems from a lack of high-quality early education.

When it comes to funding for education, we need to stop talking about “spending,” and focus on “investing.” It is time to recognize the “return on investment” the state will receive when it properly recognizes and nourishes early childhood development. The money we invest now has an impact on our economy that justifies the investment in providing affordable early childhood care and education



in Arizona. Several longitudinal evidence-based research studies have all essentially reached the same conclusion: The return on investment in early childhood development programs that focus on at-risk families yield significant long-term positive developmental outcomes. Cost-benefit analyses of these studies show returns ranging from \$3 to \$17 for every dollar invested and suggest an annual rate of return between 7 and 8 percent. Continuing to invest in large-scale early childhood programs requires long-term assurance and stability from state funding. Given the impact early childhood education provides and the long-term consequences for developmental outcomes, we must strengthen partnerships between the education sector and the business community.



### **C. The Effect of the Attributes of Children and Their Families on Early Education**

Currently, Arizona’s early education system is a fragmented patchwork of programs. Attributes of children and their families such as geographic location, access to transportation, socioeconomic status, and language challenges often create barriers to early education resources, programs, and information. For example, though a library may be nearby, a lack of a bus route may prevent a family from utilizing that resource. The transiency of many families is a factor that creates gaps in a child’s education as the child moves from school to school. As these factors demonstrate, the early childhood educational system cannot be “one-size fits all.” We must be sensitive to cultural differences, diverse value systems, and socioeconomic variances when determining the needs of Arizona’s children.

Families need to be engaged and have the resources to negotiate the early education system. Families’ access to information is critical for understanding available resources and their role in developing their child’s education. Yet, access to this information is a challenge. Arizona must find a way to provide greater access to vital information about the early education resources and programs available to families and early childhood educators. Further, as a child’s entire well-being affects his or her educational opportunities and ability to learn, access to support programs that assist with nutrition and healthcare is also crucial. Similarly, behavioral health has a large impact on children, and counseling should be available to students. Screening, assessment, and intervention for behavioral, as well as physical, issues before kindergarten are imperative to minimize any negative impact on the early learning experience.

### **D. Measuring the Success of Arizona’s Early Childhood Care and Education Programs and Institutions**

There are key things Arizona can do to allow the state to (1) better measure the success of Arizona’s early childhood care and education programs and institutions, and (2) more effectively disseminate information about the best ways (“best practices”) to achieve desired outcomes.

*First*, Arizona needs to establish continuity among early education programs, rather than relying on the existing “patchwork” system. Arizona has recently worked to develop a shared statewide definition of school readiness and is vetting this document for feedback across the state. In addition, the Arizona Department of Education has developed and adopted a comprehensive set of Early Learning Standards and Infant Toddler Guidelines to support quality across all environments. These standards should be further disseminated and professional development provided to support implementation. Defining readiness is important to setting benchmarks and measuring outcomes moving forward. The First Things First Board approved an excellent list of “readiness indicators” developed by multiple stakeholders (see the Background Report at page 27), but these readiness indicators have not been adopted statewide. Arizona also needs to develop a standardized system of metrics to measure early childhood care and education – applied to all children in all communities, whether from urban, rural, or home-schooled communities – to provide the state with a tool to use in tracking data in the assessment and improvement of children’s performance. Additionally, we need greater alignment and continuity between early education programs and the K–12 school system.

*Second*, Arizona must provide sufficient funding to fully implement assessment programs already in place.

*Third*, the state and communities need to do more with the information already being gathered through assessments. The education community constantly strives to develop and improve assessment tools – which is admirable – but we also need to focus on what we do after the assessments take place. The state needs to “stay the course” and consider the long-term payoff of maintaining a benchmark to measure progress. Unless Arizona does more with the results of existing assessment tools, we will never change the quality of our schools. Quality First is a success story. Thanks to Quality First, Arizona now measures the quality of some early childhood education programs and provides program assessments, coaching, and mentoring to improve the care that young children receive. First Things First and Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) provide information regarding high-quality child care, but more can be done.

*Fourth*, Arizona needs to focus on accountability at all levels. Using multiple data sources, we should evaluate center, program, and teacher effectiveness; provide professional development opportunities; and fully prepare an early education workforce that can effectively educate our young children. We also should involve parents in the assessment of their children, and make tools available for parents to help improve child outcomes.

