



Edward Street Child Services
Providing advocacy, resources and support to early
childhood educators and the children they serve.



Early Childhood Matters: Community Plan for High Quality Early Education in Worcester



November 2009



Early Childhood Matters

Community Plan for
Early Education
Worcester, Massachusetts

VISION:

All of Worcester's children will have the opportunity to participate in high quality early childhood education that prepares them to enter school ready to learn and succeed.

MISSION:

A coordinated community early childhood education system that works for all stakeholders, including children, parents, providers, employers, and schools.



Executive Summary

The city of Worcester has a history of strong support for education. Learning is valued and encouraged, from the early childhood network to the public school system to colleges and universities and lifelong learning opportunities. Whether as parents, teachers, business leaders or elected officials, there is a shared understanding of the importance of education. And formal education starts with the Early Childhood Education system.

The Early Childhood Education system is facing a crisis. The need to increase quality while balancing access and affordability is challenging. Edward Street Child Services (ESCS) raised awareness of the crisis process by hosting a community meeting in October of 2008. The session, led by President John Bassett of Clark University, was attended by more than 120 local leaders who listened to speakers describe both the strengths of the current system on a national, state and local level, and the deficits. That community forum was followed by a meeting at Clark University where business and community leaders, funders and local providers discussed whether Worcester should undertake a process to strengthen the local early childhood system. The consensus was that Worcester should begin such a process, and ESCS was the appropriate agency to organize such a process.

Starting with a small group of professionals and a local consultant, the ESCS team outlined a process to gather information, build consensus, develop priorities, and draft a plan for review and approval by the Early Learning Leadership Advisory Council. With funding from the Greater Worcester Community Foundation the ESCS leadership convened focus groups, and interviewed representatives of early childhood agencies, community and business leaders, parents, educators and representatives of state agencies. In addition, to prepare the plan, the staff and consultant researched best practices in early childhood education as well as other community plans in Massachusetts and across the country. The development of the plan is aided by an advisory board of local representatives and by the Leadership Council, convened by John Bassett.

We must acknowledge the strengths of Worcester's current system of early education and care. Of significance:

- Worcester has a demonstrated commitment to high quality early childhood education. Close to 75% of our early education programs have achieved or are in the process of earning accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) under the new, more rigorous standards.
- Worcester has strong and numerous partnerships and collaborations among child care agencies and other organizations, institutions, and businesses
- Worcester has created unique models, including Together for Kids, a national model for addressing behavioral problems in young children
- Worcester early childhood agencies have numerous partnerships with local colleges and universities. They mutually benefit from research, interns, and opportunities for shared education.

The initial steps to develop a plan were followed by a consensus building process to determine the areas of concentration for action. Though a wide range of concerns and ideas surfaced, the topics that emerged most frequently included (A-F):

- A Access for more children
- A Affordability for families
- B Building community awareness,
- C Compensation for teachers and other staff
- D Developing new/expanded partnerships,
- E Education and preparation of the workforce
- F Facilities improvements

As a result of the research, interviews and focus groups, the following goals are recommended for inclusion in the Worcester Early Education Plan: **Early Childhood Matters**.

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Goal I | A+ Quality |
| Goal II | Awareness. |
| Goal III | Alignment |
| Goal IV | Advocacy |
| Goal V | Access |
| Goal VI | Affordability |
| Goal VII | Accountability |



Every child can learn and thrive despite poverty, despite problems at home, despite neighborhood violence. We need to get out of the catch-up business and it all starts with early childhood education.

- U. S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan

Background

Established in 1883 by a collaborative of women, Edward Street was the oldest childcare center in Worcester and the 15th oldest in the country. Located at 10 Edward Street from 1910 to 2000, the Center provided a variety of services for young children and their families for almost a century.

Edward Street Child Services (ESCS) replaced the child care center in 2004 and is now a capacity building organization for early childhood education (ECE). Edward Street Child Services leads a community wide collaboration that is “dedicated to promoting the growth of children and strengthening the family by improving the delivery of early learning services in greater Worcester through interagency collaborations, resource development, and direct funding of programs designed to address the social intellectual, emotional, and physical needs of each child”.

The six strategic issues that ESCS has determined to have significant importance in the delivery of quality childcare are:

- F**amily involvement and empowerment
- S**chool readiness
- S**trengthening child care centers
- T**eacher training and education
- C**ommunity education and advocacy
- I**ntegrated community services related to child care

As part of the mission, ESCS is managing the effort to develop a coordinated community plan for the city of Worcester.



INTRODUCTION

“Can We Solve Our Child-Care Crisis?” was the cover story of Parade Magazine in mid July, 2009. The story described the “crisis”, including issues of affordability, accessibility and quality care. Research indicates that high quality early education is an important investment. The difficulty is balancing high quality with cost and accessibility. Increasing quality results in increasing costs. Families are unable to afford the true cost of care. Government subsidies to families and centers do not cover the cost of providing care. The system is at a breaking point. This national “crisis” has also received attention from President Obama, who acknowledged “we know that the most formative learning comes in those first years of life.” (Boston Globe 3/13/09) Research provides evidence that investments in early education “pay off” in a myriad of ways. In response to the evidence and the need, both the Democrat and Republican platforms include plans for investing in early education and the stimulus plan includes funds for such investment. It is a time of challenge and opportunity. Worcester, like so many other cities across the country, is convening early childhood advocates and stakeholders to identify needs and respond to new opportunities.

