

County of Los Angeles

A Unified Strategic Plan for Early Care and Education

2020
-
2025



CHILD CARE
PLANNING
COMMITTEE



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
OFFICE FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF
EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION



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Michele P. Sartell, MSW
Child Care Planning Coordinator, Office for the Advancement of Early Care and Education

Office for the Advancement of Early Care and Education
Department of Public Health - Health Promotion Bureau

600 South Commonwealth Avenue, Suite 800, Los Angeles, California 90005
Office: (213) 639-6202 • Fax: (213) 639-1034
childcare.lacounty.gov

January 2020

Dear Colleagues,

The early care and education system in Los Angeles County supports the optimal development of children aged birth to five years old, as well as children up to age 13 in before and after school programs. These services are critical to our economy, supporting parents and caregivers while they work, and preparing children for kindergarten entry with the skills and confidence they need to succeed in school and life.

Under the leadership of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (DPH), the Office for the Advancement of Early Care and Education (OAECE) convened the Policy Roundtable for Child Care and Development (Roundtable) and the Child Care Planning Committee (Planning Committee) to lead a collaborative planning process involving nearly 100 stakeholders. The result of this effort is the County's first unified plan for early care and education, which will guide the work of the OAECE, the Roundtable, and the Planning Committee under one vision, one mission, and with a single unified voice.

We are excited to present the 2020-2025 County of Los Angeles Unified Strategic Plan for Early Care and Education. The plan outlines four strategic priorities:

- **Access** - Increase access to early care and education services for children birth to five years of age and out of school care for children up to age thirteen.
- **Quality** - Strengthen the quality of early care and education services, especially for children and families most in need.
- **Workforce** - Improve the compensation and qualifications of the early care and education workforce.
- **Families and Communities** - Increase engagement of parents, caregivers and communities on early care and education issues.

Making progress on these strategic priorities will require continued collaboration among all aspects of the early care and education system as well as new partnerships with non-traditional partners and allies. By joining forces under this unified plan, we can achieve the vision that children are healthy, thriving and have equitable opportunities to achieve optimal development and succeed in life.



Dr. Barbara Ferrer, Director
Los Angeles County Department
to Public Health



Jackie Majors, Chair
Policy Roundtable for Child Care
and Development



Debra Colman, Director
Office for the Advancement
of Early Care and Education



Julie Taren, Chair
Child Care Planning Committee

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Office for the Advancement of Early Care and Education is deeply grateful to the partners and community members who contributed their time, energy and expertise to the development of this plan. Key among these were members of the Child Care Planning Committee and the Policy Roundtable for Child Care and Development who came together as the Strategic Planning Workgroup¹ to review and synthesize input from multiple sources as the basis for this plan. This work laid the foundation for unified leadership to improve early care and education for children across Los Angeles County.

Child Care Planning Committee - FY 2018-20

Christina Acosta	Andrea Joseph	Ernesto Saldaña
Norma Amezcua	Aolelani Lutu	Ancelma Sanchez
Ranae Amezcua	Ritu Mahajan, J.D.	Mariana Sanchez
Alejandra Berrio	Valerie Marquez	Kathy Schreiner*
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Jessica Chang	Kelly O'Connell*	Sarah Soriano
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Mona Franco	Dianne Philibosian, Ph.D. *	Veronica Torres
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La Tanga Hardy	Nellie Ríos-Parra, Chair*	Lauren Trosclair Duncan
Tara Henriquez	Ricardo Rivera	Maria Vera
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Antoinette Isaacs	Reiko Sakuma	

Policy Roundtable for Child Care and Development - FY 2018-19

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Maria Calix	Kalene Gilbert	Boris E. Villacorta
Ellen Cervantes*	Robert Gilchick, M.D., M.P.H.*	Faith Parducho
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Los Angeles County Office for the Advancement of Early Care and Education

Marghot Carabali
Elizabeth Casprowitz
Debra Colman
Renatta Cooper
Lain Loureiro
Michele P. Sartell *
Claudia Valle
Erica Weiss

Strategic Plan Consultant Team

Maura Harrington Roggero, MBA, PhD, Lead Consultant, Center for Nonprofit Management
Christina Newkirk, Center for Nonprofit Management
Katie Fallin Kenyon, Ph.D., Kenyon Consulting
Laura Valles, Laura Valles and Associates

Special thanks to the generous support of the First 5 LA and The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation.

