



BIRTH THROUGH AGE EIGHT STATE POLICY FRAMEWORK

The Birth Through Eight State Policy Framework is a tool, or roadmap, that anyone can use to guide policy in ways that will improve the health, learning, and economic outcomes for vulnerable young children.

The Alliance for Early Success (formerly the Birth to Five Policy Alliance) developed the *Birth Through Age Eight State Policy Framework* based on a long history of work led by state and national organizations and foundations. We drafted the framework and solicited input from over 150 experts, including early childhood advocates and leaders, K-12 experts and leaders, researchers, policymakers, and foundation officers. The result is a road map the Alliance uses to guide partnerships and investments. We intend for it to be a tool for anyone interested in state policies that improve outcomes for young children.

The Framework begins with five principles. The Framework outlines three policy priority areas essential for the healthy growth and development of young children: health, family support, and learning. These are grounded on a foundation of standards, assessment, and accountability. Evidence-based and innovative best practice policy options are provided in each of the policy areas. Political, social, and economic conditions should determine the policy options states pursue at any given time.

About the Alliance for Early Success

The Alliance for Early Success is a catalyst for putting vulnerable young children on a path to success. As an alliance of state, national, and funding partners, our goal is to advance state policies that lead to improved health, learning, and economic outcomes for young children, starting at birth and continuing through age eight. We create and enhance partnerships by bringing leaders together in new and innovative ways, with the goal of achieving results faster and better than anyone could do alone.

For More Information about the Framework, please email us at Alliance for Early Success: info@earlysucces.org.

Birth Through Age Eight State Policy Framework

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1

Birth through age 8 continuum: Decades of science show that development of the brain and other critical biological systems is most rapid and sensitive in the earliest years. References to “early childhood” and “early learning” in the Framework span the developmental period from birth through 8, because this age continuum forms the foundation for better and longer-lasting success later in life.

2

Priority on vulnerable populations: Because early adversity can lead to challenges, and sustained levels of stress can be toxic to developing brains, state policies and funding should prioritize young children who have been placed at risk due to familial and environmental stressors including:

- poverty
- low levels of parental education
- teen parenthood
- homelessness
- high residential mobility

Data indicate that children of color, children who are not native English speakers, and those with special needs, often fall behind on a range of critical developmental measures. This framework places a priority on these children, with an approach that builds on family, cultural, linguistic and community strengths to increase opportunities for them to achieve positive health, learning and economic outcomes.

3

State policy focus: While there are important interactions of local, state, and federal policy, this Framework focuses only on policies states can influence through legislative, regulatory, and budgetary actions.

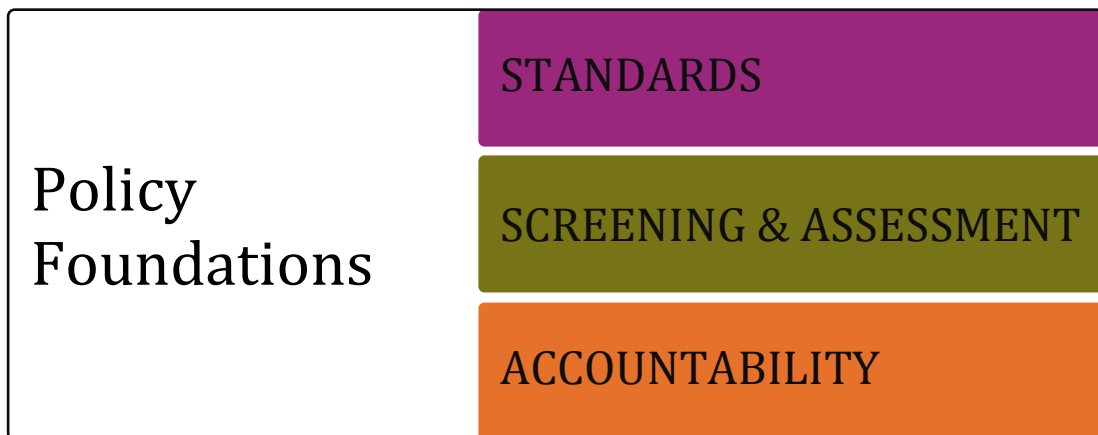
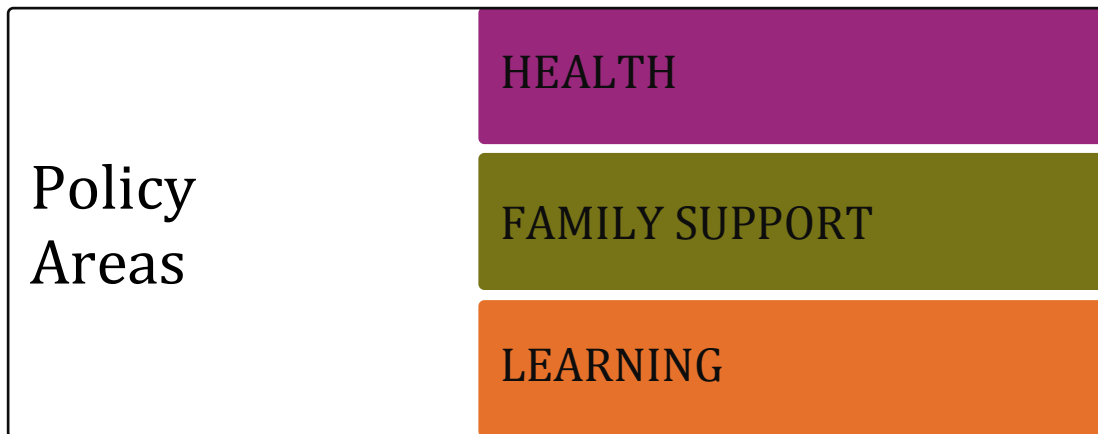
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Adequate resources: Success in changing the trajectory of a child’s development depends on the efficient use of public and private funds. Allocating sufficient resources in a smart way is necessary in order to achieve better outcomes for vulnerable children.

