

# PRINCIPLES FOR CHILD CARE: A VISION FOR INVESTING IN HIGH-QUALITY, AFFORDABLE CHILD CARE

High-quality, affordable child care is an essential national priority that is critical to the success of our children, families, and economy. It lays the foundation for our nation's current and future prosperity by allowing families to work or go to school and by supporting the healthy development of our youngest learners. Investing in high-quality, affordable child care also advances racial and gender equity for families and child care workers. By first investing resources where they are needed most and ensuring children of color and their families have access to high-quality care, we can help address persistent opportunity gaps rooted in racism and inequities. These investments will also help ensure that child care is culturally competent, linguistically relevant, and available where and when families need it. Finally, investing in child care can help more women work in better and higher paying jobs, contributing to efforts that lift them out of poverty.

But right now, our child care system fails to meet the needs of children, families, workers, or businesses. Insufficient public investment in child care leaves families and child care providers to bear the burden of supporting the current system. The high cost of child care strains the budgets of families, particularly low-income families. At the same time, those working in child care – most of whom are women, and disproportionately women of color and immigrant women – are paid very little, undermining their ability to provide high-quality care and make ends meet for their own families. Employers are negatively affected as well by unstable and inaccessible child care arrangements that reduce workers' productivity and retention.

**It is time that we provide substantial public investments in expanding access to high-quality, affordable child care for all families.** Public investments are needed to fill the gap between what families can afford to pay and what educators need to make to provide high-quality care. Only with significant investments and effective policies will we be able to meet our shared responsibility to give each of our nation's children a strong start in life. Like clean water, safe food, and good public schools, high quality, affordable child care is a national priority that benefits everyone. We as a country want to ensure that all children, families, and communities can thrive – and we have the ability to do that by coming together to invest in a bright future for all of us.

To achieve the goal of ensuring equitable access to high-quality, affordable care, any child care proposal should address the following set of principles:

## **Principle - Quality: All children can receive high-quality child care.**

- **Driven by Brain Science:** Children are cared for in safe, nurturing environments – regardless of setting – that foster their healthy development and learning. These environments are based on quality criteria that are guided by research and best practices.
- **Parents as Partners:** Parents and family members are advocates who contribute valuable knowledge about their experiences and culture to support their children's development and to strengthen their children's programs in their diverse communities. Families and early educators are involved as key decisionmakers in the design and operation of programs.

- **Well-Resourced:** All child care programs and teachers have sufficient resources to support high-quality, inclusive care and education for all children. In addition, resources are specifically targeted at expanding the availability and improving the quality of child care for infants and toddlers.

**Principle - Access: Families can access the high-quality child care setting that best meets their needs.**

- **Provides Options for Families:** Families can choose the type of care that they want and need, whether in a center, in a family child care home, at a school-age care program, or with a family, friend, or neighbor. Families should have access to a continuum of stable and consistent options as children age.
- **Inclusive:** Families have access to care that is inclusive and meets their needs, including, but not limited to, the needs of dual language learners, families who work volatile or nontraditional hours, children and/or parents with disabilities, families experiencing homelessness, children in foster care, or families who live in underserved or rural areas.
- **Family-Centered:** Outreach is conducted to families so that they can easily find out about child care assistance and child care options, including the quality of those options. Further, applying for child care assistance itself is easy and offered in ways that are convenient and accessible for families, including in the languages they speak.
- **Builds Supply:** Resources are devoted to building and sustaining the infrastructure needed for families to access a high-quality system, with resources targeted to the most underserved areas first. This infrastructure includes but is not limited to: physical space and facilities, transportation, and a well-qualified workforce.

**Principle - Affordability: Families can get the financial support they need to afford high-quality child care.**

- **Equitable:** Resources are targeted to cultivate high-quality programs in the most underserved areas first and to ensure that more financial support is provided to low- and moderate-income families.
- **Timely and Direct:** Families have access to help paying for their child care bills throughout the year at the time they incur those costs.
- **Includes Multiple Age Groups:** Support is provided to help families afford child care costs for care for a range of ages, including infants, toddlers, preschoolers, or school-age children.

**Principle - Workforce: Early childhood professionals in all settings can receive the support, resources, and compensation they need to provide high-quality care and support their own families.**

- **Fair Compensation:** All early childhood professionals earn a living wage (or equivalent income) and benefits coupled with a pathway to higher wages equivalent to similarly qualified K-12 educators and tied to standards and credentials that are based on knowledge, skills, and competencies.
- **High-Quality Professional Development and Participation in Professional Organizations:** Current and prospective early childhood professionals are able to easily access high-quality professional development and training, including higher education programs in early childhood education and other credentials, with scholarship funding and other supports. Early childhood professionals have a voice in the policymaking and implementation process, and barriers to membership in professional organizations (such as associations and unions) are addressed so that early childhood professionals have the opportunity to join a professional organization.
- **Diverse Workforce:** Resources are devoted to retaining, attracting, and developing a racially and ethnically diverse workforce that reflects the communities it serves and ensuring that diversity is well distributed across staffing levels and across all types of care.

## **9to5**

**Afterschool Alliance**

**All Our Kin**

**American Federation of Teachers**

**Association of Federal State, County,  
and Municipal Employees**

**Caring Across Generations**

**Center for American Progress**

**Center for Law and Social Policy**

**Child Care Aware of America**

**Child Welfare League of America**

**Children's Defense Fund**

**Community Change**

**Division for Early Childhood of the  
Council for Exceptional Children (DEC)**

**Every Child Matters**

**First Focus on Children**

**IDEA Infant Toddler Doordinators  
Association (ITCA)**

**Main Street Alliance**

## **MomsRising**

**National Association for Family Child  
Care**

**National Association for the Education  
of Young Children**

**National Black Child Development  
Institute**

**National Council of Jewish Women**

**National Head Start Association**

**National Indian Child Care Association**

**National Organization for Women**

**National Women's Law Center**

**New America's Early & Elementary  
Education Policy Team**

**Positive Women's Network-USA**

**Save the Children Action Network**

**Service Employees International Union**

**United Parent Leaders Action Network**

**ZERO TO THREE**