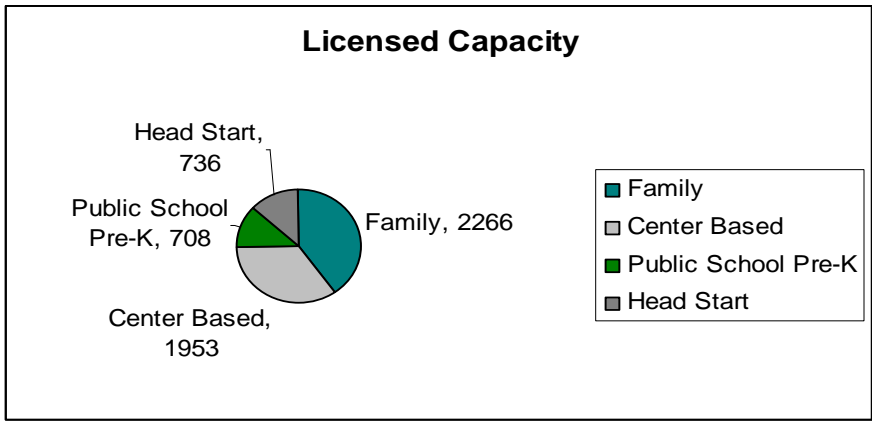
The Current Landscape

Early Childhood Centers

Currently there are 38 licensed early childhood education programs in Worcester. This includes small and large non-profit agencies, public school programs as well as many small for profit businesses. This mixed delivery system is important and allows parent to choose the setting that is most appropriate for their child’s unique needs. Twenty eight of our centers are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. (NAEYC). Worcester led the nation in accreditation under the new, more rigorous standards.

In 2006 licensed childcare capacity was 5,663. This included 736 children in Head Start, 708 children enrolled in public school preschool programs, 2,266 children served in family child-care and 1953 children enrolled in center based licensed programs. The total number of children under 5 was 11,142. Nationally, an estimated 70% of children under age 5 participate in out of home care at least part of the week. It is estimated that 7800 children require childcare in Worcester.

There are no reliable statistics for the number of unlicensed and/or home based and informal programs. Based on our estimates over 2000 children are involved in care which is often provided by relatives and friends. While the child’s physical and emotional needs are likely being met, the social, physical and cognitive developmental areas may not be a focus of daily activities.



**City of Worcester
2006**

Total Children Under 5:
11,142

Estimated Children in
Out of Home Care:
7800

Total Licensed Capacity:
5663

According to data from the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care as well as surveys of local providers:

- 15 centers in Worcester have closed since 2000
- 134 centers in Central Massachusetts have closed since 2000
- Local centers lose, on average, \$7.00 per child per day for state subsidized slots (\$1,750 per child per year)
- In central Massachusetts there are 8,313 children receiving subsidized care.
- Middle-income families are ineligible for subsidies and face the highest costs in relation to income. Because they tend to be younger and early in their careers, they have lower incomes and may have to use unlicensed, low-quality care.
- The annual cost of full-time licensed early education ranges from \$9,100 for preschool to \$12,735 for infant care in Worcester.
- A family earning \$30,000 would have to devote a third of its income toward the cost of full-time preschool for one child.



Teachers

Accreditation and certain funding streams are placing an increased emphasis on bachelor level teachers. We must retain these highly qualified professionals in order to provide high quality early education to our vulnerable children. Young children need stable relationships with caregivers. Inadequate pay leads to high turnover in staff, yet raising teacher salaries leads to higher costs making early education unaffordable for the families needing it most. As our early educators attain their degrees they often seek employment in the public school system where salaries are higher and workdays are shorter.

The average starting salary for a bachelor level pre-school teacher in the public school system is \$30,000 for 6 hrs. per day, 180 days per year or \$27.78 per hour. These teachers are also eligible for benefits like retirement and health insurance

The average salary for a preschool teacher with bachelor degree working in an early education and care center, with years of experience, is \$24,000 year for 8 hours per day, 260 days a year or \$11.54 per hour with no retirement package and few benefits.

Economic Impact of Early Childhood Education in Central Massachusetts

In 2004, with funding from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the National Economic Development and Law Center (NEDLC) researched the economic impact of the childcare industry in Massachusetts. According to the NEDLC the early education industry is integral to the vitality of the local economy. The system impacts the economy in 3 ways:

- Provides jobs within the sector including teachers and ancillary services
- Ensures a strong future economy by preparing children to be skilled, productive workers
- Enables employers to attract and retain employees, reduce absenteeism, and increase productivity

The research estimates:

Employment

Number of jobs in central Massachusetts created by the early education and care industry:

Group Child Care	1,878
Family Child Care	1,429
Public Preschool	491
Other jobs created	<u>1,555</u>
Total Jobs	5,353

Economic Impact in Central Massachusetts

Direct effects from Early Childhood	
Education (ECE) Business Operations:	\$155,831,444.
Indirect effects from ECE Business Operations:	\$ 58,841,953.
Effects from ECE staff spending wages:	<u>\$ 61,179,425.</u>
	\$275,852,822.

When considering the economic impact of early childhood education it is important to consider the number of parents of young children who are able to work and contribute to the local economy as a result of the availability of childcare.



When Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast of Mississippi in August 2005, Chevron executives moved quickly to restart the Pascagoula refinery and get gas flowing again. They also took stock of other types of infrastructure, including an often overlooked one: child care.

"After the hurricane, I understood how little I knew about how interconnected everything was, how everything could disappear overnight," says Steve Renfro, a member of Chevron's leadership team. "A disaster of the magnitude of Katrina has the power to stop the economy, but how do you restart it? We used portable electric generators to generate the fuel we needed to restart the refineries. Child care is like that generator. It enables parents to go back to work — a key factor in getting the rest of the economy back up and running."

Putting Child Care in the Picture: Why this service is a critical part of community infrastructure; Planning; June 2007

Dianne Bruce, Executive Director of Edward Street Child Services, wrote an As I See It Column on this subject for the Worcester Telegram and Gazette in 2005.