5

Evidence base: Policy options included in the Framework are based on the best available research and innovative best practice. These will change as more evidence about what works to improve outcomes for vulnerable populations emerges.

The Birth Through Age Eight State Policy Framework includes three policy areas and three policy foundations. Each policy area includes a goal statement with a set of policy choices essential for achieving outcomes for young children starting at birth through age eight. The policy foundations include a set of policy choices that support the policy areas.



POLICY AREAS: HEALTH, FAMILY SUPPORT, LEARNING

Three policy areas are essential to achieve good outcomes.

Health

Goal

Children are born healthy, stay healthy, and are surrounded by healthy adults. These policies address the basic physical, mental health and emotional needs of young children and the adults who care for them, because success depends on the health of both.

Policy choices

- Timely and ongoing prenatal, pediatric, and oral health care
- Access to affordable health insurance for children and families
- Partnerships to coordinate the identification and delivery of health care services with early learning programs
- Community-based programs targeting sources of toxic stress such as violence, crime, substance abuse, and mental illness, combined with supports for parents and caregivers who need them
- Maximize participation of families, providers, schools and communities in federal nutrition and assistance programs

Family Support

Goal

Families have the skills, basic resources, and supports to nurture their children's development and learning starting at birth and continuing through the early elementary grades. These policies promote understanding of child development and engagement in children's learning, the importance of home language and culture, responsive and culturally appropriate parenting, social networks of support, and the economic stability of families, because parents and families have the strongest influence on how children grow and develop.

Policy choices

- Voluntary, evidence-based, home visiting programs for new and expectant families at risk for poor child outcomes
- Parent education and parent-child interaction programs that are linguistically and culturally appropriate and support development and nurturing of infants and toddlers

- Access to child care assistance for eligible families with provisions for quality and continuity of care
- Effective outreach and enrollment in programs that promote family economic stability and parent participation in higher education
- Prevention programs and services for children at risk of abuse and neglect and their families
- Family engagement policies starting with defining family engagement, establishing benchmarks of success for targeted populations, and monitoring progress
- Access to health care and education programs for children cared for by grandparents and other relative caregivers

Learning

Goal

Effective learning opportunities are provided in all settings including the home, child care centers, family child care homes, preschools and elementary schools across the infant-toddler years, preschool and the early grades. Improved learning outcomes require that educators and professionals have the skills needed to advance learning and development, and to address challenges faced by all vulnerable populations. 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.

Policy choices

- Access to high-quality care and learning for infants and toddlers with educational, health, and development components; high-quality child care; voluntary, full-day preschool for all low-income 3- and 4-year-olds; and full-day kindergarten
- Collaboration among community and school-based early learning programs and services
- Opportunities for learning outside of the school day, including summer
- Transition planning from early care, to preschool, to K-12 learning environments
- Access to effective pre-service education, training and onsite support for applying knowledge to practice
- Training and coaching for teachers working with special populations including dual language learners and children with disabilities

- Coordinated professional development, including coaching and training that improves practice and provides effective learning opportunities for all children
- Specialized certification areas that reflect the education continuum, birth through grade three

POLICY FOUNDATIONS: STANDARDS, SCREENING & ASSESSMENT, ACCOUNTABILITY

Standards, Screening & Assessment, and Accountability are foundations that support the three policy areas.

Program standards define quality and practice expectations for the field and learning standards establish expectations for what children should know and be able to do. Screening provides essential information about children’s health or development status, and assessments measure progress toward the standards. Accountability for outcomes for children, families, and program effectiveness across the policy areas can inform good policy decisions, effective and efficient resource allocation, effective instruction/services, and continuous quality improvement.

Standards

Policy choices

- Developmentally, linguistically, and culturally appropriate early learning standards that reflect the major domains of development (social-emotional, physical, cognitive, and language) and foundational skill areas (literacy, math, science, social studies, and the arts)
- Alignment of early learning and K-12 standards across the major domains of development and foundational skill areas
- Core competencies for professionals tied to standards and desired outcomes
- Implementation of standards through teacher preparation, training, curricula and assessment, with review of results for vulnerable children
- Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) that are financed to advance programs to higher quality ratings and improved child outcomes
- Development and use of program quality and practice standards for family support providers

Screening and Assessment

Policy choices

- Screenings and assessments for hearing, vision, metabolic disorders, and developmental delays with appropriate follow-up
- Timely, appropriate behavioral and mental health identification and intervention including children who come to the attention of the child welfare system
- Timely and appropriate screening, referral, and enrollment in early childhood development and prevention programs
- Child assessment tools that are formative, as well as developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate
- Assessment of the quality of learning environments, educator/child interaction, and teaching strategies
- Statewide Kindergarten entry assessment to assess readiness and inform initial instruction
- Aligned early learning, Kindergarten entry, and K-3 assessments

Accountability Systems

Policy choices

- Evaluate the quality of learning environments, educator/child interaction, and teaching strategies by collecting early childhood data that can be analyzed at the level of children, programs and the workforce
- Clear indicators of child, family and program effectiveness that includes health, family support, and learning objectives
- Longitudinal, linked data systems between programs and state agencies that can be disaggregated by risk factors to inform strategies for improving program quality and child outcomes
- Early warning systems to identify problems such as chronic absence and allow for timely intervention
- Professional development for data users (parents, teachers, administrators) to support the correct interpretation and use of data