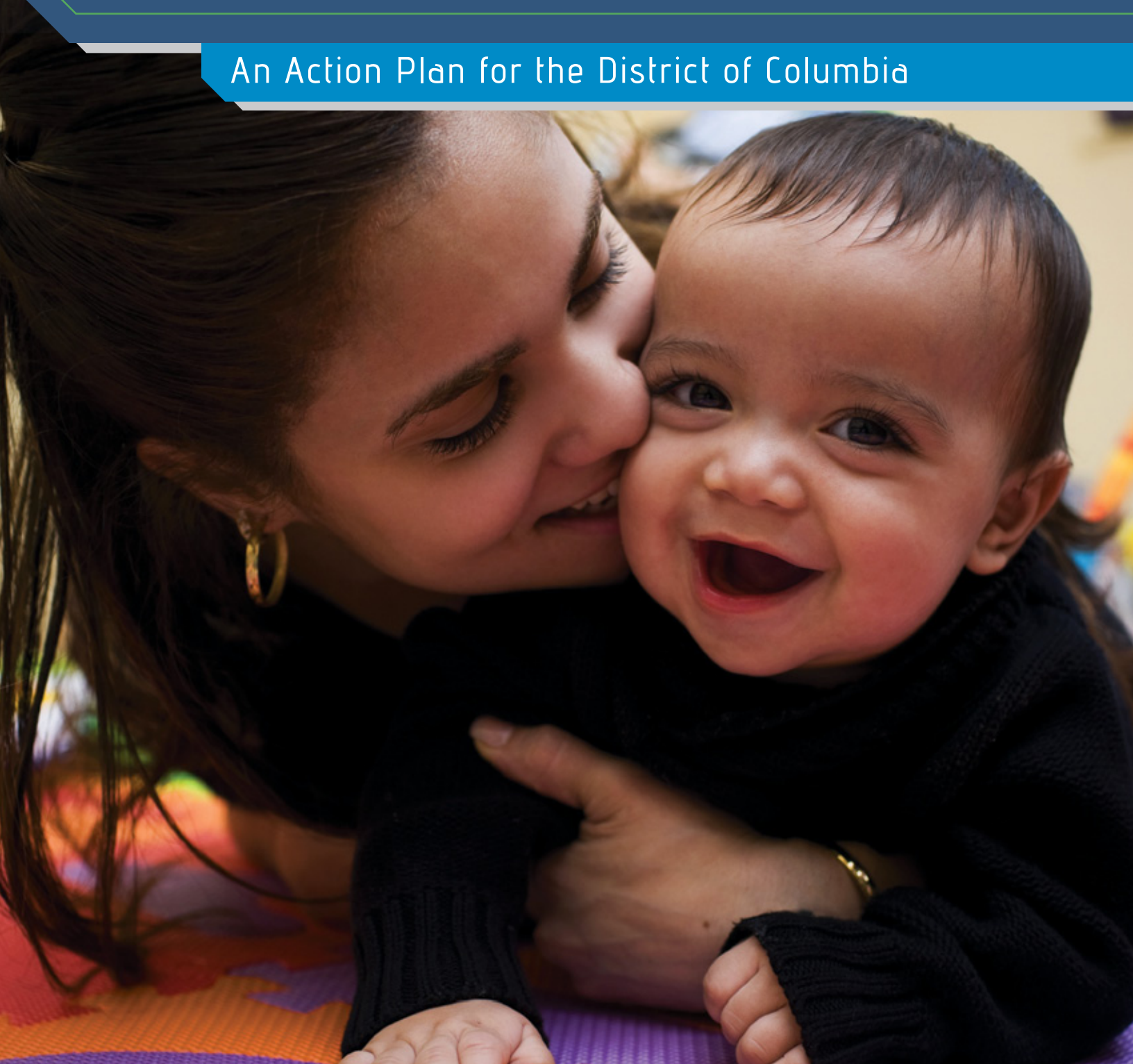


# PREPARING OUR INFANT AND TODDLER PROFESSIONAL WORKFORCE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

APRIL 2011

An Action Plan for the District of Columbia



## GREAT START DC

The mission of Great Start DC (formerly Pre-K for All DC) is to build public knowledge, public will, and public action in support of a high-quality early care and education system for all children, from birth to age five. Our vision is that the District of Columbia become recognized as a national model for its early care and education system, through which all children receive a successful start in school and in life.