*Fifth*, Arizona needs more effective systems for sharing information among early childhood care and educational programs and institutions. It is difficult to track student progress – especially over time – because not all children enter the system at the same time or at the same level and existing data systems within the state are not well aligned. Using a uniform system, such as the Arizona Education and Learning Accountability System (AELAS), would help providers, schools, and social services better communicate and track student progress. Having a uniform system would support desired outcomes, create a common framework for all students, provide clear outcome goals, and perhaps ultimately allow educators to use one common assessment tool.

*Sixth*, we need to educate the public about the long-term importance of early education programs and efforts, and develop communication systems that allow the public to understand whether dollars are being spent effectively. A method of doing this would include a publicly accessible “dashboard” that monitors progress over the long term (perhaps 25 years or beyond). The dashboard could include monitoring system progress over time, including metrics such as kindergarten readiness skills, success in reaching state-mandated third-grade reading requirements, graduation rates, and whether students choose to continue with higher education.

*Finally*, in our efforts to measure the success of early childhood care and education programs and institutions, we need to remember that early childhood education should be focused on early childhood development, not just testing and assessment. Standardized tests have their place. Any measure of success needs to recognize the fluid nature of student progress, including the use of ongoing, authentic assessment.

## **II. Content, Caregivers, and the Classroom**

### **A. Optimal Early Learning Experiences for Young Children in the Home**

We recognize that families and parents are a child’s first and most important teachers. Strong families are the cornerstone of strong communities. Whether they are in early childhood education centers or home-based care, children, parents, and families need access to culturally relevant support and information. Several factors affect the ability of family members, friends, neighbors, and hired caregivers to provide optimal early learning experiences to young children. Many of these individuals lack adequate knowledge regarding early childhood care and education and have no special skills to elevate the care beyond basic “daycare.” Often, they do not see themselves as educators, nor do they focus on providing an educational experience. Many are not aware of what the latest research indicates is the optimal learning experience for children today. This is coupled with limited availability of and access to resources and information about early childhood education. Often, limitations on these caregivers’ time, financial resources and physical space prevent them from developing a greater depth of knowledge. Other variables in the environment – including factors such as familial relationships with the child, instability at home, the caregiver’s patience level, and the inability to afford quality early education and care – also impact the optimality of the early learning experience of children.

Additionally, in the case of family, friend, and neighbor care and unregulated care, there are large disparities among providers. Many lack access to professional development and have very limited resources. Many also lack basic knowledge of child development and responsive caregiving.

In all cases, additional support systems, particularly training and informational resources, are needed. Adequate information that provides caregivers access to knowledge about optimal educational experiences will assist caregivers in gaining awareness about what activities are appropriate for different stages of childhood development. Such support does not replace in-home care, but supplements it, delivering information about best-practice methods that encourage intuitive experiences through informal, interactive activities such as storytelling, socialization, and learning through play. A central clearinghouse that allows parents and caregivers access to information and “best practices” is critical to develop awareness of the available resources. Information can be

disseminated through established avenues such as home visitors, directed media campaigns, social networks, community organizations, faith-based organizations, cultural and arts organizations, schools, libraries, and pediatricians.

## **B. High-Quality Early Education for Young Children From Childcare Providers**

Numerous factors affect the ability of organizations like professional childcare centers and preschools to provide high-quality, early education, including:

- **Focus on Early Childhood Development.** High-quality education centers recognize that their purpose is to provide high-quality, early education rather than to warehouse children at the lowest possible cost. High-quality centers require their providers to prioritize early childhood development.
- **Shortage of High-Quality Staff.** Organizations face a shortage of educated, high-quality staff, at both the director and teacher level, particularly in rural or less populated regions. Career and Technical Education Programs found on school campuses throughout Arizona train and involve high school students in preschool programs that are effective, locally based, offer an interactive learning opportunity, and can develop a generation of future childcare providers and informed parents and families. The restoration of funding for Career and Technical Education can help these organizations to continue to grow and expand.
- **Employing Professionals.** High-quality early childhood programs respect their early childhood care and education providers and view them as professionals.
- **Providing Better Pay.** High-quality early childhood programs adequately and fairly compensate teachers as professionals. The increased licensing rates and educational requirements now placed upon providers are not commensurate with pay. Teachers should also be compensated for the time they spend improving the profession (e.g., mentoring).
- **Encouraging Professional Development.** Funding, coaching, and professional development should be available across the field and not just within certain schools. Good program directors invest in staff professional development and provide quality feedback. Arizona needs defined professional development standards for early childhood teachers.
- **Teacher Retention.** Organizations struggle to retain teachers because of low pay, lack of benefits, incentives that entice teachers to leave a school once they develop the skills that will make them more money elsewhere, and the perception that teaching early learners is a “dead end job.”
- **Teacher Input.** More teacher input into policy-making will help ensure that policies are grounded in actual practice.
- **Effective Student/Teacher Ratios.** High-quality education centers have low student/teacher ratios, and when necessary adjust the ratios based on the classroom makeup (e.g., to assist children with special needs or to provide potty-training). They also recognize, however, that continuity of care is