¹ Strategic Planning Workgroup members are denoted by *.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Early care and education can be a cornerstone for a child's healthy development and future well-being. So they can thrive, all children deserve access to high-quality early learning environments to support their growth and development. Quality early care and education programs offer nurturing and stimulating environments that contribute to a child's optimal physical, social-emotional, linguistic, and cognitive development. For working families, child care is also an essential resource that enables parents and caregivers to remain in the workforce. To ensure that all children have access to high-quality early care and education, the Los Angeles County Office for the Advancement of Early Care and Education (OAECE), under the leadership of the Department of Public Health (DPH) and in partnership with the Policy Roundtable for Child Care and Development (Roundtable) and the Child Care Planning Committee (Planning Committee), presents the County of Los Angeles Unified Strategic Plan for Early Care and Education – 2020-2025 (the Plan).

A Unified Approach

Serving approximately 650,000 Los Angeles children under age 5, the early care and education system is a complex and disconnected matrix of services. Recently, support for our youngest children has risen as a priority issue with elevated political attention and increased public investment. This critical moment in time provides an opportunity to shift how early care and education is approached in Los Angeles County. The Plan was developed through

an innovative collaborative process involving almost 100 stakeholders including OAECE staff, Roundtable members, and Planning Committee members. The Plan documents shifts in the early care and education landscape, the history of each of three entities that developed the Plan, and the twelve-month process that brought unique perspectives together under a common vision. The Plan also uplifts OAECE as the Los Angeles County early care and education office and the transformative role it can serve as an educator, convener, data manager, strategist and advocate.

Strategic Priorities

As a north star for Los Angeles County early care and education efforts, the Plan offers a guiding framework for the OAECE, Roundtable, Planning Committee, and other stakeholders with four focus strategic areas: 1) access to early care and education, 2) early care and education quality, 3) early care and education workforce supports, and 4) family and community engagement in early care and education issues.

Implementation Planning

The four strategic priorities define a direction for early care and education systems and the Plan provides a starting place for collaborative work. A full implementation framework identifying specific activities in each of the four strategic areas, and the assumptions, tasks, roles, timeline, and resources required to achieve them will be completed by June 2020.



INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Early care and education programs support the care and development of children birth to five years old, as well as out of school care for children to age 12. Program providers may include school districts, early care and education centers, licensed family child care homes, and family, friends, and neighbors who provide care. Across Los Angeles County, many families struggle to find services for their children that are high-quality and affordable. The average annual cost of child care is \$10,303 per preschooler in center-based care and \$8,579 per preschooler in family child care². During the recession, early care and education programs subsidized by the State of California for low-income families experienced budget reductions totaling \$1.5 billion³ impacting families with the greatest need. Over the past few years, modest increases have restored some funds to the subsidized system, although a substantial gap between funding and need remains.

State and Local Priorities

Most recently, attention at state and local levels to the importance of the early years has generated new public investments. Contributing to this momentum, the California Assembly Blue Ribbon Commission on Early Childhood Education released its final report in April 2019 with a list of recommendations that called for significant funding and systems change. The 2019-2020 California Budget includes \$5 million for a Master Plan for Early Learning and Care, \$245 million for grants to child care and preschool providers for facilities expansions, and \$195 million for early learning and care workforce development grants.

Locally, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (Board) lobbied successfully for State investment in the Emergency Child Care Bridge Program for Children in Foster Care. The Board also instructed the Chief Executive Office – Homeless Initiative to identify strategies to connect families experiencing homelessness with early care and education services and mandated the Chief Executive Office, in consultation with the Roundtable and the OAECE, to identify county-owned properties that could provide space for early care and education programming. Further local support is the identification of access to quality early care and education as a critical strategy for the prevention of child abuse and neglect as highlighted in the LA County’s Office for Child

Protection’s (OCP) *Countywide Child Protection Strategic Plan – 2016-21*⁴.

In Los Angeles County, responsibility for harnessing this new energy to create an early care and education system that meets child and family needs rests with three entities, the Planning Committee, the Roundtable and the OAECE housed within the DPH Health Promotion Bureau.