Great Start DC publishes economic analysis, research, and public policy reports that illustrate the benefits of high-quality early education for the District of Columbia — and that connect an informed, engaged public with opportunities to take action on behalf of young children.

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Great Start DC

1834 11th Street, NW

Washington, DC 20001

202.986.1716

[www.greatstartdc.org](http://www.greatstartdc.org)

## THE IMPORTANCE of High-Quality Care and Education for Infants and Toddlers

The first three years of life are an unparalleled time of growth and discovery. Children are born ready to learn, and the opportunities we provide them during this critical time of physical, emotional, and cognitive development make a lifelong difference in their health, well-being, and education attainment. Healthy early development takes place, above all, in a context of secure and nurturing relationships. Only by forming attachment and trust with caring adults — parents, relatives, teachers, and other caregivers — do children become secure in the world, able to learn and thrive (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

High-quality early care and education (ECE) — which, by definition, is provided by consistent, responsive, and well-trained teachers and other adults who have specialized knowledge and skills — is increasingly recognized as a key ingredient in preparing young children for success in school and life. High-quality early learning environments have repeatedly been shown to close the education achievement gap between children living in poverty (especially children of color) and their more advantaged peers, drastically reducing the need for later intervention and remediation (Heckman, Grunewald, & Reynolds, 2006; RAND Corporation, 2008).

In its commitment to building a comprehensive ECE system for all children, from birth through the early elementary grades, the District of Columbia is emerging as a national leader. As the first stage of building this inclusive framework, the Council of the District of Columbia unanimously passed the Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Amendment Act of 2008, making access to high-quality pre-kindergarten education

available to all 3-year-old and 4-year-old children on a voluntary basis for their families. And in March 2010, the District of Columbia Early Childhood Higher Education Collaborative released *Preparing Our Pre-K Teacher Workforce for the 21st Century: An Action Plan for the District of Columbia*.

The crucial next step, undertaken in this report, is to develop a similar action plan for the District's infant and toddler workforce — those vital, and often under-recognized and under-rewarded, professionals who work with children from birth to age 3. This workforce includes teachers, program directors, assistant directors, mentors, coaches, and other staff working together on behalf of our youngest children.







## A NEW VISION of Infant and Toddler Professional Preparation

While concerns about school readiness have focused a great deal of national, state, and local attention on pre-k and kindergarten, it has become ever more clear that “school readiness begins in infancy” (Lally, 2010). Given the lifelong importance of what children experience in their earliest years — what’s at stake in terms of their growth, development, and learning outcomes — what does it take for teachers and other professionals to work effectively with our youngest children?

Researchers and practitioners strongly agree on the key elements of skilled practice — often called *core knowledge and competencies* (Honig, 2002; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009; Schumacher, 2009a; and Zero to Three, 2008). Professionals working with infants and toddlers need:

- » A disposition toward working with very young children;
- » Detailed knowledge of child development and learning;
- » The ability to create a stimulating, nurturing, and language-rich early learning environment;
- » An understanding of relationships and interactions with infants and toddlers;
- » Skills in child observation and documentation;
- » An understanding of special needs and how to promote inclusion of all children;

- » Knowledge of health, nutrition, and safety;
- » An understanding of partnership with families;
- » Cultural competence in working with diverse children and families;
- » Professionalism; and
- » Administration and supervision skills for directors and program managers.

Program policies, too, can either support or hinder good practice. The Program for Infant/Toddler Care, a nationally recognized training model developed by the California Department of Education and WestEd, recommends the following practices (Lally, 2009):

- » Establish a primary teacher for each child so that one special teacher is principally responsible for the child's care.

