

Birth
Through
Eight
**State
Policy
Framework**

April 2018

Introduction

The Birth Through Eight State Policy Framework (Framework) is a roadmap to guide state policy to improve young children's health, family, and learning outcomes. The Framework features best bet policies in the areas of health, family support, and learning. The policies address a range of issues and require different levels of investment, and every one of them draws upon what we know from science.

Leaders can choose which policies to pursue based on their states' political, social, and economic realities. The Alliance for Early Success (Alliance) uses the Framework to guide our partnerships and investments. It also is a unifying tool to help anyone interested in smart state policies make decisions and take actions that have the best possible chance of promoting success for vulnerable young children and their families.

We developed and published an initial Framework in 2013 with input from more than 200 experts representing early childhood and K-12 advocates and leaders, researchers, communication professionals, policymakers, and foundation leaders. Subsequent revisions reflect input from an expert advisory group as well as additional experts in health and family support (2015), and an advisory group on race and equity and inclusion (2018). Policy options are updated to reflect the latest research and best practice evidence, which can be found in the [Research at a Glance](#) report by Child Trends. The most significant changes are the inclusion of cross-cutting policy choices that address multiple issues and revisions to the five principles.

ABOUT THE ALLIANCE FOR EARLY SUCCESS

The Alliance for Early Success invests in state policy change efforts that improve health, family support, and learning outcomes for young children starting at birth and continuing through age eight. We are a 50-state resource for early childhood advocacy and policy expertise. We believe racial, economic, social, and gender equity is essential for all children and families to reach their full potential. Through our state and national partnerships we work to achieve big, sustained impact faster than anyone can do alone.

Learn more about the Alliance:
www.earlysuccess.org

See our theory of change:
www.earlysuccess.org/theoryofchange

Learn more about progress in your state:
www.earlysuccess.org/50stateprogressreport

Birth Through Eight **State Policy Framework**

The Alliance for Early Success Birth Through Eight State Policy Framework is a tool that anyone can use to maximize opportunities for all children and families to achieve their full potential. The Framework covers a cross-section of health, family support, and learning policies, and rests on five guiding principles:

1. Starting EARLY results in better outcomes

Decades of science show that development of the brain and other critical biological systems is most rapid and sensitive in the first years of life. In the context of our Framework, early childhood spans birth through age 8, a continuum that lays the foundation for later success.

2. All children and families should have the opportunity to achieve their FULL POTENTIAL

Framework policies promote racial, social, income, and gender equity by addressing systemic barriers that prevent some from reaching their full potential. While all children benefit from smart policies, the Alliance prioritizes children at risk of poor outcomes with an approach that builds on family, cultural, and community strengths.

3. EVIDENCE should inform state policy choices

Many states are making strides for families through data-influenced policy and practice. Policy options included in our Framework are based on the best available research, and innovative and effective practices in the states. These will be modified as more evidence emerges about what works to improve outcomes for vulnerable populations.

4. Sound policy implementation requires SMART FUNDING

Policies that truly help families thrive hinge on the efficient and sufficient use of public and private funds. Strategic funding decisions should ensure that policies can achieve results over time.

5. ACCOUNTABILITY leads to better outcomes

Policy success or failure depends on what happens in the shift from policy to program, and how policies are implemented in communities. Accountability measures, combined with a philosophy of continuous improvement, promote a culture of innovation and inquiry and increase the likelihood of achieving desired results.

Cross-Cutting Policies

At the Intersection of Health, Family Support, and Learning.

The realities of daily life for young children and families do not always lend themselves to neat categories. Policies that cut across health, family support and learning address the multiple factors that affect outcomes, and often have the best chance of success. The Framework therefore begins with a group of cross-cutting policy options.

Outcome: Children thrive in families and communities that support their healthy development.

BEST BET POLICIES

Foster healthy environments.

- Invest in places that build social capital, such as schools, libraries, community centers, and parks.
- Invest in safe, affordable housing.
- Support health and affordable food options in high-poverty neighborhoods.
- Incentivize economic development that brings living-wage jobs into neighborhoods where lack of opportunity brings all of the problems associated with unemployment and concentrated poverty.

Focus on prevention.

- Direct funding to programs addressing adverse early experiences and sources of toxic stress.
- Invest in family engagement strategies that value parents as experts in their children's development.
- Promote comprehensive screening and early detection of developmental delays and link to referral, care coordination, and intervention.
- Expand access to voluntary, effective home visiting programs and services for new and expectant parents that model relationship building, engage parents in their child's learning, and refer for additional supports as needed.
- Adopt policies that support flexible work schedules for parents.
- Support paid family leave and work exemptions that foster nurturing relationships and responsive caregiving, build parental resilience, and provide security for children.
- Invest in strategies that address the behavioral and mental health of children and the adults who care for them.
- Co-locate or coordinate services.
- Reduce barriers to participation in public benefit programs (e.g., TANF, Head Start, child care subsidy, SNAP and WIC, Medicaid/CHIP, and the EITC) with universal on-line applications and aligned eligibility and enrollment policies.

- Employ navigators, centralize referral resources, and invest in hub strategies that integrate supports for parents and children in settings where families are.
- Connect education and job training opportunities for parents with access to high quality early learning for their children.
- Connect learning environments to health and family support networks.
- Coordinate income support programs to minimize “cliff effects” that occur when a small increase in wages leads to a substantial decrease in benefits.