From the column:

As the city of Worcester looks toward revitalizing downtown and enhancing economic development programs, we should not overlook the important contribution of Early Childhood Education to the overall improvement of the local economy. While most children benefit from high quality early childhood education experiences, children from low-income families show the most significant gains across many domains. Not only are these children provided with the building blocks for academic success, they also show large gains in social-emotional development, which is critical for long-term success.

According to the National League of Cities, without early intervention, children living in poverty are more likely to experience poor health, score lower on standardized tests, be retained in grade, drop out of school, have out-of-wedlock births and end up as poor adults than rich or middle class children. A child born to a poor mother is more likely to die before his or her first birthday than a child born to an unmarried mother, a mother who smoked during pregnancy or a mother who is a high school dropout. Even within the same family, children born when the family's financial condition was worse, tend to complete less schooling than their brothers and sisters who were born during more financially stable times.

Several highly regarded research studies examining the role of Early Childhood Education clearly demonstrate the importance of and economic benefit of investing in early learning. The High/Scope Perry Preschool Project, The Syracuse Preschool Program, and the Abecedarian Project all demonstrated higher academic achievement and increased IQ scores in children participating in high-quality early childhood education programs that also provided parent education and home visiting. The economic benefit of these programs was realized in both the short and long term. These children were much less likely to be placed in special education, more likely to graduate from high school and less likely to drop out. In addition, program participants were less likely to be involved in juvenile and adult crime. In fact, the results of the Syracuse Preschool Program demonstrated that after 10 years, program participants were 70

per cent less likely to be involved with the criminal justice system. The incidence of teen pregnancy among participants was significantly less. Program participants were far less likely to rely on welfare benefits and on average earned \$2000 or more per month as adults than their peers who did not have the advantage of a high quality early education experience.

Worcester has a compelling need to look at the economic impact of early childhood education in the community. According to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health 46.1% of births to Worcester residents in 2000 were paid by public funds. This is up from 36% of public pay births to Worcester residents in 1990. Almost half of our young children were born into poverty. Without support during the critical early years, these children will require special education, juvenile justice intervention and welfare assistance in the future. The cost to the community will be enormous. The benefit-cost analysis conducted by the High/Scope Perry researchers found that for every \$1 invested in the program, over \$8.00 in benefits was returned to participants and society as a whole through less reliance on welfare programs, less special education expenditures and lower criminal justice expenses. A recent review of early childhood education research conducted by the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis contends that the internal rate of return is in fact, a 12 to 1 ratio. Few economic development projects can boast this high a benefit to the community.

Worcester points with pride to our outstanding number and caliber of institutions of higher education. Unfortunately, according to Census 2000, only 23.3 percent of the population has a bachelor's degree or higher. Public investment in early childhood which will prepare our youngest citizens for academic and life success, can lead to a higher percentage of college educated citizens and a better educated workforce.

The Opportunities

Worcester has a foundation of assets and resources on which to build a stronger, more coordinated system. Among the assets:

- The local early education network, which includes the second largest number of nationally accredited child care centers in the country
- Colleges and universities with Early Education departments
- The interest of employers, educators, parents and residents
- Business and community leaders who understand the importance and impact of early education
- Elected and appointed officials who recognize the connections between early education and success in further public and/or private education
- Community representatives who understand the significance of early childhood education to the long term stability and growth of the city and its institutions
- Families who value education and expect to raise their children in an environment that encourages learning at all stages of life

Since early 2009, there has been an effort underway to develop a community plan for early education in Worcester. The plan, guided by representatives from business, higher education, early childhood education, parent groups, public schools, public officials, and local foundations will build on current system and community strengths and address identified challenges. These diverse stakeholders will work together on behalf of early childhood education in Worcester.

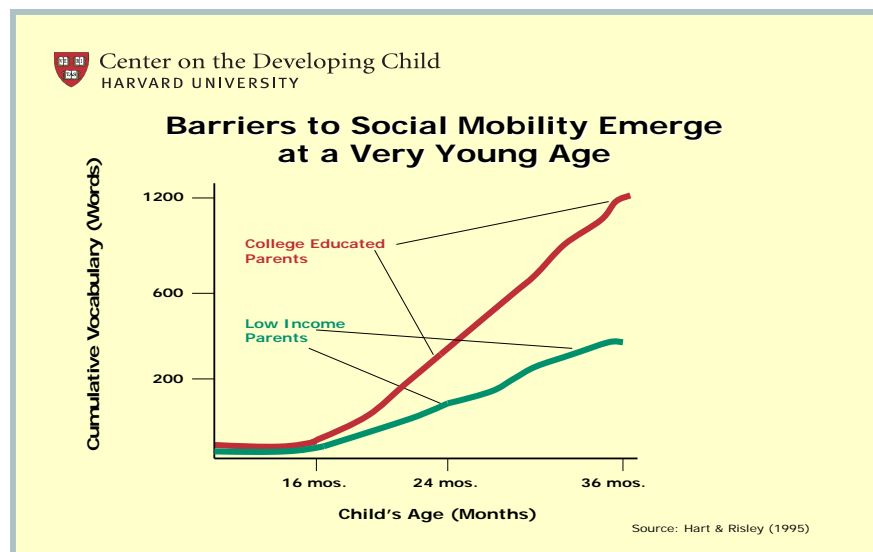
Plans for early education already exist in many other communities. By developing consensus and support from different (but connected) sectors, these communities set priorities and target current and new resources for implementation. Plans studied in preparation for developing the Worcester plan included Boston and Springfield, Massachusetts, Norwalk, Connecticut, Kansas City, Kansas, Long Beach and Santa Barbara, California. Though different in style and presentation, all plans offered the rationale, process and goals, strategies, outcomes and additional details. The Worcester Plan, unique to our community, will follow a similar format.