- » Maintain small groups, allowing for personalized care, the development of intimate relationships, and freedom and safety to move and explore.
- » Establish continuity of care, ideally keeping primary teachers and children together throughout the child's enrollment in care.
- » Ensure that each child receives personalized care so that the child's needs are met, and choices, preferences, rhythms, and styles respected.
- » Establish cultural continuity, being respectful, open, and responsive to all families, and show a keen understanding of the importance of culture in the lives of infants and toddlers.
- » Include and support children with special needs, making the benefits of high-quality care available to all children.

Yet, despite growing recognition of the skills and knowledge required for working with very young children, the training and education requirements for the infant and toddler professional workforce remain low throughout the United States. The District likewise sets minimal standards for this vital workforce:

- » A lead teacher of infants and toddlers in a District child development center can complete as little as a 90-hour child care certification course and have three years of supervised work experience with children.
- » An assistant teacher can complete as little as a high school diploma or a GED certificate and have one year of supervised work experience with children.<sup>1</sup>
- » Center-based teaching staff must also complete at least 18 hours per year of approved continuing education in early childhood education or child development.
- » A director of a District child development center must obtain a District of Columbia Director Credential (or an equivalent credential from another jurisdiction) and have five years of supervised experience working with children.
- » A licensed family child care provider need only be 18 years of age or older, hold a high school diploma or a GED certificate, and complete a minimum of 9 hours per year of approved training in child development, as well as receive an annual regulatory compliance review.

How, then, can we ensure that infant and toddler teaching professionals acquire the knowledge and skills they need? Research increasingly shows that professional preparation in this field requires far more than a series of workshops and/or training sessions. Training that follows a coherent professional pathway, preferably leading to a credential or a higher education degree, appears to be of significant value for early

education professionals and to be linked with better outcomes for young children. Teachers become most effective at what they do through a structured and guided process that balances child development knowledge with extensive practice, including opportunities for reflection and mentoring (Kamil, 2009; Kreader, Ferguson, & Lawrence, 2005; Lally, 2009; Schumacher, 2009b; Whitebook, Gomby, Bellm, Sakai, & Kipnis, 2009; Zaslow, Whittaker, Tout, Lavelle, & Halle, 2010).



<sup>1</sup> By contrast, the District of Columbia has raised the education requirements in publicly funded prekindergarten programs (serving 3-year-old and 4-year-old children) to a bachelor's degree for teachers and an associate degree for assistant teachers, with a target date of 2014 for meeting the new requirements. At least 26 of the 50 states have set similar benchmarks for pre-k teachers (Barnett, Epstein, Friedman, Sansanelli, & Hustedt, 2009).

## THE CURRENT STATUS of the District of Columbia's Infant and Toddler Professional Workforce

Infants and toddlers are cared for in a wide variety of settings in the District, from small to large center-based environments to family child care that is offered in the provider's own home. Of the 328 licensed child development centers operating in the District, 193 have a license that enables them to serve infants and toddlers. Additionally, all 147 of the licensed family child care homes in the District have a license that allows them to care for infants and toddlers.

Who are the professionals currently caring for infants and toddlers in these District programs? A survey of this workforce was commissioned by Great Start DC and conducted in early 2011, in conjunction with a study of program quality. Survey results offer a preliminary profile of those caring for the District's children — including the education attainment of directors<sup>2</sup>, lead teachers, and assistant teachers<sup>3</sup>. The survey data indicate that the District faces substantial challenges in building the infant and toddler workforce it needs. As shown in the accompanying chart, the most common level of attainment in the District was found to be the entry-level Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, which requires significantly less preparation than a higher education degree and offers four distinct "endorsements," including one for infant/toddler teaching. Few members of the workforce had attained degrees, and even those degrees rarely represented a focus on early childhood education.

The 2011 survey, documented in *Great Start DC Infant/Toddler Baseline and Workforce Development Studies*, also collected information on salaries and benefits, confirming that the District's infant and toddler professionals receive scant economic reward for their crucial work with young children and their families.

For example, while the 2011 survey found some correlation between salaries and levels of education attainment for lead teachers, pay

remained low at all levels of education. Even lead teachers with a bachelor's degree or higher earned a mean of \$14.00 per hour, or \$37,700 per year.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, the average U.S. kindergarten teacher earns \$33.54 per hour, and the average U.S. elementary school teacher earns \$36.30 per hour (American Federation of Teachers, 2010).