Promote accountability and continuous improvement.

- Develop a comprehensive, linked data system to inform planning, document progress, and ultimately improve the health, development, learning, and success of children and their parents.
- Centralize and track screening, referral, diagnosis, and treatment.
- Support training for parents, service providers, and policymakers to help them accurately interpret and use data.

Health

Large, long-term studies show powerful links between adverse childhood experiences and poor health and mental health outcomes, both during childhood and later in life. These policies address the health of young children and of the adults who care for them, because early success depends on both.

Outcome: Children are born healthy, stay healthy, and are surrounded by healthy adults.

BEST BET POLICIES

Ensure access to affordable, physical, oral, and mental health insurance coverage for children and parents.

- Expand outreach
- Simplify enrollment
- Eliminate barriers to retention
- Address health care shortages—both of providers who accept Medicaid/CHIP, and of providers who offer specialized care (e.g., dental care, mental health, developmental specialists).

Prioritize prevention strategies.

- Promote timely use of prenatal and pediatric health care
- Require universal newborn screening for hearing and metabolic disorders, and vision screening between ages one and five
- Screen for developmental disabilities and delays according to the schedule recommended by American Academy of Pediatrics
- Increase access to comprehensive health (medical) homes that identify and respond to the physical, social, and emotional determinants of health
- Prioritize funding for prevention programs, including those delivered outside of traditional medical settings
- Increase participation of families, child care providers, schools, and communities in federal nutrition programs

Improve the quality of health care.

- Implement health care data systems to track and improve referral and follow-up services
- Maximize screening, diagnosis and treatment of maternal depression and early childhood behavioral health issues using new opportunities under the Affordable Care Act
- Improve coordination between IDEA Part B and C, primary care, and public health programs

Family Support

Parents and extended family members are their children's first and best teachers. These policies give families the knowledge, skills, stability, and basic resources they need to enhance their children's development and learning, while respecting families' home languages and cultures.

Outcome: Families help their children explore, learn, and grow in safe and nurturing places.

BEST BET POLICIES

Support strategies that foster responsive caregiving.

- Ensure programs draw upon the language and culture of families and their communities.
- Direct supports to the most vulnerable parents: teen parents, foster parents, grandparents raising grandchildren, parents who have experienced abuse and neglect, and parents of children with special needs.
- Promote family support programs that offer activities and materials while creating opportunities for modeling, peer support, and networking among parents.

Align policies and practices that support stable, economically secure families.

- Change the culture of eligibility determination and case management from a focus on rule compliance, to a focus on adult-, child-, and family outcomes.
- Revise eligibility and work requirements for low-income families that disrupt continuity of care for children and work against children's developmental and educational needs.
- Invest in networks of parent navigators/promoters to build social capital and connect families to supports.
- Increase access to public benefits and tax credits that provide income or other supports to help families meet basic needs and maintain stable housing and employment.

Learning

Effective early learning occurs in multiple settings from birth through age eight. These policies influence the quality of interactions and environments that children experience, starting at birth and through the early elementary years, because gains are made and sustained from this strong foundation.

Young children learn wherever they are, and the early relationships and environments they experience create a foundation for school success. These policies influence the quality of children's learning experiences, from birth through the early elementary years.

Outcome: Children arrive at Kindergarten with the skills and abilities to meet developmental milestones, read on grade level, and reach achievement goals in K and grades 1, 2, and 3.

BEST BET POLICIES

Expand access to high quality early learning programs.

- Expand access to high quality child care, Early/Head Start and full day pre-K in a variety of settings (i.e., homes, centers, and schools).
- Support access to high quality full-day kindergarten and grades 1-3.
- Ensure high-quality programs are accessible for full days, during non-traditional hours, before and after school, and over the summer.
- Encourage play to help develop social, emotional, and executive function skills.
- Implement developmentally and culturally appropriate early learning standards that reflect approaches to learning, social/emotional, physical, cognitive, and language development; and build foundational skills in literacy, math, science, social studies, and the arts.
- Align curriculum, standards, and assessments starting in pre-K through grade three.

Build a high quality early childhood workforce, birth through grade 3.

- Adopt training and professional development strategies that ensure the workforce is culturally and linguistically diverse and responsive to the needs of children and families being served.
- Establish research-based teacher competencies that address child development; protective factors; social, emotional, and behavior management; and cultural and linguistic appropriateness.
- Support training and coaching for teachers working with special populations including dual language learners and children with disabilities.
- Support home-based care providers in enhancing learning opportunities for children in their care.
- Establish a coordinated professional development system to reflect the principles and indicators of NAEYC's Blueprint for State Early Childhood Professional Development Systems.

- Implement strategies to improve salaries, benefits, and working conditions for early childhood educators, and support compensation parity across early learning programs (child care, Pre-K and K-3 classrooms).
- Ensure program directors and school principals have the capacity to provide instructional leadership that supports effective teaching.
- Promote transition planning from early care, to preschool, to K-12 learning environments.

Set goals and monitor progress.

- Set goals and track outcomes in ways that engage families in their children’s learning.
- Ensure child assessment tools are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate.
- Require Kindergarten entry assessments to guide instruction.
- Assess the quality of learning environments, teacher-child interaction, teaching strategies, and children’s progress, and use the data for continuous improvement.
- Implement early warning system to identify problems, such as chronic absence, to allow for timely intervention.

BIRTH THROUGH 8 STATE POLICY FRAMEWORK

