

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS: INVESTING OUR RESOURCES WISELY

Behind their sweet and innocent faces, infants and toddlers in the State of Washington are engaged in serious work. As they eat, sleep, play, observe and interact with others, these diminutive human beings are busy wiring and shaping their brains. To be ready for and successful in school and life, our infants and toddlers need families, providers and systems ready to support them.

To help them achieve this readiness, a collaborative group of key stakeholders developed a Birth to Three Comprehensive Plan (B-3 Plan) at the request of the 2010 Washington State Legislature in House Bill 2867. This pragmatic, yet powerful, plan consists of actionable policy recommendations in seven high-level focus areas, each of which are outlined below. Within each area are specific “next steps” that build on existing efforts to improve services and achieve measurable outcomes for children and families.

Most of these recommendations are based on strategies and policies identified in Washington’s Early Learning Plan (ELP) and the 2009 Recommendations to the Governor. The collaborative focus on birth to three, however, is an exciting and important new development in the state’s efforts to actively support early learning. These strategic policy recommendations make more effective use of our state’s limited resources by capitalizing on the natural synergies of proven, evidence-based approaches.

READY AND SUCCESSFUL CHILDREN

1. HEALTH & DEVELOPMENTAL WELLBEING

Sustain support for and build services, systems and infrastructure that optimize the physical health, mental health and developmental wellbeing of infants and toddlers, including universal developmental screening for infants and young children.

Next Steps:

- Develop a joint plan between relevant agencies (DEL, OSPI, DOH and DSHS) from current funding to promote a system for Universal Developmental Screening.
- Align Washington State’s Medicaid payment policies and procedures with strategies to expand and promote developmental screening among health care providers.
- Amend Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) program policy to include serving infants and toddlers identified as at-risk of developmental delay based on established risk categories (e.g., infants and toddlers in foster care, premature infants and toddlers).

- Engage child care programs in educating parents and families about developmental screening and connecting families to resources

2. HOME VISITING.

Increase availability of quality services to at-risk families and caregivers of infants and toddlers by supporting a portfolio of effective evidence-based home visiting programs so that families and communities can choose which EBHV model best meets family and community needs.

This high-level recommendation is closely linked with the following recommendation to support parents and caregivers as their children's first and most important teacher, but highlighted individually due to its distinct value as a prioritized form of service delivery to support infants and toddlers

Next Steps:

- Expand investments in home visiting programs to reach a greater number of vulnerable children.
- Increase quality implementation by assessing and monitoring fidelity and building organizational capacity.
- Develop statewide structure for and require common reporting of activities, outputs, fidelity measures, indicators and outcomes across programs implementing the same EBHV models.
- Assess the feasibility of a portfolio approach to positively impact targeted child and family outcomes.
- Build the knowledge- and evidence-base for the range of research-based and promising home visitation models, including what is required to implement evidence-based models.
- Support interagency coordination and stakeholder involvement in statewide efforts to plan and implement home visitation services.

READY AND SUCCESSFUL PARENTS, FAMILIES & CAREGIVERS

3. POLICIES & PROGRAMS THAT SUPPORT STRONG FAMILIES AND PARENTS¹ AND CAREGIVERS AS THEIR CHILDREN'S FIRST AND MOST IMPORTANT TEACHER.

Engage parents as partners in all aspects of birth to three planning and *support programs and policies that promote parents as children's first and most important teachers through information, resources and other supports that are easy to access, culturally competent, relevant and affordable.*

Next Steps:

- Strengthen the connections between medical providers and parents of infants and toddlers to promote early literacy.
- Provide information, services and supports to meet the unique needs of families with and caregivers of infants and toddlers.

4. FAMILY, FRIEND & NEIGHBOR CARE

Design, implement and expand statewide outreach and support for FFN caregivers.

Next Steps:

- Provide information, support and education to FFN providers of infants and toddlers through community-based strategies similar to those used for parents, such as home visiting, medical providers, Community Cafés, library partnerships, Play & Learn groups, and parenting education.
- Expand infrastructure for Kaleidoscope Play & Learn.
- Require and incentivize foundational training for FFN providers participating in the child care subsidy program.

¹ Throughout the Birth to Three Comprehensive Plan, the term “parents” refers to all those in parenting roles: birth mothers and fathers, adoptive and foster mothers and fathers, kinship caregivers (grandparents and other family members raising children), guardians and other adults acting as parents. The role of fathers, in particular, is often overlooked by services and programs. This B-3 Plan calls for greater attention to fathers throughout the continuum of infant and toddler services.

READY AND SUCCESSFUL EARLY LEARNING PROFESSIONALS

5. HIGH-QUALITY PROFESSIONALS & ENVIRONMENTS

Develop and invest in policies, infrastructure and supports that improve the quality of care and environments for infants and toddlers.

Next Steps:

- Provide interdisciplinary consultation to licensed family child care home and center-based childcare settings to improve the quality of care for infants and toddlers.
- Work with higher education systems to develop an infant/toddler credential program.
- Improve the quality of child care (center-based and family child care home) by providing comprehensive services through partnerships between child care and Early Head Start.
- Change current Washington Administrative Code for child care centers to include trained infant/toddler consultation for toddler as well as infant rooms.

READY AND SUCCESSFUL SYSTEMS AND COMMUNITIES

6. CHILD CARE SUBSIDY POLICIES & PROGRAMS THAT SUPPORT STRONG FAMILIES AND HIGH-QUALITY CARE.

Design and fund child care subsidy programs and policies to support parent choice and access to affordable, continuous, high-quality care for families of infants and toddlers.

Next Steps:

- Expand the supply of high-quality infant/toddler care through the provision of incentives in the subsidy system to licensed child care providers meeting higher standards.
- Allow for authorization of 12-month eligibility for families with infants and toddlers receiving subsidies when programs meet higher-quality standards.

7. INFRASTRUCTURE, PARTNERSHIPS & MOBILIZATION.

Build state-level infrastructure for coordinated birth to three systems that promotes collaborative governance, accountability, and the use of relevant data and funding streams; supports strong partnerships; and connects to and mobilizes local and regional infant and toddler efforts.

Next Steps:

- Promote funding for existing birth to three programs that have a continuum of services; identify service gaps for infants and toddlers; and ensure that, as Pre-K services are phased in, a parallel funding stream for birth to three services is developed in tandem.
- Create an advisory committee connected to the Early Learning Advisory Council focused on infants and toddlers.
- Develop mechanisms for linkages and feedback loops to generate mutually beneficial two-way learning opportunities that extend across and between tiers, including community-based organizations, institutions and agencies; county and regional planning entities; and the state level.
- Promote the use of established Core Competencies and benchmarks for infants and toddlers.
- Highlight information specific to infants and toddlers in all early learning data systems, including reporting on the indicators (or “vital signs”) associated with Washington’s broader Early Learning Plan.
- Develop a system to link regional birth to three data being collected with the statewide P-20 Longitudinal Data System in development.
- Invest in recruitment and retention activities to build the availability of infant and toddler care in communities across the state.
- Incentivize the broader adoption of Strengthening Families, an existing, overarching collaborative framework already used by several organizations and agencies