

Child Care and Development Policy Framework for 2014-2016

Restore – Integrate – Improve

The first Child Care Policy Framework was adopted by the Board of Supervisors on January 6, 2009, just as California was sliding into a severe fiscal crisis and the country recognized it was in a recession. Over the next four years, funding for subsidized child care and development services in California was reduced by \$1.2 billion. This translated to a loss of nearly \$200,000,000 of subsidy dollars to low-income families in Los Angeles County. Also during this period, the number of licensed family child care homes in Los Angeles County declined by 14 percent, dropping from over 9,000 to 7,623, furthering limiting an inadequate supply of child care and development programs available to infants and toddlers.

Given this context, we are thankful for the strategic focus that the two previous Child Care Policy Frameworks have provided County departments and our community partners. Despite this period of serious budget reductions, Los Angeles County has made incremental progress to closing the gap between “what we know” and “what we do” that contributes to the overall well-being of young children, families and communities. There is, however, still much to do.

Momentum for Change Is Building

For the first time in many years, there is a sense of optimism and urgency that now is the time to improve and expand access to child care and development services. Consider the following facts:

- Economic conditions are improving in Los Angeles County, California and the country.
- Economist and Nobel Laureate James Heckman, Ph.D. has weighed in on early care and education, “We cannot afford to postpone investing in children until they become adults, nor can we wait until they reach school age - a time when it may be too late to intervene. Learning is a dynamic process and is more effective when it begins at a young age and continues through adulthood.”
- A report released by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in January 2014 identifies three goals to improve the health of the nation. The first goal calls for prioritizing investments in America’s youngest children and urges the creation of stronger quality standards for early childhood development programs, linking funding to program quality and guaranteeing access for all low-income children under five years old by 2025.
- The Los Angeles Area Chamber Commerce has identified early education as a priority issue, recognizing “that an investment in quality early education programs will increase achievement, reduce drop-out rates and create pathways for success throughout K-12 education. This type of investment will enhance educational outcomes and result in a knowledgeable workforce that will lead our nation’s economy.”
- On January 7, 2014, California Senate President pro Tem Darrell Steinberg introduced SB 837, *The Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2014*, which would make transitional kindergarten available to every four-year old child in California. Senator Carol Liu will be introducing a companion bill to expand and improve early care and education services available to children from birth through three years of age.

- The FY 2014 Omnibus Appropriation Bill arrived on the President's desk with bipartisan support and was signed by President Obama on January 17, 2014. This bill not only restored the reductions imposed by sequestration on Head Start, Early Head Start and the Child Care and Development Block Grant, but actually increased funding for these programs. In addition, it will support states and local communities in expanding high quality early learning for infants and toddlers through Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships and fund Preschool Development Grants available to states on a competitive basis.
- Federal legislation, the *Strong Start for America's Children Act* (H.R. 3461 and S. 1697) has been introduced in Congress. This legislation would significantly expand access to high quality early care and education services.

Goals for 2014-2016

Given this momentum, the time to improve and expand child care and development services is now. We are aware that even with this momentum, the legislation cited above could dramatically change the child care and development sector in our county; that family, business, and operator interests in child care and development do not always align seamlessly; and that to achieve the changes needed in the child care and development sector will require vision, commitment, and hard work. The Child Care and Development Policy Framework for 2014 – 2016 is intended to focus County departments and community stakeholders on areas where a unified voice from Los Angeles County can best support the optimum development of our children, families, and communities. As such, the Child Care Policy Framework for 2014-2016 will focus on the following goals:

1. Restore and Expand Funding
2. Strengthen Policies on Eligibility and Access
3. Maximize Access to Available Services
4. Prioritize Quality Services
5. Expand Family and Community Engagement

GOAL 1 – RESTORE AND EXPAND FUNDING

Objective: Pursue the restoration and expansion of funding for subsidized child care and development and related services

