

EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

PPC Goal: Ensure each child in Pennsylvania has the opportunity to participate in affordable and accessible high-quality early care and education, including infant and toddler child care, as well as pre-kindergarten education.

The rapid brain growth during the first few years of life underscores the need to build an early, solid foundation for future success in school, relationships, and life. A coordinated early care and education system is a vital component of the economy, allowing parents to work while knowing their children are receiving high-quality child care and education.

POLICY PRIORITIES:

1. Increase the number of children enrolled in publicly funded, high-quality pre-k.

- a. Increase investments for publicly funded, high-quality pre-k allowing more eligible 3- and 4-year-olds to voluntarily participate.
- b. Monitor provider eligibility in Pre-K Counts (PKC) and the Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program (HSSAP) to ensure an adequate supply of high-quality pre-k providers are eligible for participation in publicly funded programs. Preserve the mixed pre-k service delivery system, and explore expanding provider types to include STAR 3 and 4 family child care homes.
- c. Ensure the availability of a high-quality workforce by addressing the wage gap that exists between pre-k teachers and their counterparts in a kindergarten classroom.
- d. Monitor the impacts of the state PKC and HSSAP programs to ensure intended positive impacts.

2. Increase the number of Child Care Works eligible children, specifically infants and toddlers, in high-quality child care programs.

- a. Seek workforce data from OCDEL in order to analyze compensation disparities within the sector and advocate for professionals to be paid comparable wages to K-12 teachers with the same degrees and/or credentials.
- b. Explore conducting cost estimation studies, using an approved modeling tool, to determine the true cost of providing high-quality care to more accurately reflect the investments needed to build an infrastructure that supports providers.
- c. Expand the pool of high-quality providers for eligible children in the subsidized child care program

by supporting current Keystone STAR 3 and 4 providers to maintain high-quality programming and for Keystone STAR 1 and 2 providers to advance in the quality ratings with increased incentives.

- d. Support policies and funding to increase professional development and degree attainability to support increased wages for the child care workforce.

3. Strengthen Infant Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) through collaboration with early childhood education, health systems, Early Intervention (EI), and child welfare.

- a. Promote the importance of the social and emotional development and mental health/early relational health of infants and toddlers and with their caregivers.
- b. Promote professional endorsements in infant mental health or early childhood mental health, as well as the inclusion of IECMH topics as professional development training for early care and education providers, including child care, EI, and related professionals.
- c. Strengthen the coordination of support and services between mental health providers and early childhood education providers to reduce the number of suspensions and expulsions from infant and toddler programs, including an analysis of available data and services through the IECMH consultation program.

4. Support economic policies that promote family affordability such as a state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) to provide working families a path to financial stability.