The Process

On October 31, 2008, Edward Street Child Services hosted a forum that brought 120 community leaders and representatives to Mechanics Hall to learn about Early Childhood Education as an economic development strategy. Guest speakers included: Rob Grunewald, an economist with the Minneapolis Federal Reserve; Paul Reville, Secretary of Education; and Margaret Blood, President of Strategies for Children.

At that meeting, guests learned that much of the achievement gap can be explained by early learning experiences. The Federal Reserve has been exploring models for early childhood education that emphasize system wide strategies to support early learning, professional development for teachers, and community partnerships. The initial session generated interest in the development of a more coordinated approach to early childhood education for the Worcester area. John Bassett, President of Clark University, hosted a follow up meeting where representatives from business, community based organizations, colleges and universities and city departments discussed the issues in more detail. There was general agreement that Worcester needed a plan and should undertake a planning process.



By the age of 3 we see significant gaps in language acquisition between children of low income parents and their peers with college educated parents. Without the intervention of early childhood education, the gap continues to widen and is quite pronounced by the time children enter school.

This is an opportune time for planning a community wide effort. There is a growing awareness of the connections linking early childhood education and future academic success, economic stability and workforce development. As an additional incentive, the federal economic stimulus package is investing billions of dollars into early childhood education—a clear signal this is a national priority.

Supported by an advisory board, and assisted by a consultant, Edward Street Child Services is coordinating the planning process. The broad goal of the project is to engage the larger community in working to find solutions to the issues of quality, access, and affordability of early childhood education in our community. ESCS started the planning process with research about national and state models of system wide coordination. A few of those models are listed in the resource section and can be accessed through the internet.

The process included the two community meetings, a review of contemporary research, interviews and a community-wide parent survey. To date, more than 100 stakeholders have shared their opinions, concerns and ideas. The initial steps were followed by a consensus building process to determine the areas of concentration for this action plan. As noted earlier, the topics that emerged most frequently:

- A**ccess for more children
- A**ffordability for families
- B**uilding community awareness
- C**ompensation for teachers and other staff
- D**eveloping new/expanded partnerships
- E**ducation and Preparation of the Workforce
- F**acilities improvements



What we emphasize in education is generally what we get. When we emphasize achievement above all else, then we are likely to produce achievement above all else. High achievement is desirable. But at what cost? When education becomes focused on production — namely, evidence of demonstrable achievement — then we have lost what it means to be educated. Teaching and learning are not just about achievement or quality-assured products. They are about care, compassion, love, hope, joy, passion, grace, relationship, and more. They are about people and how we nurture and are nurtured on our learning journeys.

Colin Gibbs, "Future Directions for Early Childhood Education: 10 Concerns", 2009

Strengths

While this process is focused on addressing major challenges, all stakeholders agreed Worcester has major strengths on which to build a more coordinated approach.

Worcester has an exceptionally high number of accredited programs. The community led the way, having the highest number of centers achieve accreditation under the new, extremely rigorous standards. At this time the city of Worcester has the second highest number of accredited centers in the country. This is a major accomplishment. Of the 38 licensed child care agencies in Worcester, 28 are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. This is a remarkable achievement and one that should be recognized and celebrated. Unfortunately, it appears few parents are aware of the value of accreditation or whether or not their children are in an accredited center. It does make a difference. The process to obtain accreditation is rigorous, costly and time consuming. The standards are high. As stated by NAEYC:

Since 1985, NAEYC has offered a national, voluntary accreditation system to set professional standards for early childhood education programs and help families identify high-quality programs. Today, NAEYC Accreditation represents the mark of quality in Early Childhood Education.

Worcester early childhood education programs engage in numerous, valuable collaborations and partnerships. Agency leaders are proud of the various projects that bring them together on behalf of children. Included is the model initiative, Together for Kids. This network of parents, teachers, advocates and mental health professionals received its initial investment from The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts. The rigorous research component of the model demonstrated effectiveness. The preschool expulsion rate was reduced to almost zero in participating centers. (Previously, Massachusetts had the 9th highest preschool expulsion rate in the country.) This led to financial support from United Way of Central MA and local foundations. The success of the model led to the Massachusetts legislature targeted funding to expand child behavioral services statewide.

A second example is Edward Street Child Services, which facilitates collaborations and offers trainings and learning opportunities for teachers and other staff. Recently the organization partnered with a local business (Davis Publications), Greater Worcester Community Foundation and Quinsigamond Community College to bring the North American Reggio Emilia liaison to Worcester for a presentation on the internationally recognized best practice approach in early childhood education. The Saturday session was attended by over 115 early childhood educators.

The education and professionalization of the workforce is important. Edward Street convened a group of childcare agencies, colleges offering early education programs, and the Educational Opportunity Center of the Colleges of Worcester Consortium to look at barriers to higher education for early education teachers. The community received a grant from the Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund to implement a model to assist incumbent teachers with financial

aid forms, matriculation, and problem solving around transportation and childcare. The model, called the Central Massachusetts Early Educators Professional Advancement Program includes work with high school students who have indicated an interest in early childhood education as a career. We are developing a pipeline of early childhood educators in Worcester.

Beyond the collaborations among early care and education agencies are the partnerships with other nonprofits, businesses, local, state and federal officials and funding sources. For example, the United Way of Central Massachusetts invests in the community impact priority, **Ensuring Children’s Readiness for School**.

The strengths and successes of the early childhood education system in Worcester provide a strong foundation on which to build a more coordinated system to benefit families and children, employers, providers, educators and community members.