A. How are we going to do it:

1. Working within the adopted Legislative Platform and with the Chief Executive Office - Intergovernmental Relations and External Affairs (CEO-IGEA), promote the restoration and expansion of federal and State funding for:
 - a. The full range of child care and development services for children from pre-natal through five years of age, with an emphasis on services for children birth to three, and
 - b. Increased on-site inspections of child care and development programs by the California Department of Social Services/Community Care Licensing Division (CDSS/CCLD).
2. Promote efficiencies that optimize the administration of subsidized child care and development services and afford families access to stable arrangements, including but not limited to the annual determination of eligibility and the elimination of parent fees for State Preschool.
3. Work with First 5 LA, First 5 California and other philanthropic sources to increase, coordinate, and integrate investments in child care and development. In this process, the critical need for additional services for infants and toddlers will be emphasized.

B. Benchmarks for success

1. CEO-IGEA, working in conjunction with the Policy Roundtable for Child Care and Development (Roundtable) and the Office of Child Care, will provide the Board of Supervisors with information on State and Federal proposals and their impact on local families and programs.
2. The Roundtable will work with local stakeholders to develop collaborative approaches to integrate and maximize available funding.
3. The Roundtable, in conjunction with the Child Care Planning Committee (Planning Committee), will promote the effective utilization of existing data to inform policy, practice and decision-making relating to the restoration, expansion, and geographic allocation of funding for subsidized child care and development services.

C. Our partners

- Board of Supervisors, County departments, business, philanthropy, education, families, child care and development, and community stakeholders.

GOAL 2 – STRENGTHEN POLICIES ON ELIGIBILITY AND ACCESS

Objective: Engage State and local partners to change eligibility policies and administrative guidelines that deter vulnerable families from accessing subsidized child care and development services.

A. How we are going to do it:

1. Working in conjunction with CEO-IGEA, engage the California Department of Education (CDE), CDSS/CCLD, First 5 California and First 5 LA in a dialogue regarding:
 - a. The impact of trauma on young children and the current definition of “at risk” as it applies to eligibility for subsidized child care and development services, and
 - b. The vulnerability of teen parents involved with the child protective services and juvenile justice systems as it impacts their ability to access subsidized child care and development services for their young children.

B. Benchmarks for success

1. By September 2014
 - a. Communication channels will be established with State agencies regarding the unique needs of children and families who have experienced trauma and the role of high quality child care and development services in promoting the optimal development of children strengthening families.
2. By January 2015
 - a. Policies and guidelines, or the interpretation of policies and guidelines, will be changed or clarified to facilitate access of vulnerable families to subsidized child care and development services.
 - b. The County Departments of Children and Family Services (DCFS), Public Social Services (DPSS), Probation and Mental Health (DMH) will work collaboratively with the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE), local school districts and community-based organizations to ensure that eligible children and their families have access to needed health and social services.

C. Our partners

- CDSS, CDE, First 5 California, First Five Los Angeles, the Child Care Planning Committee, DCFS, DMH, Probation Department, DPSS, LACOE, Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and other local school districts, the Child Care Alliance of Los Angeles and community-based child development programs.

GOAL 3 – MAXIMIZE ACCESS TO AVAILABLE SERVICES

Objective: Facilitate access to subsidized child care and development and supportive family services by providing County departments working directly with families, access to information on vacancies in Early Head Start, Head Start, and CDE-contracted subsidized child care and development programs by developing an electronic vacancy tracking system.

A. How we are going to do it:

1. Coordinate a joint proposal to the Productivity Investment Fund (PIF) in partnership with DCFS, the Family Solution Centers and targeted child care and development programs. The purpose of this proposal will be to develop and pilot an electronic application to track vacancies in subsidized child care and development programs in order to increase the utilization of available funds.
2. Build on the experiences of the DCFS Foster Care Search Engine and the two-click system as well as the former Centralized Eligibility List. The intention is to develop an application where child care and development programs can easily report vacancies, Children's Social Workers can access that information quickly, and a feedback loop provides information on children who are actually enrolled in and receive child care and development services.
3. Convene DMH, DCFS, the Department of Public Health (DPH), and other County partners to develop strategies for coordinating early childhood mental health consultation, family support and other services to support families and to build the capacity of child care and development program staff to promote young children's healthy social-emotional development and address challenging behaviors.
4. Pursue additional funding to build and sustain the vacancy tracking system.

