

Strategic Plan for Child Care and Development In Los Angeles County 2013-18

Prepared by the Los Angeles County Child Care Planning Committee – April 5, 2013



Office of Child Care

STRATEGIC PLAN FOR CHILD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT



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INTRODUCTION

The Strategic Plan for Child Care and Development in Los Angeles County (2013-18) was developed over an 18 month period and involved the entire Child Care Planning Committee (Planning Committee) and other stakeholders. The following provided the context for planning:

- The lingering economic recession, which reduced public revenues that could be invested in child care and development;
- The tremendous cuts to the funded system of subsidized child care and development;
- The expanding implementation of Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) in Los Angeles County;
- The increasing expectations for the competencies of the early childhood workforce;
- The recognition of the many vulnerable children in County client families who would benefit from good quality child care and development services, and the successful attempt at more effective connections between such services and the children in families served by the Department of Children and Family Services;
- The need to keep a focus on the inclusion of children with special needs during times of reduced resources; and
- The growing importance of a more unified message about investments in and improvements to the child care and development infrastructure.

Planning resulted in four overarching goals in these areas: Quality, Access, Planning Council Role, and Workforce. Each goal and the allied strategies reflect these contextual realities and relate to the larger vision articulated by the Desired Impact and Outcome statements.

This Plan emphasizes strategy over fixed objectives in order to provide a fluid approach in an ever-changing policy and fiscal environment. The strategies recognize the the limitations of the Planning Committee, and at the same time have the potential to create incremental change and synergies that move the infrastructure of child care and development in a positive direction.

Implementation of the Strategic Plan will involve the efforts of the Planning Committee along with the actions, support, and initiatives of other local and statewide stakeholders. The strategies presented in this plan assume effective coordination between the Planning Committee, the Policy Roundtable for Child Care and specific programs, such as the Steps to Excellence Program (STEP), Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP), and more. The actions taken by the Planning Committee in carrying out the stated strategies will be developed by work groups formed around each of the four major goal areas. Examples of ideas for implementation are referenced in the implementation section associated with each component of the Strategic Plan. The work groups include Planning Committee members and their alternates and other interested stakeholders. Participation in the work groups is open to the public. Quarterly, the work groups will report on the progress of their efforts to the full Planning Committee.

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QUALITY

DESIRED IMPACT: HIGH QUALITY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION IS AVAILABLE THROUGHOUT LOS ANGELES COUNTY.

OUTCOME OF PLAN: There is a common definition of "quality" as articulated by an agreed upon Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) for both centers and family child care homes that addresses the comprehensive needs of children.

GOAL: QRIS implemented in Los Angeles County is accessible and understandable to parents, providers, and the public.

Strategy 1: Promote alignment of standards for QRIS.

Strategy 2: Support development of a QRIS operational structure that is effective, efficient, and informative.

Strategy 3: Support development of educational/informational materials for providers and parents that explain the QRIS and the ratings.

Strategy 4: Facilitate support for, and information to, programs and providers in order to assist with incorporating health, mental health, family support and other relevant community services.

QUALITY

Background

- Research documents the relationship between high quality in child development services and positive outcomes for children. While the optimal level of quality has yet to be determined, it appears that even modest improvements, particularly in teacher/child interactions and early learning environments, translates into markedly better developmental results. Many states and regions have developed and are implementing QRIS, which are proving to boost provider and program quality as well as raise parent and public consciousness about the impact quality has on children's overall well-being.
- The 2003-13 Strategic Plan included an objective to develop quality standards against which licensed child care and development programs – centers and family child care homes – could be evaluated. The Policy Roundtable for Child Care (Roundtable) adopted the objective and created the Steps to Excellence Project (STEP) in 2005 as Los Angeles County's QRIS. Since the pilot phase of STEP, the rating matrices defining quality criteria in six areas of program operation – regulatory compliance; teacher/child relationships; learning environment; identification and inclusion of children with special needs; teacher qualifications and working conditions; and family and community connections – have been modified based on lessons learned. New supports designed to improve quality have been added to make STEP more effective in addressing the issues of quality child care and development in Los Angeles County.
- STEP and LAUP's rating system were each selected to participate in the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC). A new quality rating standard and process has been developed by representatives of 17 consortia statewide and will target licensed child care and development programs serving high need children and their families. The new RTT-ELC QRIS pilot will be tested for two years to validate its measures. At the end of that period, Los Angeles County Office of Child Care and LAUP will be implementing a common, validated QRIS.
- Both RTT pilots have agreed to utilize the Los Angeles Child Care Planning Committee as an advisory group to RTT in Los Angeles County.