Planning for the Future

The results of surveys, interviews and meetings are not surprising and confirm what has been known and discussed by those in the field for many years. While there has been progress in many of the areas identified as priorities, work remains. As noted by one provider, the “foundation exists, but hasn’t been pulled together”. Listed earlier were the several areas that require attention and strategic direction to propel the early childhood education system in Worcester forward.

Those areas have provided the basis for goals, followed by rationale, strategies, outcomes, indicators and timetable. The goals are prioritized, but subject to review and changes by the Advisory Board and Leadership Council. The more specific components, like strategies, etc., are not yet prioritized. Once the goals of the plan are approved and accepted by the Leadership Council, subcommittees will form to work out the details. Edward Street Child Services, supported by its Board of Directors and staff, is committed to continuing the process through the final stages of planning and into the implementation phase. The plan will remain a Work in Progress, and the goal areas may be modified or revised as research, time and resources require. Expected results from the implementation of this plan include:

- A more coordinated system of early childhood education that strengthens the links among early childhood education programs, the public schools, other service providers, employers, and parents
- An informed public that recognizes, understands and supports the value of early education
- An early childhood education workforce that has opportunities for professional development and appropriate compensation and benefits
- More affordable and accessible early childhood education options for families

Goal I. A+ Quality

Rationale

Research highlights the benefits of early childhood education and underscores the importance of program quality to achieve desired outcomes. The experts, however, have not determined a universal definition of quality. One nationally recognized measure of quality is the National Association for the Education of Young Children accreditation. The NAEYC standards measure program quality across a variety of areas and have set the bar high. Worcester is fortunate to have more than 50% of its early childhood education programs accredited by NAEYC. Those centers that are already accredited should be assisted in maintaining that status and other centers should be encouraged to start the process. Gaining accreditation is a rigorous process, but the high standards of the NAEYC ensure programs of quality for young children.

Quality is also connected to the early childhood education workforce which has significant challenges in the areas of compensation and benefits. Some centers experience significant turnover as trained and experienced personnel leave for more satisfactory salaries elsewhere.

“Research shows that better-educated preschool teachers with specialized training are more effective...Conversely, research shows that low educational qualifications and a lack of specific preparation in preschool limit the educational effectiveness of many preschool teachers. The requirements for teacher qualifications continue to increase, but salaries have not kept pace.” (Early Learning Research: Characteristics of High Quality Early Learning Programs)

The Worcester Salary and Benefits Study completed February of 2008 documented that:

- The average wage for a center-based Program Director was \$20.55 an hour or \$42,744 annually.
- Lead teachers are paid an average of \$13.76 an hour or \$28,620 annually.
- Assistant teachers and teachers’ aides salaries range from \$18,865 to \$22,193.00
- Benefits vary greatly. Those centers which are part of large multi-service organizations are better able to offer competitive benefits than smaller agencies.

The quality of a child care program is connected to the education of the workforce. As noted in the Worcester Salary and Benefits Study based on the work of Rolnick and Grunewald, “Children who are given the opportunity to participate in quality programs, with highly educated teachers are less likely to be enrolled in special education, less likely to be involved in the juvenile justice system, are more likely to graduate from high school and pursue further education and are less likely to rely on the welfare system as adults.” The Plan will offer several strategies to promote accreditation and the recruitment, retention and support of staff.

Facilities play a significant role in programming. Space must be safe and free of environmental hazards. Furniture and facilities should be designed for children. Historically, many centers have retrofitted space for childcare that was never intended for that purpose. Licensing standards have not kept up with the research. For example, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts licensing standards require 35 square feet of programming space per child in a center. Research has shown, however, that cortisol levels in children (a measure of stress) remain high until a minimum of 54 square feet per child is reached (Legrendre). It would be difficult for many early childhood education centers to meet more stringent requirements, but the research should be considered for new or renovated facilities. Space does have an effect on the quality of programs and local centers should be supported in their efforts to improve/acquire appropriate facilities.



Strategies

Professional Development:

- Expand the current Central Massachusetts Early Childhood Educators Professional Advancement Program
- Identify and promote professional development opportunities for center-based staff via email and/or website
- Pilot a “circuit rider” program bringing specialized skills to classrooms while providing much needed time for teachers to plan curriculum, write reports, etc.
- Offer English for Speakers of Other Languages programs on site to recruit employees who reflect the diversity of the community (and the children) but who have limited English proficiency.

Sustainability:

- Maintain our significant level of NAEYC accredited centers
- Promote accreditation to all providers
- Encourage and promote programs that provide mentoring, train-the-trainer, diversity and leadership within the early education profession
- Support local, state and federal initiatives that link early childhood education facilities and programs with other economic development initiatives in the community
- Assist with efforts to build, renovate or otherwise improve early childhood education facilities
- Develop a leadership development program for current and future agency and program directors with an emphasis on the skills necessary for operation of A+ programs.
- Offer workshops to share practices in recruiting and retaining good employees

Compensation and Benefits:

- Develop a system of bonuses and incentives for increased credentials leading to staff retention
- Support local, state and federal initiatives that focus on compensation and retention of employees

Parental Involvement:

- Provide learning opportunities for early education and care staff and parents.
- Research and offer a series of training programs on child development for educators and parents.
- Expand the Together for Kids model (working with children who exhibit challenging behaviors) and reduce the negative effects on children, the classroom and on the teachers.
- Research and report parent involvement models that demonstrate success in engaging parents in their children's education

Outcomes

- Currently accredited agencies maintain status
- Support provided for additional programs that seek accreditation
- An incentive plan for teacher compensation and/or bonuses is implemented
- Professional development opportunities are scheduled on a regular basis and evaluated for customer satisfaction and effectiveness
- A minimum of two new activities each year that address one or more of the strategies
- A more stable workforce
- Increased parental involvement
- Reciprocally improved communication and transition services from Early Education providers to public education classrooms

Indicators

- Maintain/increase level of NAEYC accreditation
- Compensation plan in place to reward increased educational attainment of teachers
- Number of professional development activities carried out annually
- Number of teachers participating in professional development activities
- Documented improvement in retention levels of workforce
- Increase in number of parents/caregivers involved in the early education of their children
- Number of parents aware of accreditation of centers and of quality standards
- Policies and procedures exist to transition children from early education programs to public school classrooms

Goal II.