important for children and do not constantly adjust teachers and assistants from one classroom to the other just to meet ratios.

- **Intra-School Teamwork.** High-quality education centers reject the “silo mentality” and operate as a community rather than a collection of individuals who happen to work in the same building.
- **Accreditation and Rating Programs.** High-quality education centers are accredited and achieve high ratings. To ensure ratings and accreditations have meaning, though, there needs to be appropriate checks and balances put into place, starting with incorporation of feedback from the parents whose children attend the schools. The tools currently used to rate or accredit schools may not take into account all of the important factors that make up high-quality early education, such as the importance of the emotional environment at the school (i.e., whether a child is feeling loved and nurtured such that he or she wants to learn).
- **The Quality/Affordability Trade-Off.** Currently access to high-quality early education is determined by the ability of a child’s caregiver(s) to pay for high-quality care (i.e., “you get what you pay for”). Neither poor families nor many middle income families can afford to send their children to accredited, five star rated child care centers. We need scholarships and grants to make early education and care more affordable for all families and we need to extend current tax credits available to preschools, not just kindergarten and above. Additionally, providers have limited ability to access funding and services like Quality First. We must expand and enhance funding to bring these quality services to all of Arizona’s children.
- **Geography and Accessibility.** High-quality childcare centers simply are not available in some geographic areas, especially rural communities.

### C. Providing High-Quality Early Education in Arizona Schools

Arizona provides limited early education, and the quality of these programs varies widely. State-supported pre-kindergarten programs are limited mostly to students with special needs, and full-day kindergarten attendance is neither statutorily required nor universally accessible. The dominant factor preventing high-quality education is inadequate and inconsistent funding. No mandate exists at the state level to provide consistent early childhood education from birth to age 8. This failure to support early education has led to unequal access among various constituencies, disparities between schools, and inconsistencies between the programs that do exist. Without steady funding, schools often cut pre-kindergarten programs when space or funds are needed elsewhere. Further, though kindergarten is offered in the schools, the statutory funding formula no longer includes all-day kindergarten. Also, unfunded mandates and limited resources hinder teachers. As such, there is not enough early education offered or available.

The current measurement standards of individual student success largely negatively affect the delivery of early education in schools. The concern is that teachers will “teach to the test,” which often harms the educational process by removing the enriching garden of play that is early childhood education and failing to focus on the whole child. Programs such as music and art are

often removed, which are just as important in developing life skills as reading and math. Further, standards from upper elementary school are forced down to early childhood educators (academic escalation/ curricular shove-down), and such high stakes academics are harmful. Test performance pay incentives do not improve education.

Though accountability and results are important, we must agree on how to properly measure success and what are the appropriate desired outcomes. The pedagogy of fourth grade, for example, is not the pedagogy of preschool, but current measurement standards do not allow this difference. Developmentally appropriate assessment rather than the current high stakes methods would better serve early childhood development and more accurately capture performance.

### III. Roles and Resources

#### A. Important Resources and Their Availability

The State of Arizona dedicates insufficient resources to make high-quality early childhood care, education, and support accessible to Arizona families, and there must be greater alignment, coordination, and more equitable allocation of existing resources (especially across urban and rural areas of the state). In particular, we need to focus on *funding* and *coordinating partnerships*, which are discussed in greater detail below in Sections III (C, D &E). In addition, we need to develop the following:

**Shared Understanding and Commitment.** We need to educate *all* Arizonans about the critical importance of early childhood care and education to the success of our children, our communities, and our state. We need commitment to and engagement from citizens, families, volunteers, nonprofit organizations, the business community, community colleges, universities, civic organizations, faith-based communities, schools, and elected officials (at the local, state, tribal, and federal level). Collectively we all must communicate to the legislature and the private sector that now is the time to be bold and do *more*, not less, for our young children.