B. Benchmarks for success:

1. By July 2015
 - a. A collaborative application will be successful in securing funding.
 - b. A pilot project will be in place and initial evaluation data will be available.
2. By July 2016
 - a. The system will be used by the intended audiences including Children's Social Workers and child care and development programs.
 - b. Data will be available to inform refinements and expansion beyond the pilot phase. The system will provide feedback information showing that children are actually enrolled in programs.

C. Our partners:

- Proposal development and pilot testing: DCFS, LACOE-Head Start, LAUSD, the Child Care Alliance of Los Angeles and Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP).
- DMH, DPH and other County departments will provide consultation to program staff to ensure the successful participation of children and families in

GOAL 4 – PRIORITIZE QUALITY SERVICES

Objective: Support efforts to establish and sustain a single, validated child care quality rating and improvement system serving all of Los Angeles County.

A. How we are going to do it:

1. Promote parent awareness and use of current quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS). This includes promotion among County employees, clients and residents.
2. Monitor and support the Office of Child Care's expedited merging of the Steps to Excellence Program (STEP) into the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) QRIS.
3. Analyze progress in aligning QRIS systems with the following functions:
 - Home visitation programs
 - Early identification and screening of all enrolled children
 - Reducing obesity in young children
 - Encouraging innovative approaches to aligning services, including support for continued pilot testing of LAUSD Saturday Clinics
4. Support efforts to increase on-site inspections of all child care and development programs by the CDSS/CCLD.

B. Benchmarks for success

1. By April 2015
 - a. STEP will be merged into the Office of Child Care administered RTT-ELC QRIS.
 - b. Child development centers and family child care homes will be participating in the Office of Child Care administered QRIS.
2. By April 2016
 - a. Los Angeles County will have a single, unified QRIS.
 - b. Parents will use the QRIS to make decisions when choosing child care and development services.
 - c. Participating programs will have demonstrated quality improvements.
 - d. Participating programs will be connecting families to ancillary service systems including behavioral health, public benefit programs and other services provided by County departments and community-based organizations.

C. Our Partners

1. Merging STEP and RTT-ELC: LAUP, First 5 LA, CDE, the Child Care Alliance of Los Angeles, UCLA- Center for Improving Child Care Quality
2. Alignment of QRIS to other service sectors: County departments and community-based agencies
3. Promotion of QRIS to families: County departments and community-based agencies.

GOAL 5 – EXPAND FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Objective: Engage a wide range of County departments, Commissions and community stakeholders as advocates for integrating child care and development services into efforts aimed at fostering the optimal development of children, strengthening families and promoting community well-being.

A. How we are going to do it:

1. Roundtable members will outreach to other affiliated Commissions and stakeholder groups focused on children, youth and families to share information on the benefits of high quality child care and development services and provide information on the local child care and development landscape.
2. Roundtable members will engage representatives of the commissions and stakeholder groups in discussions on:
 - a. Joint opportunities for cross-sector professional development and data linkages to facilitate the effective integration of services, and
 - b. Opportunities to create a technology infrastructure to provide families with information on child care and development options, parent support and education and other resources.

B. Benchmarks for success

1. By January 2015
 - Communication channels will be established among partners, using traditional and technology-based vehicles to share information.
2. By April 2016
 - Cross-departmental training and professional development opportunities will be available and participants will report increased competency in ensuring access to high-quality child care and development programs for vulnerable children and families.
3. By December 2016
 - The Roundtable, in collaboration with 211 LA County and community stakeholders, will report on how technology is connecting families with resources and supports throughout Los Angeles County.

C. Our Partners

- Roundtable members will engage the Child Care Planning Committee, First 5 LA, the Commission for Children and Families, the Probation Commission, and the Interagency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect and the regional Child Abuse and Neglect Councils.