Implementation Issues and Options

- The Planning Committee will craft an action plan to support Strategy 1 (page 6) that is aligned with the goal of the RTT-ELC to launch a single QRIS.
- Action plans to carry out all strategies under this goal will be shaped by work groups of the Planning Committee. For example, for Strategy 3 the work group may develop a collateral piece on "continual quality improvement" within the context of Early Childhood Education (ECE). An activity that connects ECE providers with enrollment in health care through the Affordable Care Act (ACA) may also be part of this goal as relates to Strategy 4 and in meeting staff support standards in STEP.
- Materials will be developed collaboratively with STEP/RTT-ELC staff and will include input from various stakeholders. In addition, the Planning Committee and Quality Work Group will: serve as a sounding board on QRIS; support a feedback loop on the appropriateness of the tools used in QRIS; and assist in other appropriate ways with the evaluation of RTT-ELC.
- The Planning Committee will monitor the allocation and use of California Department of Education (CDE) quality funds related to ongoing financial support of QRIS in Los Angeles.

- The Planning Committee may facilitate connections between ECE providers and community-based organizations and non-profits that offer programming, support and resources focused on improving quality.

Alignment with Child Care Policy Framework

- The Child Care Policy Framework's first goal is: "The quality of child development services in Los Angeles County will be improved as the Steps to Excellence Program (STEP) is expanded and support services to STEP are intensified". The impact and goal, as well as the selected strategies of the Strategic Plan support this statement and are related to ensuring the efficacy of STEP and QRIS in general in Los Angeles County.

Alignment with California Comprehensive Early Learning Plan (CCELP)

The CCELP is being developed by the California Department of Education in response to the a federal requirement. The final CCELP will be approved by the state appointed Early Learning Advisory Committee.

There are several potential recommendations in the draft CCELP that are aligned with the 2013-2018 Strategic Plan. Among the recommendations are:

- Create more rigorous program standards accompanied by supplemental resources to upgrade quality.
- Ensure parents have good information about their choices and that good choices are available.
- Focus ECE funding on a system that supports a child's development and early learning.
- Develop a systemwide emphasis on quality to improve child outcomes with increased per child funding to pay for the actual cost of quality.

ACCESS

DESIRED IMPACT: THERE IS SUFFICIENT DISTRIBUTION AND EFFECTIVE USE OF RESOURCES TO MEET THE EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION NEEDS OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES.

OUTCOME OF PLAN: Access to quality ECE is increased through effective use of all public and private investments from federal, state, and local entities.

GOAL: Increase the supply of and access to appropriate ECE options by maximizing use of existing state and federal funds and ensuring connections between ECE providers and other support services to address all children's needs and abilities.

Strategy 1: Facilitate intentional connections between County departments serving children and families and ECE services.

Strategy 2: Enhance the capacity of ECE providers to utilize other services and supports and to make appropriate referrals to meet children's needs.

Strategy 3: Engage with community partners to facilitate technical assistance in fiscal and program management for ECE programs and providers.

Strategy 4: Share broadly the results of an annual needs assessment and priorities for future funding with community partners and policy makers.

ACCESS

Background

- Since 2009-10, child development services for low income families in Los Angeles County have been reduced by 25 percent or more. State budget cuts have affected half-day preschool, voucher payment programs, full-day child development centers and, most particularly, infant/toddler care options. It is clear that the State needs to re-invest in ECE. Given the limitations of current revenues, the Planning Committee chose to focus efforts on conserving and maximizing the funding that is available. This does not preclude supporting advocacy for greater public investment as the State and federal economies improve.
- In 2011, state funding was eliminated for the Centralized Eligibility List (CEL), thus putting an end to a single point of registration for subsidized child care for low-income families. Some CDE-funded contractors have managed to achieve maximum enrollment without the CEL; but for many others, it has been difficult to recruit eligible families and thus earn their full contracts. Consequently, strategically connecting families whose children would benefit from high quality ECE services is more important than ever.
- Many children and their families served by Los Angeles County departments, such as Children and Family Services, would benefit from ECE services, including Early Head Start and Head Start and subsidized child care and development centers that hold contracts with the CDE. A pilot project in the Long Beach area involving Department of Children and Families Services (DCFS) and local child development providers has proved the value of expanding such efforts.