Awareness

Rationale

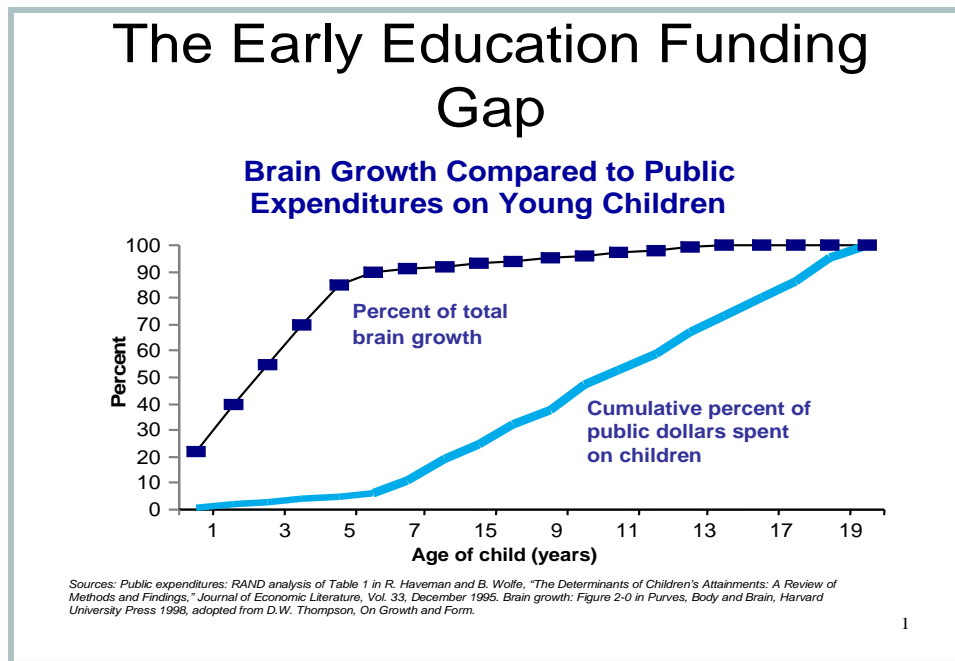
From the interviews, surveys and research, we know that early education and care is often misunderstood and undervalued. It is often characterized as “babysitting” or “day care”. Educators, employers and caregivers should understand the importance of this early foundation. Our children are our future. Their readiness for school and life impacts our economy today and tomorrow.

The importance of NAEYC accreditation should be understood and appreciated. Unfortunately, a recent local survey confirmed that parents did not know if their child’s center was accredited. Parents should know about and understand the importance of high quality early childhood education. Accreditation is one clear indicator of quality. The community should also have a better understanding of the importance of early childhood education and its impact on society, the workforce (present and future) and the local economy. Parents, school personnel, community members, and the media should know about, and take pride in, the number of centers that are accredited in the Worcester area. An awareness campaign similar to those targeting drunk driving, cancer, the environment etc. is needed to inform all stakeholders about this important field.

The awareness campaign should inform parents and stakeholders about what is appropriate and suitable for young children in a learning environment. During one focus group, local early education providers mentioned that parents are asking for “skill and drill” work (and worksheets) to develop reading and writing skills for preschoolers. These parents are already thinking about preparation for the MCAS. While skill building is an aspect of early education, an awareness campaign will emphasize the total development of the child, particularly in the social-emotional domain. Early educators nurture curiosity as they work with children to explore their environment. This inspires a lifelong love of learning.

While the emphasis on developmentally appropriate education for young children is valid, it is not the only reason to promote a coordinated community plan for Worcester. Early education programs are essential for the economy and workforce of this community. These programs allow parents to work. The ice storm of 2008 provided a clear example of what happens when services are disrupted. The Worcester Public Schools were closed for several weeks because of the storm and its aftermath. Winter vacation followed. As a result, many parents had to quickly make other arrangements. Early education programs that accept vouchers were required to be open. Parents with young children were able to work. Parents with school age children had to find childcare arrangements wherever possible. Many employers found that parents of school age children were unable to work because they did not have a safe place for their children. This serves as a clear reminder that safe, reliable, quality early education and care is a critical component of our local infrastructure.

Finally, an awareness campaign will address misconceptions about early childhood education and its purpose. Recent editorials (and the public response to those editorials) illustrate the public misperception about this field. These misunderstandings must be countered with facts, figures and examples. As the national trend toward universal preschool grows, the public needs to understand the importance of the public investment in early education and why it is in the nation’s best interest to invest early.



Strategies

Public relations

- Plan and implement a public relations campaign
- Prepare monthly op-ed pieces to run in local media highlighting the importance of early childhood education
- Outreach to parents to help them take an active role as their child’s first teacher
- Convene an annual summit on early education for educators, providers, legislators and other community leaders
- Prepare a report card on progress toward goals listed in this plan
- In partnership with providers and stakeholders, host an annual Legislative Breakfast to discuss issues of common interest
- Continue to collect and publish data and information that affects the availability, quality and understanding of early childhood education

Employer understanding

- A “Teal Ribbon Campaign” focusing on business and employers to highlight the importance of early childhood education for employees of today and for the future
- Recruit a small task force of employers to discuss this plan and make recommendations on how employers might address early childhood education for/with their employees.
- Produce materials on the economics of early education in Worcester that can be shared with employers, educational institutions, city officials and other stakeholders
- Recruit speakers who are willing to make presentations to local business groups, civic clubs, churches and other groups on behalf of the early education system.