**Human Capital.** Arizona needs a call to action to attract additional, high-quality human capital into early childhood care and education. We should provide education and development opportunities to early educators including family, friends, and neighbors who provide early education and care; and families that choose to educate their children at home. We should support families who choose to benefit from home visiting services. Although professional development standards for early childhood educators exist, more technical assistance needs to be provided such as coaching, mentoring, and role models to help providers meet those standards.

#### B. Role of Government in Early Childhood Care and Education

Government has an important role to create an aspirational environment of leadership for the overall system of high-quality early care and education by providing regulatory oversight, coordination, vision, and funding. Ideally, federal, state, county, school district, city, and town governments and tribal governments work together to set goals for early childhood education in the state in order to sew Arizona's patchwork system into a cohesive quilt. The Arizona Constitution requires that the Legislature provide a general and uniform public education system. As such, the government should

prioritize early childhood care and education, striving to make it accessible to all residents, and the community should encourage these goals and stress their importance. Overall, a more targeted role is needed at all levels of government to create a full continuum of care from pre-birth to adulthood.

One of government's current primary roles is one of regulation, as it is responsible for protecting the health and safety of children. Although the government is not required to provide the actual early education and care services for early education and care, it should have a role in assessing the quality of the education and care and requiring certain standards. Quality standards already exist (e.g., ADE's Arizona Early Learning Standards, Head Start/First Things First) that can be widely utilized, and the state should identify and broadly promote clear, acceptable standards. Further, the state already imposes licensing requirements and certifies teachers, but this oversight should be broadened to include more early education and care providers, particularly those that currently operate without licenses, and those that serve more than one family. Finally, Arizona should restore funding for all-day kindergarten, revise state law to mandate kindergarten, and establish a firm entry age of 5 by August 31. Also, it should consider other mandates to reach more children, such as providing early education and care, particularly for children under age 6.

Coordination between all levels of the government must improve; currently, it is quite limited. Collaboration helps to eliminate redundancy, facilitate coordinated learning opportunities, and support under-served areas, such as Arizona's tribal and rural communities. For example, many library systems and parks and recreation programs offer after-school programs, and, if they were to coordinate with local schools, such programs could be adapted to better align with the curriculum. Also, in another example, the Bureau of Indian Education could collaborate with local and state government to deliver cultural education.

The local level of government – cities, towns, school districts, and counties – and tribal governments are often the first line providers, running the Head Start programs and offering other health and literary resources. Often, local communities can innovate to support unique local needs, particularly because the local communities most acutely suffer the consequences of poor education. Local officials can push the goals of education and key education initiatives up to the state level in order to move the needle at the state legislature. For example, city mayors can provide leadership on particular programs, such as Phoenix's "Read On Phoenix" initiative.

### **C. Role of Government in Funding Early Childhood Care and Education**

To define the current role of the government in funding early childhood care and education, we must identify (1) what the state has mandated for early education; (2) the associated funding available – or additional funding necessary – to fulfill that mandate; and (3) the appropriate agencies or organizations to administer the funds.

The state has mandated reading readiness standards for third-graders. As documented throughout this Report and the associated Background Report, this mandate cannot be fulfilled without high-quality early childhood care and education programs. To fulfill the state mandates and ensure that Arizona's children have the educational foundation that they need, the state should provide adequate funding for the following:

- All-day kindergarten;
- Early intervention programs;
- Home visiting;
- Preventative health education;
- Expanded access to high-quality early care and education programs for children ages 0–5.
- Childcare subsidies;
- Kindergarten Plus or other extended-day and school break programs for young children;
- Improving the transition from pre-K and Head Start programs to kindergarten;
- Early childhood block grants, which includes preschool funding and reducing class sizes in grades 1–3;
- Professional development, particularly continuing education for professionals who may not be able to attend full-time programs;
- Pay for early childhood educators that represents a livable wage, and that reflects respect and appreciation for early childhood professionals;
- Establishing lab schools in partnership with universities and community colleges, which provide training for educators, high-quality education for children, and ongoing research concerning child development; and
- Improving available equipment and facilities.