Implementation Issues and Options

- Implicit in this strategy is monitoring fluctuations in ECE availability dependent on approved State budgets and keeping local stakeholders informed and ready to act to preserve current capacity and build a case for increasing investments in the ECE system. In addition, it will be important to monitor the availability of facilities which could be licensed. This is critical for expansion, given that suitable real estate is difficult to identify in Los Angeles County.
- This plan draws attention to supporting connections between County department client families, such as those served through DCFS, and ECE services that benefit vulnerable children and their families.
- The plan speaks to engaging partners in helping to connect ECE providers with other health, mental health, and social services. Examples of potential partners include 211 LA County and Healthy City.
- Another priority is building the capacity of ECE contractors to effectively administer their programs so as to serve the maximum number of children and fully earn their contracts. The Planning Committee will seek partners positioned to provide key technical assistance to contractors. One example is the new repayable LA ECE Bridge Fund initiated by the California Community Foundation to assist CDE-funded centers to weather low cash flow periods and remain fiscally sound. Additional organizations, such as the California Child Development Administrators Association (CCDAA), may have valuable resources to offer in this regard.
- The Planning Committee will make use of coordinated, informational e-mails to broad audiences as well as post information on the Office of Child Care website.

Alignment with Child Care Policy Framework

- Goal 2 of the Child Care Policy Framework speaks to strengthening the child development infrastructure to integrate family support, health, mental health and other relevant services. The Strategic Plan 2013-18 specifically references this idea in its Access goal and strategies. In addition, the Policy Framework has a goal related to connecting vulnerable families to appropriate ECE options which is mirrored in the strategies of the Strategic Plan 2013-18.

Alignment with California Comprehensive Early Learning Plan (CCELP)

There are several potential recommendations included in the draft CCELP that are aligned with the 2013-2018 Strategic Plan. Among the recommendations are:

- Create greater systemwide quality and consistency among its early learning programs.
- Create a coherent system that links services to various family needs.
- Pursue quality and access in tandem rather than as competing goals.
- Ensure that parents have information about the available choices.

PLANNING COUNCIL ROLE

DESIRED IMPACT: THERE IS A MORE UNIFIED VOICE ON EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION FOR LOS ANGELES COUNTY.

OUTCOME OF PLAN: The Los Angeles County Child Care Planning Committee is a forum where ECE issues and ideas are presented and discussed to build consensus that supports the efforts of many groups to improve the ECE infrastructure in the County.

GOAL: Participation in the the Planning Committee is expanded to include more stakeholders.

Strategy 1: Outreach to other groups with ECE policy agendas.

Strategy 2: Use the Joint Committee on Legislation to engage stakeholders.

Strategy 3: Plan for facilitated discussion sessions at Planning Committee meetings.

Strategy 4: Develop a tiered process that incorporates big issues, local policies, and administrative issues in discussions and in making policy recommendations.

Strategy 5: Explore the use of social media for Planning Committee purposes and to act on the policy recommendations.

LOCAL PLANNING COUNCIL ROLE

Background

- In the past decade there have been many groups with policy agendas related to ECE, but the messages and goals of these groups were not well coordinated or aligned. It is a common belief that having a unified message about what is needed and should be supported legislatively is critical to future success in State budget development and in the enactment of legislation. Ultimately the Planning Committee could, with other stakeholders, work toward agreement on the top priorities for action to improve ECE in Los Angeles County.

Implementation Issues and Options

- The goal is to extend the role of the Planning Committee into a forum for open discussion and building consensus around issues, with the possibility of developing uniform messages. To this end, the Planning Committee will develop a mechanism to ensure increased member input into agenda setting and will integrate regular reports from the Joint Committee on Legislation into the monthly meetings.
- Planning Committee meetings could be used effectively to introduce and review current issues, important topics, and new ideas raised by members and other stakeholders and to ensure room for diverse opinions. While taking on issues that have broad impact as well as county specific items, the Planning Committee will move to adopt a process in which public discussions build on one another and lead to consensus or majority approved recommendations for action.
- Interactions and activities of the Planning Committee will provide opportunities to create stronger connections among its members and other participants, and between the Planning Committee, the Roundtable, and other groups focused on child and family well-being. Toward this end, meetings may include more time for members and guests to share about program goals, missions, current initiatives, and public policy agendas.

Alignment with Child Care Policy Framework

The Planning Committee will consider alignment with the Child Care Policy Framework in issue discussions and consensus building leading to recommendations. Many of the activities listed under implementation are intended to help the Planning Committee become more strategic about making and forwarding recommendations for action to the Roundtable and ultimately to the Board of Supervisors.

Alignment with California Comprehensive Early Learning Plan (CCELP)

The strategies of this goal are focused on local action relating to statewide or national issues. A few of the potential recommendations in the draft CCELP describe issues of global concern that may well become the focus for Planning Committee discussions and work. An example would be the recommendation that all ECE programs within the state funded system are contributing to the goals of the system and if not, then replaced or redesigned.