Office for the Advancement of Early Care and Education

In 2000, the Los Angeles County Office of Child Care (OCC), the predecessor of the OAECE, was established under the Chief Executive Office (CEO) to address the child care needs of Los Angeles County employees and to staff a state-mandated local child care and development planning council (Planning Committee). Soon after the establishment of the Planning Committee, the Board called for the founding of the Policy Roundtable for Child Care and Development to focus on early care and education policy and systems improvement. Management of both the Planning Committee and the Roundtable were assigned to OCC. In 2001, the role of the OCC expanded to workforce professional development with the Investing in the Early Educators Stipend Program, followed by the California Transitional Kindergarten Stipend Program (CTKSP). OCC developed and implemented the Steps to Excellence Program (STEP), a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) in 2007. Although OCC no longer leads a QRIS program, it continues to influence quality practices as a part of Quality Start Los Angeles. OCC changed its name to OAECE in 2016 and transitioned to DPH in 2018. The move to DPH reflected recognition of the vital role that early care and education plays in child development, family well-being and community health.

² Child Care Planning Committee. *The State of Early Care and Education in Los Angeles County – Los Angeles County: Child Care Planning Committee 2017 Needs Assessment Executive Summary*. March 2017.

³ California Budget Project. (2012). *Falling Behind: The Impact of the Great Recession and the Budget Crisis on California’s Women and Their Families*.

⁴ See ocp.lacounty.gov/Portals/OCP/PDF/OCP%20Strategic%20Plan%20and%20Progress%20Updates/2016-10-20%20OCP%20Strategic%20Plan%202016-2021.pdf?ver=2018-10-23-170532-757.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Child Care Planning Committee

The Child Care Planning Committee is Los Angeles County's state mandated Local Child Care and Development Planning Council (LPC) funded by the California Department of Education (CDE). Established as the County's LPC in 1991, the Child Care Planning Committee is staffed by OAECE and is composed of 50 members including parents/consumers, early educators, board appointees and representatives of public agencies, community-based organizations, higher education, and resource and referral agencies. The State requires the Planning Committee to conduct county-wide planning to address access to quality, affordable early care and education.



Policy Roundtable for Child Care and Development

The Roundtable, established in 2000, is a Board of Supervisors appointed body composed of 25 community leaders in early childhood, education, business, economics, and research and representatives of County Departments including Child and Family Services, Mental Health, Probation, Public Health, Public Social Services, and Parks and Recreation. The Roundtable is staffed by OAECE and charged with developing policy recommendations for elevation to the Board of Supervisors, advising County departments on early care and education programs, and identifying strategies to secure, coordinate, and maximize funding for high quality services.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

Strategic planning was launched in the fall of 2018 by the OAECE in partnership with the Planning Committee and the Roundtable. Funding from First 5 LA supported the Center for Nonprofit Management to facilitate the planning process. The proposal to bring these entities together to develop a unified plan demonstrates a recognition across all participating bodies that working together is a tremendous step toward a more cohesive system in Los Angeles County.

Values and Guidelines

Early in their work together, the three participant entities articulated a set of values to inform the planning process. They agreed that the process would 1) embrace a deliberate focus on equity, 2) inspire collaboration and partnerships with community stakeholders and meaningful engagement of authentic family and parent voices, 3) be trauma-informed, 4) promote policy and systems change, and 5) use data to inform planning and advocacy. These values informed the development of a set of guidelines that were intentionally aligned with the Assembly Blue Ribbon Commission on Early Childhood Education's approved principles. The guidelines served as a framework for the identification of strategic priority

areas and strategies. These guidelines focus on access, equity, quality, workforce, families, financing, targeted investments, data and advocacy. Going forward, the guidelines will be used to evaluate potential tactics and the crafting of implementation activities. To learn more about the guidelines, please see Appendix A.

One Vision, One Mission

The strategic planning process entailed review of the intersecting mission statements of the OAECE, Planning Committee, and Roundtable to arrive at the following united vision and mission statements:

VISION

Children are healthy, thriving and have equitable opportunities to achieve optimal development and succeed in life.

MISSION

Lead, build, and strengthen an affordable and high-quality early care and education system for the children and families in Los Angeles County.