Providing high-quality early childhood programming requires money, certainly more money than the state currently dedicates to early education. Within the past decade, significant cuts were made to early childhood care and education due to a variety of factors, including the recent economic downturn and the political climate. These funds must be restored.

To make high-quality early childhood care and education accessible, the state must also identify new funds and new funding sources for education. The current state and federal education funding system is archaic and pits stakeholders against each other. We need to develop a system that encourages stakeholders to work together. For example, invite private investors to invest in “Social Impact Bonds<sup>2</sup>,” “Pay for Performance Bonds,” or other public-private partnerships; establish an endowment for early childhood care and education in Arizona; extend existing tax credits to include quality early childhood education programs; and give tax incentives, particularly in rural areas, to open or support early education and care programs, or to provide money for employees to cover the costs of their children’s early education and care.

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<sup>2</sup> Social Impact Bonds create a contract between a private investor, government body, and a highly effective social service provider. This public-private partnership is designed to foster innovative ideas that are designed to have high social impact, provide cost savings to the state, and, if successful, provide the private investor with a return on their investment.



As noted in Section I (D) above, the state needs to take concrete steps to measure the success of Arizona’s early childhood care and education programs and institutions (which will require some state funding), and our limited resources need to be directed toward programs and services that work. Arizona’s Quality First is a good example: this program ties scholarship funding to high-quality care.

Against this backdrop, Arizona’s current funding is administered through a complex, fragmented, state system that ultimately does not meet Arizona’s needs. There are multiple agencies involved that both provide and contend for resources and regularly duplicate services. This complexity and duplication creates a system that inefficiently expends administrative funds. This system *must* be simplified.

Additionally, there is a lack of uniformity in funding. We need to assess and evaluate funding mechanisms to ensure equitable delivery. We need to level the playing field when it comes to allocation of funds for early childhood care and education so that there is equitable access to early education regardless of the educator’s income, type of school, geographic location (urban vs. rural), or special needs of the child.

#### **D. Private Enterprise, Philanthropy, and Others**

Private enterprise, philanthropy, community and faith-based organizations, and individuals can support early child care and education through both financial and other support. By leveraging the private sector’s financial and human resources, we can supplement and advance Arizona’s current early child care and education system. Though it is not expected nor feasible for the private sector to fully fund the system, the private sector can support grass-roots community efforts that garner broader support for change.

Private enterprise and philanthropies can facilitate better system coordination to create a state-wide early education system in Arizona. For example, BUILD Arizona is part of a national initiative that works to align programs, policies, and services to support the creation of a comprehensive early childhood system. We should “build” on BUILD Arizona.

Also, private enterprise and philanthropy can serve a critical funding role for early childhood education and care. Early childhood education is relevant to the private sector as an investment in the economic and workforce development of the state. Philanthropy is a catalyst for high-quality



education. Investment in the form of scholarships and other assistance is important, especially in rural areas and for families that could not otherwise afford high-quality early childhood education. In addition, creative new approaches to private investment should be explored, such as providing seed money to incubate and innovate early education programs.

Additionally, private funds can be used to change the message concerning early childhood education through a cohesive media strategy that utilizes tools such as public service announcements. These financial resources can be used to leverage support for, provide political advocacy on, and educate government and families on the importance of the issue. Other private opportunities include private financing (such as was the case in the privately-financed capital improvements in the Higley Unified School District), private endowments of schools, and support of research, studies, and professional development of educators.

Supplemental educational opportunities can be provided by recruiting the skills and talents of Arizona's private sector. Such individuals can enhance school curriculum by teaching real-life skills, relating unique experiences, and supplementing arts and culture lessons.

#### **E. Coordination, Collaboration and Partnership Among Families, Providers, and Others**

Communication is key to encourage and improve coordination, collaboration, and partnership among Arizona's families, early childhood care and education providers, and other relevant organizations. We must improve communications across sectors, increase transparency at schools, educate voters on spending outcomes, and better communicate with families on available choices and resources. For example, real data and results such as First Things First Regional Partnership Councils' Needs and Assets Reports need to be better communicated and then used to attract additional resources and create sustainable funding.