Job-related benefits, according to the 2011 workforce survey, are also meager for many members of the District's infant and toddler workforce. Notably, in a profession characterized by high exposure to childhood illness, only 38 percent of staff in all job categories were reported to receive health insurance, and only 48 percent to receive paid sick leave. Paid vacation time was offered to only 37 percent of staff.

In addition to the 2011 workforce development survey, the "baseline" portion of the study assessed infant and toddler program quality in the District in early 2011 (Howard University Center for Urban Progress, 2011). Findings revealed, on average, minimal to good infant and toddler program quality, based on the Infant and Toddler

**Education Attainment of the District of Columbia's Infant and Toddler Professional Workforce, 2011**  
(Highest Level of Education Achieved)

	High School Diploma/ GED	CDA Credential*	Associate Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Doctoral Degree	Among degree-holders, degree is in early childhood education
Directors	—	8%	33%	35%	23%	2%	33%
Lead Teachers	—	52%	17%	21%	10%	—	11%
Assistant Teachers	42%	47%	3%	7%	1%	—	3%

Source: *Great Start DC Infant/Toddler Baseline and Workforce Development Studies* (Howard University Center for Urban Progress, 2011).

\*The present survey did not determine how many of these earned CDA credentials included an infant/toddler "endorsement."

<sup>2</sup> As presented in the survey, the category of "director" is an aggregate of multiple administrative roles in child development centers (including executive director, program director, and center director). It is not possible to disaggregate these roles in reporting the survey findings.

<sup>3</sup> Respondents completing the written surveys (i.e., center administrators) were asked to report data on up to four lead teachers and up to four assistant teachers, whether or not there were more than four such staff in their programs.

<sup>4</sup> Survey respondents were given the option of reporting salaries either as hourly or as annual figures. Hence, these hourly and annual ranges represent different responses, rather than being equivalent to each other.



Environment Rating Scale, Revised Edition, or ITERS-R (Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 2006). Higher subscale scores were found in the areas of "interaction" (including supervision of play and learning, peer interaction, and staff-child interaction) and "parents and staff" (including provisions for parents, provisions for personal needs of staff, staff interaction and cooperation, and staff continuity). Lower subscale scores were found in the areas of "personal care routines" (including naps, diapering and toileting, and health practices) and "activities" (including fine motor activities, blocks, sand and water, and promoting acceptance of diversity).

These findings represent modest improvement since an earlier quality study drew a sobering picture of the District's infant and toddler programs. Data gathered over a four-year period by the Quality Training Assessment Project indicated "inadequate" child care quality in many infant and toddler classrooms in the District. Using the set of 24 quality indicators on an earlier version of the ITERS (Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 1998), the project rated nearly one half of classrooms as "minimal" or "below minimal" for all four years (Wells-Wilbon, 2006).



## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Consistent, responsive, and well-trained professionals with specialized knowledge and skills are the key to high-quality care and education for our youngest children. The following recommendations offer a blueprint for excellence in infant and toddler workforce preparation and development in the District.

**1 DEVELOP A PUBLIC POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE AGENDA FOR HIGH-QUALITY INFANT AND TODDLER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IN THE DISTRICT,** as the crucial next stage of building a comprehensive ECE system for all children from birth through the early elementary grades.

**2 STRENGTHEN PROFESSIONAL TRAINING AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR THE INFANT AND TODDLER WORKFORCE.**

- » Support and expand the District's existing programs for infant and toddler professional preparation and development, with the goal of ensuring that all who work with very young children have mastered core skills and knowledge specifically related to infants and toddlers.
- » Create a subgroup of the DC Early Childhood Higher Education Collaborative to focus specifically on infant and toddler professional development and to promote institutional collaborations.