OFFICE FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION AS A CHANGE AGENT

With the shared vision and mission as the foundation, the OAECE, Roundtable and Planning Committee will implement the 2020-2025 strategic plan through a united effort managed by OAECE. As the Los Angeles County early care and education office, OAECE has a unique mandate to promote systems change through the advancement of new policy and program initiatives, based on the work of its collaborating partners. The strategic plan highlights the mandate of OAECE as an agent of policy and systems change through five primary roles.

Educator: It is the job of OAECE to inform partners, advise key stakeholders and publicly promote the importance of quality early care and education to support the well-being of children, strengthen families and help communities thrive.

Convener: The plan will require OAECE to convene and nurture committees, commissions and task forces to act as agents of change in early care and education policy and systems planning.

Data Manager: Reflecting the shared value noted above, it will be the task of OAECE to gather, organize, manage, and disseminate data related to family needs, system capacity, program quality and child and family outcomes to shape effective strategies and strengthen early childhood systems.

Strategist: Drawing on data, OAECE will be called upon to conceptualize, design, and implement innovative programmatic, policy, and systems change strategies.

Advocate: To assure implementation of system improvements, OAECE will need to mobilize and support advocacy for public policies (legislative and administrative) that build and strengthen the early care and education system in Los Angeles County.



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The 2020-2025 strategic priorities will guide collective efforts of the OAECE, Roundtable, and Planning Committee over the next five years. Grounded in the Planning Committee's 2017 needs assessment entitled *The State of Early Care and Education in Los Angeles County*,⁵ the priorities focus on 1) access to early care and education, 2) early care and education quality, 3) early care and education workforce supports, and 4) family and community engagement on early care and education issues. The paragraphs that follow provide a brief preview of each of the priorities and one example of the kinds of activities under each strategy that will be expanded upon in the implementation stage of planning.

Priority 1: Access

The early years are a critical period in human development. The foundation that is built through a child's participation in quality early care and education is associated with positive economic, educational and social impacts lasting well into adulthood⁶, benefitting both the individual child, family and larger community. Unfortunately, many families in Los Angeles County do not have access to affordable, quality early care and education. There are approximately 650,000 children under five in Los Angeles County, but only 206,830 spaces in licensed centers and family child care. The 2017 early care and education needs assessment highlighted challenges like a shortage of infant and toddler care, the decline in family child care homes, increased participation in transitional kindergarten, and the high cost of child care.

Goal 1: Increase access to early care and education services for children birth to five years of age and out of school care for children to age twelve.

Strategies:

1.1: Reduce barriers and maximize resources to expand early care and education services to centers and family child care homes, prioritizing infants and toddlers, high-need families, and under resourced communities.

- **Example Activity** - *Finalize and promote a toolkit that helps early care and education providers navigate the facility development system including licensing, zoning, fire, and public health.*

1.2: Advocate for funding to build or upgrade early care and education centers and family child care homes.

- **Example Activity** - *Develop a cross-sector advocacy strategy for facilities funding and for tackling barriers to facility development.*

1.3: Lead the analysis of data on the needs of Los Angeles County families for early care and education services and share with stakeholders to inform local planning and increased early learning investments.

- **Example Activity** - *Launch an on-line dashboard to inform the public about the supply and demand of Los Angeles County early care and education services.*



⁵ Child Care Planning Committee. *The State of Early Care and Education in Los Angeles County - Los Angeles County: Child Care Planning Committee 2017 Needs Assessment Executive Summary*. March 2017. See childcare.lacounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/ECE-Needs-Assessment_Executive-Brief-03-30-2017.pdf.

⁶ Schweinhart, L.J., Montie, J., Zongping, X, Barnett, W.S., Belfield, C.R., & Nores, M. *Lifetime Effects: The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40* (pp. 194-215). Ypsilanti, MI:High/Scope Press. © 2005 by High/Scope® Educational Research Foundation.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Priority 2: Quality

Every parent should have the opportunity to enroll their child in a high-quality early care and education program. Research shows that there is a relationship between early care and education quality and children's academic achievement, as well as language and cognitive development.⁷ To increase the quality of care, initiatives like Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) have emerged across the country. Locally, Quality Start Los Angeles (QSLA)⁸ has led the way in strengthening a county-wide quality improvement system. While QRIS is an approach to incentivize and support quality improvement, it is just one strategy on a continuum of quality improvement supports which may include *teacher-focused* efforts like training; *setting-focused* efforts like facilities grants; *family-focused* efforts like educating parents about quality; and *systems level efforts* which focus on setting and meeting standards.⁹

Goal 2: Strengthen the quality of early care and education services, especially for children and families most in need.