Recognition

- Gather/write articles for print and websites that highlight agencies with NAEYC accreditation
- Establish annual awards for innovative early education programs and recognition for those who make contributions to the sector
- Establish annual awards for family friendly businesses that highlight best practices



Many employers are utterly unwilling to look at flexibility as a possible support to workers. I work in a child welfare nonprofit with no flex time, no ability to work from home, and no real interest in work/life balance. Especially for those who choose to work in nonprofits, with lower pay scales and benefits, one would think those types of benefits would be ones that employers would be eager to offer.

I had to send my daughter to live with her father because I could not get to the center for pick-up on time. If I could adjust my work schedule so I could leave work 15 minutes earlier my daughter could live with me. I would work through lunch! I miss my daughter.

Comments from parents in response to a community survey on early care and education October 2009

Outcomes

- A community whose members are more knowledgeable about, and supportive of, the importance of Early Childhood Education.
 - Employers institute policies supportive of families who use early education programs
-

Indicators

- Public Relations campaign planned
- Number of articles printed, presentations given
- Community summit occurs, attended by broad representation of stakeholders
- Number of employers who add/change policies to assist families



Goal III. Alignment

Rationale

Most early education participants in this process mentioned the need for more consistent, standardized policies to transition children from early childhood education to the K– 12 system. Schools vary in their enrollment procedures and their level of interest in the preschool experience. Early childhood educators have requested opportunities for more structured transitions so that relevant information could be shared.

The Worcester community has 38 early education and care programs. While similar, each program has its own mission and philosophy. The vast majority of children exiting our early childhood programs will be entering the Worcester Public Schools. Collaboration among providers and the public school will help to align curriculum and standards so that children will have a consistent educational experience across centers to better prepare them for the next phase of their academic career. The development of a strong partnership will help K – 12 teachers to understand the important work that occurs in early childhood education and the critical development across all domains that lead to academic success. Joint professional development opportunities will develop partnerships, increase respect, and break down barriers. Aggregate data shared between the public schools and the ECE community will help to inform teaching practice.



The path to success does not begin at age 17. The earliest months and years of life are a crucial time when we build the foundation of children’s character, how they relate to others and how they learn. Long-term research shows that quality early childhood education raises graduation rates by up to 44%. Research further shows that kids who fail to get it are 70% more likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age 18, making them potentially unfit for service and a threat to their communities. Furthermore, every dollar invested in quality early childhood programs can save \$16.

Statement from “Mission: Readiness” a nonprofit, bi-partisan organization led by senior retired military leaders ensuring continued American security and prosperity into the 21st century by calling for smart investments in the next generation of American children.

Local universities have added extraordinary value to the early education experience. Interns provide classroom support, research topics of interest, and bring their enthusiasm and knowledge to the centers. Several local colleges and universities have Early Education departments which link to centers in the community. Students volunteer for projects in the neighborhoods where both colleges and centers are located. For example, Holy Cross students helped to build the playground at Worcester Comprehensive Child Care Center in Main South. WPI students have provided technology support services for 14 early childhood centers in the community.

Strategies

- Develop a more formal relationship between the K – 12 systems (Public, Private, Charter) and a more structured transition for children and their families. Continue and expand formal and informal relationships with local colleges and universities
- Identify gaps and barriers for children and families in early education programs who need additional support or services and develop model(s) for accessing such support
- Share available data across programs to prepare children for success



Goal IV. Advocacy

Rationale

Early childhood education benefits the entire community on several levels. As an economic development strategy, the return on investment has been estimated to be as high as \$17.00 for every \$1.00 invested. (Rolnick and Grunewald) High quality early childhood education allows parents to work and contribute to the local economy. Clearly, program quality matters. Parents will be able to focus on their work knowing that their children are in a safe and nurturing environment. In this way, the system benefits the business community today. The system also provides long term benefits to the business community. Reduced special education and juvenile justice costs positively impact the local tax rate. Preparing children to enter school ready to learn prepares the workforce of the future. Typically, advocates for improving the delivery of early education services have been the providers and teachers themselves. Their advocacy work is often viewed as self-serving. Bringing the voices of parents and the business community to the advocacy work will help the entire community to understand and invest in early childhood education.

Strategies

- Where appropriate, integrate activities and strategies with Goal III
- Educate key stakeholders about the importance of accreditation, workforce compensation, facilities, transition to schools and other relevant issues
- Recruit non-traditional allies to advocate for state and federal funding for early childhood education
- Highlight family friendly employer practices through awards and media announcements
- Engage in coordinated activities to advocate on behalf of policies that impact early childhood education



Goal V. Access

Rationale

As established by research and proven through experience, early education is extremely important for all young children. Opportunities must be available to ensure healthy development, readiness for school, and long term success and achievement.

The current method of funding for the system of early education and care denies access to many working families. Funding provides access for care – not for early childhood education. The very poor and those families transitioning off of temporary assistance for needy families (TANF) and into the workforce are eligible for vouchers for childcare, dependent upon the behavior of the parents. Although research shows that poor children benefit the most from early childhood education, unless there is a service need (parent working) the child will not have access to a voucher. A focus group of low income parents highlighted their frustrations and disappointments with attempts to access early education and care for their children.