WORKFORCE

DESIRED IMPACT: LOS ANGELES COUNTY CHILDREN HAVE HIGH QUALITY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION EXPERIENCES THAT PREPARE THEM AS LIFE-LONG LEARNERS AND PRODUCTIVE CITIZENS OF THE WORLD.

OUTCOME OF PLAN: ECE Educators have the competencies necessary to provide a high quality early care and education experience for children inclusive of all abilities.

GOAL: ECE educators implement best practices effectively in serving children and families of diverse backgrounds and abilities.

Strategy 1: Support/advocate for enhanced licensing standards regarding teacher preparation and education.

Strategy 2: Promote and support ECE professional development efforts and opportunities across the county.

Strategy 3: Establish new, continuing partnerships with other organizations to disseminate information on best practices, using various distribution methods including social media.

Strategy 4: Promote and support the development of leadership in the field of ECE.

WORKFORCE

Background

- Current licensing standards for the training and education of ECE workers are minimal for both center-based personnel and family child care providers. Title V standards used in CDE-funded programs are higher, yet do not require any type of degree for lead teachers. The complexity of understanding children's development and responding appropriately to the various levels of development in groups of children ages 0-5 calls for greater competence than can be guaranteed with current standards. While a greater portion of the ECE workforce is working to earn degrees, it has become clear that both pre-service and in-service training and professional development is needed to ensure that all educators/providers have the necessary competencies to be successful. Without greater attention to how we prepare and support our ECE workforce, we will not realize the higher levels of quality necessary to achieve desired child outcomes.
- The introduction of the QRIS has focused a spotlight on the issue of teacher competencies and how they are demonstrated based on validated measures.
- CDE has developed and is promulgating competencies that can serve as the foundation along with the CDE-developed Infant/Toddler and Preschool Learning and Development Foundations, Curriculum Frameworks, and Development Program Guidelines.
- Compensation remains a significant issue; however, it cannot be addressed adequately without looking at the investment in the entire ECE system.
- A gap in leadership is developing as older, more seasoned professionals retire and many younger workers lack the training and competencies to move into supervisory or management positions.

Implementation Issues and Options

- Professional development includes training, workshops, and formal college coursework; and, whenever possible, should be aligned with QRIS standards.
- The following subject areas are critical to a competent workforce in Los Angeles County: dual language learners; early developmental screenings and inclusive practices; diversity; parent engagement; and early mental health.
- Promoting and supporting professional development efforts involves identifying entities and opportunities, and assisting in the dissemination of information about the opportunities. There is a need for a comprehensive web-based source of all professional development opportunities that should be considered as a collaborative endeavor.
- It will be important to work with other groups interested in improving the ECE workforce such as the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce, LAUP, the California Association for the Education of Young Children, and JumpStart as well as the entities most involved in training such as the Child Care Resource and Referral (R&R) Agencies, the California Preschool Instructional Network (CPIN), and local colleges.
- It will be important to monitor and review the Office of Child Care's Investing in Early Educators-Stipend Program and LAUP's ASPIRE (A Stipend Program in Support of ECE Excellence) to ensure access for the ECE workforce and that these programs support improved qualifications and the acquisition of desired competencies.

Alignment with Child Care Policy Framework

The Child Care Policy Framework goal to expand STEP and launch RTT-ELC is supported in the Strategic Plan for 2013-18 in that several QRIS standards relate to the education and training of ECE providers and teachers and the promulgation of best practices among the ECE workforce. The promotion of Strengthening Families and the Protective Factors framework with County departments and

community-based agencies can be mirrored in the use of this Plan's framework for addressing QRIS standards related to family engagement.

Alignment with California Comprehensive Early Learning Plan (CCELP)

One of the key systems drivers identified in the draft CCELP is a “great early childhood workforce”. Potential recommendations under this rubric include:

- ECE personnel are to be strong partners with families, which may require training and support.
- The California teacher competencies should be used to define a clear career pathway with aligned credentials and staff qualifications.
- Adequate resources should be provided to allow programs/providers to retain their best teachers and caregivers.
- Teachers are trained to use best practices in working with dual language learners and programs are supported to implement these best practices.
- Family engagement is considered a key workforce competency and the workforce is specifically trained in it.

CONCLUSION

This Plan emphasizes strategy over fixed objectives in order to provide a fluid approach in an ever-changing policy and fiscal environment. The strategies recognize the the limitations of the Planning Committee, and at the same time have the potential to create incremental change and synergies that move the infrastructure of child care and development in a positive direction. Implementation of the Strategic Plan will involve the efforts of the Planning Committee along with the actions, support, and initiatives of other local and statewide stakeholders.