Strategies:

2.1: Partner with local quality improvement efforts to provide input, inform and influence quality improvement efforts.

- **Example Activity** – *Launch a campaign in partnership with the Quality Start LA to promote what quality looks like in a program.*

2.2: Advocate for increased quality improvement investments for all providers including centers, family child care, and family, friends, and neighbor care.

- **Example Activity** – *Elevate quality improvement policy recommendations to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors through the Roundtable.*

2.3: Leverage data from local quality improvement efforts to publicly promote the importance of quality care.

- **Example Activity** – *Release a “True Cost of Quality Care” infographic based on the Comprehensive Fiscal Analysis funding model.*

2.4: Promote integration across early childhood services and develop strategies that connect early childhood education with other child/family support systems.

- **Example Activity** – *Create a handbook that helps parents navigate early childhood services such as early care and education, home visitation, developmental screenings, early childhood mental health consultation, kindergarten transition, library services, and parks and recreation.*



⁷ Jeon, L. & Buettner, C.K. (2014). *Quality rating and improvement systems and children's cognitive development*. Child Youth Care Forum, 44, 191-207. Doi: 10.1007/s10566-014-9277-7.

⁸ Quality Start Los Angeles (QSLA) is a voluntary quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) designed to help parents of children birth to five choose the best early childhood education for their family.

⁹ Boller, K., Tarrant, K. & Schaack, D.D. (2014). *Early Care and Education Quality Improvement: A Typology of Intervention Approaches*. OPRE Research Report #2014-36. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Priority 3: Workforce

The quality of early learning programs for children is intrinsically connected to the early care and education workforce. Given the importance of a workforce armed with the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to achieve quality care, the Plan elevates workforce as a separate priority, rather than just a component of the quality priority discussed above. Numerous studies indicate that a well-educated workforce provides children with better quality care resulting in increased developmental gains.¹⁰ A key to enhancing the quality of the early care and education system lies in the professionalization of the workforce and a comprehensive professional development pathway comprised of college coursework, training, coaching and mentoring. Unfortunately, the early care and education workforce faces multiple challenges inclusive of low wages, limited education, and barriers to accessing professional development that must be addressed to achieve improved system quality.

Goal 3: Improve the compensation and qualifications of the early care and education workforce.

Strategies:

3.1: Advocate for increased compensation for the early care and education workforce.

- **Example Activity** – Release a policy brief advocating for a single reimbursement rate that incentivizes and compensates for the true cost of quality care.

3.2: Advocate for an efficient, comprehensive statewide data system to track information on the workforce and provide a portal for early educators to access professional development opportunities and build their career profiles.

- **Example Activity** – Integrate the Investing in Early Educators Stipend Program with the Early Care and Education Workforce Registry to reduce duplicated work and increase efficiency in serving the early care and education workforce.

3.3: Reduce barriers to professional development opportunities.

- **Example Activity** – Build a one-stop website that seamlessly connects Los Angeles County early educators to training opportunities of all kinds.



¹⁰ Saracho, O.N. & Spodek, B. (2007). *Early childhood teachers' preparation and the quality of program outcomes*. *Early Child Development and Care*, 177 (1), 71-91. Doi: 10.1080/03004430500317366.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Priority 4: Families and Communities

To build an effective early care and education system in Los Angeles County, it is essential to incorporate the voices of parents, primary caregivers,¹¹ and communities. Children learn and grow in the context of overlapping spheres of influence,¹² so it is critical to build effective and reciprocal partnerships among early care and education programs, families, and communities. A key component for effective systems changes lies in authentically engaging parents, understanding the early care and education issues they face day to day, and inviting them to be partners in developing solutions.

Goal 4: Increase engagement of parents, caregivers and communities on early care and education issues.

Strategies:

4.1: Assure parent and caregiver access to research findings on early care and education issues.

- **Example Activity** – Release family-friendly materials that promote the importance of early care and education by collaborating with allies like Resource and Referral agencies.

4.2: Empower and mobilize families as advocates for early care and education resources.

- **Example Activity** – Launch an early care and education campaign that advances the authentic parent voice through parent testimonials.