- » Define core knowledge and competencies for the ECE workforce, linked to the District's birth-to-3 Early Learning Standards.
- » Define career pathways in ECE, ensuring that training and professional development efforts offer credit toward the attainment of credentials or higher-education degrees.
- » Provide the infant and toddler professional workforce ongoing professional development opportunities, beyond credential or degree attainment, including release time for pursuing such training. Such professional development should include participation by directors and other management staff, and use content tailored to these administrators.





### 3 SET HIGHER QUALIFICATION STANDARDS FOR TEACHERS IN INFANT AND TODDLER PROGRAMS.

- » Revise the District's current standards for center-based infant and toddler program professionals to include, for lead teachers, an associate (AA or AS) degree, with an infant-toddler specialization, and for assistant teachers, a CDA credential, with an infant-toddler endorsement.
- » Provide for accelerated training for infant and toddler professionals at District institutions of higher education, training that leads to an associate degree with an infant/toddler specialization.
- » Strengthen systems of support to help infant and toddler professionals succeed in pursuing higher education. Support should include scholarship funds to assist with the costs of tuition, fees, and books; academic and career counseling services; and flexible class schedules and locations, and/or distance learning, to accommodate the needs of working students.

### 4 RAISE QUALIFICATION STANDARDS FOR DIRECTORS OF PROGRAMS SERVING INFANTS AND TODDLERS.

- » Revise the District's current standards for directors of center-based programs serving infants and toddlers to include a bachelor's degree in child development, early childhood education, or a related discipline, with a concentrated amount of specific training in infant and toddler development and care.

### 5 LINK PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TO PROFESSIONAL COMPENSATION.

- » To retain and reward well-trained infant and toddler professionals, provide a scale of increased compensation that is linked to the attainment of professional training and education.

### 6 DEVELOP A NETWORK OF INFANT AND TODDLER SPECIALISTS WHO PROVIDE ONSITE GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT TO INFANT AND TODDLER TEACHERS.

- » Provide a system of outside expertise and support focused on early learning and development, dual language learning, health, mental health, and family support as a key component of a District-wide quality-improvement system, promoting excellence in infant and toddler programs.
- » This network should include a cadre of master's degree-level specialists in early intervention and care for infants and toddlers with disabilities and other special needs, who are available to provide consultation, training, and technical assistance to teachers and staff in infant and toddler programs.

### 7 INVEST IN LOCAL INFANT AND TODDLER CHILD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS AS EXEMPLARY MODELS AND "CENTERS OF PRACTICE."

- » Identify and support model programs as a means to anchor the ongoing development of a comprehensive, high-quality system throughout the District.
- » Identify promising programs as training and internship sites for infant and toddler professionals pursuing professional development.
- » As recommended in *No Time to Wait* (Task Force for Strategic Planning on Infant and Toddler Development, 2007), create at least two comprehensive service centers in areas of the District with high concentrations of poverty.
- » Increase public investment in model programs to enhance their quality and capacity as observation, training, and dissemination centers.

### 8 IMPLEMENT ONGOING DATA COLLECTION ON THE DISTRICT'S ECE WORKFORCE, INCLUDING THOSE WHO WORK WITH INFANTS AND TODDLERS.

- » Collect and maintain reliable, up-to-date workforce information, enabling policymakers to gauge impacts and systems change over time, as well as to inform planning, evaluation, quality assurance, and accountability.
- » Ongoing data collection about the ECE workforce should include information on age, gender, ethnicity, linguistic background, workplace setting, tenure in the workplace, professional training and education completed, and degrees or credentials held.

## CONCLUSION

The key to building and maintaining a comprehensive, high-quality model system of early care and education for all children from birth to school age is to first build and maintain the excellence and continuity of its professional workforce. The District, following the passage of its Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Amendment Act of 2008, is well on its way to ensuring excellence in prekindergarten education for its 3- and 4-year-old children, under the guidance of well-trained pre-k teachers and other professionals. Now is the crucial time to build on that achievement by turning our attention to the vital professionals who provide early learning and care for children from birth to age 3. High-quality infant and toddler programs, like exemplary pre-kindergarten programs, will lay the foundation for effective and sustainable school reform, workforce development, and the District's economic vitality.



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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**Great Start DC**  
1834 11th Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20001  
202.986.1716

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