They spoke of the difficulty in understanding the requirements (which often seemed contradictory), the difficulty in getting to required appointments, and the challenges of finding transportation to and from the child care center and work. The system seemed to discourage parents, not inspire them to enroll their children in early education programs. And now, less state funding is available for vouchers to subsidize the care of low income children.

In the past, Massachusetts state agencies overspent in the budgeted early education and care voucher line and then petitioned the legislature for more money. In the current economy, that is no longer possible. There is less opportunity for these families to access important programs for their young children.

Sick child care remains an issue for working families. To protect all children, centers cannot allow children to attend when sick. Parents are threatened with job loss if they take time off to care for sick children.



- Assure that the income-eligible wait list for Worcester is accurate for the region to assure equitable subsidies
- Create and pilot a community case manager who will assist parents in gathering necessary information and completing applications for subsidized care as well as connections to other resources for families
- With community and school partners, develop and implement a series of workshops for parents and teachers to build skills and understanding and to encourage their participation in the education of their young children
- Offer programs that are culturally and linguistically appropriate.
- Research and report on models of parent involvement that demonstrate success in achieving parent participation. Share models with parent networks, early education and care staff, schools and other interested parties.
- Work with parents, providers and employers to find solutions for sick child care

If public policy aims to encourage college attendance, a focus on improving the environments of children and improving preparation for college will be more effective than grant or loan programs to economically or cognitively disadvantaged children in their late teen-age years. Since what is known about cognitive ability is that it is formed relatively early in life and becomes less malleable as children age, programs that operate later in the life cycle are likely to be both ineffective in promoting college attendance and wasteful of public funds.

Recent studies of early childhood investments have shown remarkable success and indicate that the early years are important for early learning. Moreover, early childhood interventions of high quality have lasting effects on learning and motivation.

Invest in the Very Young; James J. Heckman, PhD Nobel Laureate in Economic Sciences; Ounce of Prevention Fund, 2000

Goal VI. Affordability

Rationale

The cost of high quality early childhood education is often not affordable for parents who need and want the services. There are many factors affecting affordability. First, parents of young children are at the beginning of their careers when their earnings are likely the lowest. In Worcester, the average cost of full-time licensed early education ranges from \$9,100 annually for preschool care to \$12,735 for infant care. A family earning \$30,000 a year would have to devote a third of its income for preschool for just one child.

Second, the largest expense in child care is salaries and benefits. Staffing levels are mandated and require a low ratio of staff to children. In Massachusetts, the child to staff ratio for infant care is 2:1; for toddler care it is 1:4; and for preschool 1:10.

The current focus on increasing teacher credentials is negatively affecting affordability. As a result of higher accreditation standards, many teachers have returned to school. As teachers earn college degrees they should be adequately compensated. Too often, teachers look for positions within the public school system after attaining their degrees, where salaries are significantly higher and hours and number of days worked are significantly less. High quality programming requires degreed teachers. If the centers in Worcester are to remain accredited we must find a way to appropriately compensate hard working and highly qualified teachers. Quality must not be compromised to achieve affordability.

The current economy is severely impacting families and early education and care agencies. Parents who have lost their jobs or fear job losses, have reduced their use of early education and care. Many are seeking part time care or are making arrangements for informal care to reduce costs. While the care may be adequate, the caregiver likely does not have the early childhood education/child development background that would lead to a high quality learning experience for the child.



- Develop and pilot a shared services model to reduce overhead costs for organizations: Services to include human resources, billing, payroll, transportation, food purchase and preparation
- Work with employers to develop a local scholarship model for young children, particularly those whose parents earn too much to qualify for state subsidized care but not enough to afford high quality early childhood education
- Develop partnerships between employers and the early education programs close to their facility
- Encourage employers to add early childhood education/childcare options to a cafeteria style benefits package
- Educate employers and parents about dependent care tax credits
- Based on successful models in other communities, partner with family care providers and private and public early childhood education programs to assure that children in family care arrangements have access to high quality early childhood education for a minimum of 3 hours per day.
- Continue to advocate for Universal Preschool in the commonwealth



Goal VII Accountability

Rationale

This proposed plan is designed to be a working document. Priorities may change. The availability of funds for specific areas of focus may also change. However, Edward Street Child Services and the community must remain focused on the needs of the youngest and most vulnerable members of our community. Working toward goals and monitoring progress in a transparent and public way will assure that children will receive the attention they deserve. The community requested this plan; the community, guided by Edward Street Child Services, must remain committed to its success.

Strategies

- Recruit a task force to meet quarterly to monitor progress toward meeting goals of this plan
- Provide support and feedback on the progress of this plan to those who are involved in carrying out the implementation
- Provide quarterly reports on progress to the Early Learning Leadership Advisory Council
- Host annual community-wide events to highlight success and generate further support



With guidance from the Early Learning Leadership Advisory Council, Edward Street will be recruiting community members to work on furthering developing strategies within each goal area. If you would like to participate, please contact us at:

director@edwardstreet.org or 508.792.0220

Next Steps

- Develop subcommittees to focus on each goal area
- Gather baseline data
- Set priorities
- Develop implementation plans
- Pilot initiatives
- Monitor progress
- Report to community

Over the past three decades, business leaders have invested time, expertise and resources in efforts to improve K—12 education in the United States. What we have learned leads us to conclude that America’s continuing efforts to improve education and develop a world class workforce will be hampered without serious federal and state commitments to high-quality early care and education for all children, zero through five. In challenging economic times, it is essential that public investment be as efficient and effective as possible. Investments in quality early care and education, with a particular focus on children most at risk, are a wise and safe investment in our nation’s success.

“Why America Needs High Quality Early Care and Education”;
Business Roundtable and Corporate Voices for Working Families

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