4.3: Engage parents, families and community members as thought partners on early care and education issues through events and committees.

- **Example Activity** – Establish a parent/caregiver workgroup as a part of the Planning Committee to inform and influence early care and education planning across Los Angeles County.



¹¹ Primary caregivers include legal guardians, foster parents, and relative caregivers.

¹² Epstein, J. L. (1987). *Toward a theory of family-school connections: Teacher practices and parent involvement*. In K. Hurrelmann, F. Kaufman and F. Loel (Eds.), *Social Intervention: Potential and Constraints* (pp. 121-136). New York: Walter de Gruyter.

IMPLEMENTATION PLANNING

While this initial strategic plan will guide the direction of OAECE, the Planning Committee and the Roundtable over the next five years, the plan is very broad. An implementation plan, to be completed by June 2020, will bring the strategic priorities to life. Throughout the strategic planning process, OAECE has garnered a wealth of information that will inform the development of a comprehensive implementation plan that will identify specific actions needed to accomplish targeted goals. The next phase of the planning process will launch in January 2020 through an all-day input session with parents, early care and education providers, community organizations, public agencies, supervisorial representatives and various Los Angeles County Departments.

The implementation plan will tackle critical issues to guide success including:

- **Assumptions:** Articulate a clear set of assumptions about factors that shape access, quality, the workforce and family engagement.
- **Objectives:** Establish clear, measurable objectives for each strategy area.
- **Implementation Activities:** Develop activities for each of the four priority areas and strategies.
- **Roles and Responsibilities:** Define the distinct roles and responsibilities of OAECE, the Planning Committee, the Roundtable and other stakeholders within each strategy.
- **Timeline:** Create an implementation timeline with annual targets for outcomes and milestones for success.
- **Resources and Budget:** Produce an inventory of fiscal and in-kind resources needed to execute the implementation plan effectively.

If you are interested in participating in implementation planning, please contact the Office for the Advancement of Early Care and Education at (213) 639-6202.



APPENDIX A

Guiding Principles

The guiding principles, intentionally aligned with the Assembly Blue Ribbon Commission on Early Childhood Education's approved principles,¹³ provide direction for the identification of strategic priority areas and preliminary action items. Going forward, the guiding principles will be used to evaluate potential tactics and the crafting of additional action items.

Access: All children and their families should have access to nurturing, educational, culturally, linguistically and developmentally appropriate high-quality early care and education opportunities with a commitment to social, behavioral, cognitive and physical development and continuity of care.

Equity: Equity must inform all decisions and systems and implicit bias must be acknowledged and managed. Policies and systems should affirmatively remove obstacles and barriers for families seeking access to early care and education.

Quality: All families should have access to a variety of high-quality early care and education settings that meet their needs and that are affordable.

Workforce: High quality early care and education requires a competent, effective and well-compensated and professionally supported workforce who reflect the racial, ethnic and linguistic diversity and needs of the children and the families they serve across the various roles and settings.

Families: Early care and education must be integrated with other supports and services that contribute to children's optimal development, engages and strengthens families, and builds upon the capacity of the workforce.

Financing: High quality early care and education requires leveraging financing that is adequate and sustainable with incentives for quality and targeted investments to ensure equity for children and families with the greatest needs.

Targeted Investments: Efforts are required to maintain services, prioritize areas of need by targeting investments, capitalize in what works, and build upon areas of success.

Data and Advocacy: The County of Los Angeles in partnership with its local stakeholders¹⁴ plays a significant role in advocating for legislative and administrative policies and investments informed by robust data and current research to meet the needs of our children and their families. Our work must be transparent, accountable, collaborative, and committed to equity, continuous improvement and responsive to emerging needs.

¹³ Adapted from the Assembly Blue Ribbon Commission on Early Childhood Education Principles approved on October 9, 2018. Their principles are posted at speaker.asmdc.org/sites/speaker.asmdc.org/files/pdf/BRC-Principles-Final-120318.pdf.

¹⁴ Local stakeholders are inclusive of parents and other primary caregivers (e.g. foster parents, legal guardians and relatives), early educators, institutions of higher education, child care resource and referral agencies, public agencies (i.e. County departments), philanthropy, advocacy organizations, businesses, and others concerned with the optimal well-being of children, families and communities.