To further encourage communication, we recommend organizing stakeholder conversations – perhaps even following the Arizona Town Hall model – about the goal of improving early childhood care and education to build bridges among stakeholders. Currently, stakeholders worry that if they do not compete for resources they will be left behind. Stakeholders need to view each other as allies, not competitors. The goal of these conversations would be for stakeholders to take an inventory of what resources are available, understand what is already being done and by whom, review data to identify what works and where there are gaps, identify steps to make accessing resources less overwhelming and confusing, and identify strategies for future success.

To further encourage coordination, collaboration, and partnerships, we support tasking a backbone organization with a proven track record, like First Things First, with coming up with a long-term strategy for early education in our state and to provide a “North Star” to follow and ensure effective collaboration. The state's long-term coordination plan should include elements such as further dissemination of the Early Learning Standards and Infant Toddler Guidelines; further aligned and streamlined systems and processes; one-stop shopping websites that assemble information from various organizations; use of social media to increase awareness and build momentum; branding; and “megaphone collaborators,” or champions for messages.

In addition to developing a statewide strategy, we need to foster collaboration and partnerships among public institutions, communities, civic organizations, faith-based organizations, non-profits, private industry, and volunteers. Arizona’s higher education network of community colleges and universities are critical partners that both assist in developing best practices and then teaching teachers those practices so that they can be brought to life in the classroom. Public libraries and the public library system also provide a great resource, particularly in rural areas, for families as well as educators. Many libraries provide social and emotional development opportunities. Finally, early childhood education must continue to foster a strong volunteer base, perhaps focusing on retirees and networked non-profits (e.g., Arizona Alliance of Nonprofits).

In the end, it is important for us to recognize that collaboration takes tremendous effort. It is easy to say we need to collaborate more, or that we need to collaborate better. It takes significant resources and a personal commitment to collaborate and to align our systems. We need to acknowledge what it will take to have the type of collaboration we want, and then we need to provide the funding and set the example to accomplish it.

#### **IV. Getting There: Setting Priorities and Taking Action**

The 103<sup>rd</sup> Arizona Town Hall strongly believes that the education of children from birth to age eight should be treated as a continuum, rather than the existing “patchwork” approach. As such, participants recommend taking the following cohesive set of actions, which have been identified as having the most potential beneficial impact on early childhood education and care:

##### *Restoring and/or increasing funding to increase affordability and availability of early childhood care and educational programs.*

- Restore state funding for full-day kindergarten and early education and care subsidies, including incentives for quality;
- Restore funding for the early childhood block grant, home visiting programs, and family literacy programs, and established but currently unfunded mandates;
- Expand Head Start programs, and comparable other public and private initiatives, to provide universal, voluntary early care and education, including pre-kindergarten;
- Expand tax credits to include high-quality early childhood education;
- Revise current education tax credits to equalize public and private school contribution amounts and timelines;
- Establish sustainable, dedicated funding sources and other creative funding strategies;<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For example, one proposed option is “Highway to Success” funding: Reduce driver’s license and state identification renewal intervals to four years and raise the fee from \$10 to \$40, dedicating 75% of the increased revenue to fund early childhood education initiatives.

- Fund, through the state and private sources, collaborative efforts to streamline and support the education system;
- Explore alternative, non-traditional financing, like social impact bonds, endowments, service taxes, national resource taxes, and public-private partnerships, as well as private investment in program seeding;
- Create scholarships through public-private partnerships for families paying for early education and for the professional development of educators and caregivers; and
- Modify public policy to include children birth through five years of age in Average Daily Membership (ADM) calculations of needed educational resources.

*Focusing on the quality of educational opportunities and care through a cohesive vision and consistent standards.*

- Early childhood educators must understand and incorporate practices of actively engaged learning based on the critical evidence of early brain development and positive developmental outcomes for young children;
- Expand on current, successful initiatives such as First Things First, and programs such as First Things First's Quality First, Expect More, BUILD Arizona, and new initiatives such as Read on Arizona, to create best practices and reach all areas of the state, including underserved, rural, and tribal areas;
- Utilize the Arizona Early Learning Standards and Infant Toddler Guidelines to create a developmentally and culturally appropriate curriculum;
- Restore music and arts programs to all kindergarten through third grade classrooms;
- Require that K–3 pre-service teachers in training complete coursework in early childhood education and early brain development, including recognition of and strategies for working with children with special needs, before receiving a teaching certificate;
- Require that all professional early educators be credentialed with formal preparation that includes college-level early childhood coursework;
- Encourage providers to participate in self-study opportunities and work towards accreditation; and
- Provide additional supports for unregulated providers such as family, friends, and neighbors.

*Encouraging collaboration and coordination across the early childhood community.*

- Support BUILD Arizona to advance policy recommendations to integrate and coordinate early childhood education programs and services.
- Continue to support the Arizona Ready Education Council K–3 recommendations, and explore the development of a Governor's Council focused on the coordination of birth-through-age-eight education;

- Vertically align the education continuum so that participants in the system – from healthcare providers to home visitors to families to educators to libraries to cultural organizations – coordinate efforts to most efficiently develop children; and
- Collaborate with parents and families to develop partnerships among schools, libraries, museums, health services, faith-based and community organizations (i.e., Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS), etc.), so that children not enrolled in programs have additional opportunities.

*Engaging in a comprehensive media, branding, and outreach campaign to communicate the importance of early childhood education and care and the availability of resources.*

- Emphasize the critical and positive economic development that accrues from investment in early childhood education;
- Convey the message that early childhood care and education is not just “daycare,” but rather a vital component of a child’s education;
- Conduct outreach to families and caregivers to explain the availability of programs and provide resources in educating children;
- Create a message about the importance of early childhood education at the BUILD Arizona level to then share and distribute within new avenues, those already in place, and circles of influence, utilizing sponsorships and media partnerships;
- Involve governmental agencies, programs (e.g., First Things First, Expect More Arizona), and private enterprises and philanthropies (e.g., United Way, Chambers of Commerce) to have a consistently delivered message;
- Utilize the media to advocate for greater funding;
- Create public relations, social media, and media-based campaigns to raise awareness to create widespread public support; and
- Engage lobbyists and all stakeholders to advocate for change at the legislature.

*Recruiting, developing, and retaining qualified early childhood educators.*

- Increase pay to a livable wage for early childhood professionals;
- Develop apprenticeship programs, lab schools, and mentoring opportunities through collaboration between stakeholders;
- Create a pathway for professional development, starting with career programs in high school and continuing to the highest level of advanced degree, and National Board Certification in Early Childhood or exceptional education, through partnerships with universities and nonprofits (e.g. the Arizona K12 Center); and
- Support and expand existing scholarship opportunities for early childhood educators, such as T.E.A.C.H. Arizona and PCCP (Career Pathways).



### Individual Call to Action

Individual Arizonans must commit to doing all we can to ensure that Arizona fulfills these goals and remembers that early childhood is the stage in human development of the whole child and is a pivotal time in an individual's physical, cognitive, and social-emotional growth and development. First and foremost, the 103<sup>rd</sup> Town Hall's participants must serve as ambassadors and share what we learned so that we can change the conversation about early childhood care and education: circulate the final report within our own circles of influence and post or link to the report on our social network sites; volunteer to speak to school districts, governing boards, charter associations, and community organizations and groups (e.g., Kiwanis and Rotary Clubs); write op-eds or letters to the editor; and participate in the follow-up discussion on early education throughout the state.

Politically, individuals can advocate and lobby for early education; educate themselves about how the budget and pending bills in the Arizona Legislature may impact early education (the Arizona School Boards Association and AEA provide this information upon request); reach out to their legislators and advocate for early education; get involved in local legislative district races and encourage everyone to vote, especially in the primaries; and endorse and donate to candidates and organizations that further the goals of early childhood care and education.

And in their "backyards," individuals can look for opportunities to volunteer, coach, teach, tutor, or mentor in schools; work within their local school districts to bridge the gap between early education and kindergarten; start discussions regarding preschool programs on their elementary school campuses; support and promote awards for early childhood caregivers and teachers; educate parents about early education options and resources; and recruit and encourage friends and colleagues entering the early childhood profession.

Our children are the future of our country and our state. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to act wisely and with vision on their behalf. To move forward in this way, we must ensure that our children are first healthy and safe, as well as empowered and equipped to thrive in the global economy.