

Early Childhood & Educational Alignment

Institute for Youth, Education and Families

A nighttime photograph of a city skyline with various skyscrapers and buildings illuminated against a dark blue sky. The image is partially obscured by a blue diagonal graphic on the left side.

NLC NATIONAL
LEAGUE
OF CITIES

CITIES STRONG TOGETHER

The Critical Early Years

90% of a child's brain development has occurred by age 5

Source: [Too Small to Fail](#)

During the early years of life, children's brains form 1 million new neural connections per second

Source: Center on the Developing Child (2009). *Five Numbers to Remember About Early Childhood Development* (Brief). Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu.



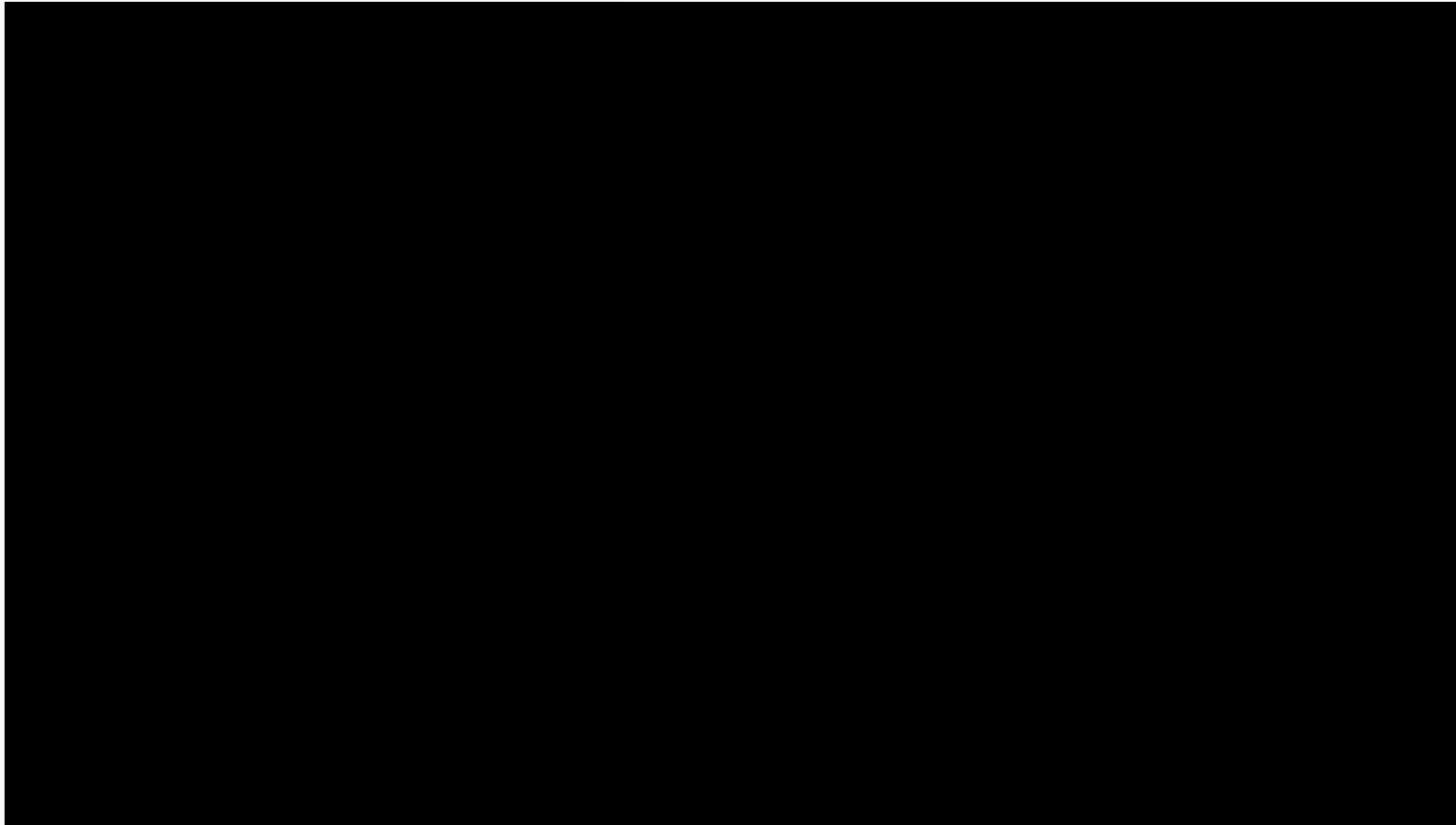
The Science of Brain Development



The social and physical environment influence how brain architecture is formed.

**Experiences in childhood
(both good and bad)
are strongly associated
with behaviors, health and economic productivity...
...DECADES LATER!**

We're Building Brains!



<https://youtu.be/OQTfmnYB7I0>

A child's readiness for school depends on meeting his or her comprehensive needs

- **Physical and motor development**
- **Language and literacy**
- **Social and emotional development**
- **Cognitive development**

A child who starts behind in these areas is likely to stay behind.

High-Quality Makes a Difference



High-quality, intensive early care and education programs can have lasting positive effects.

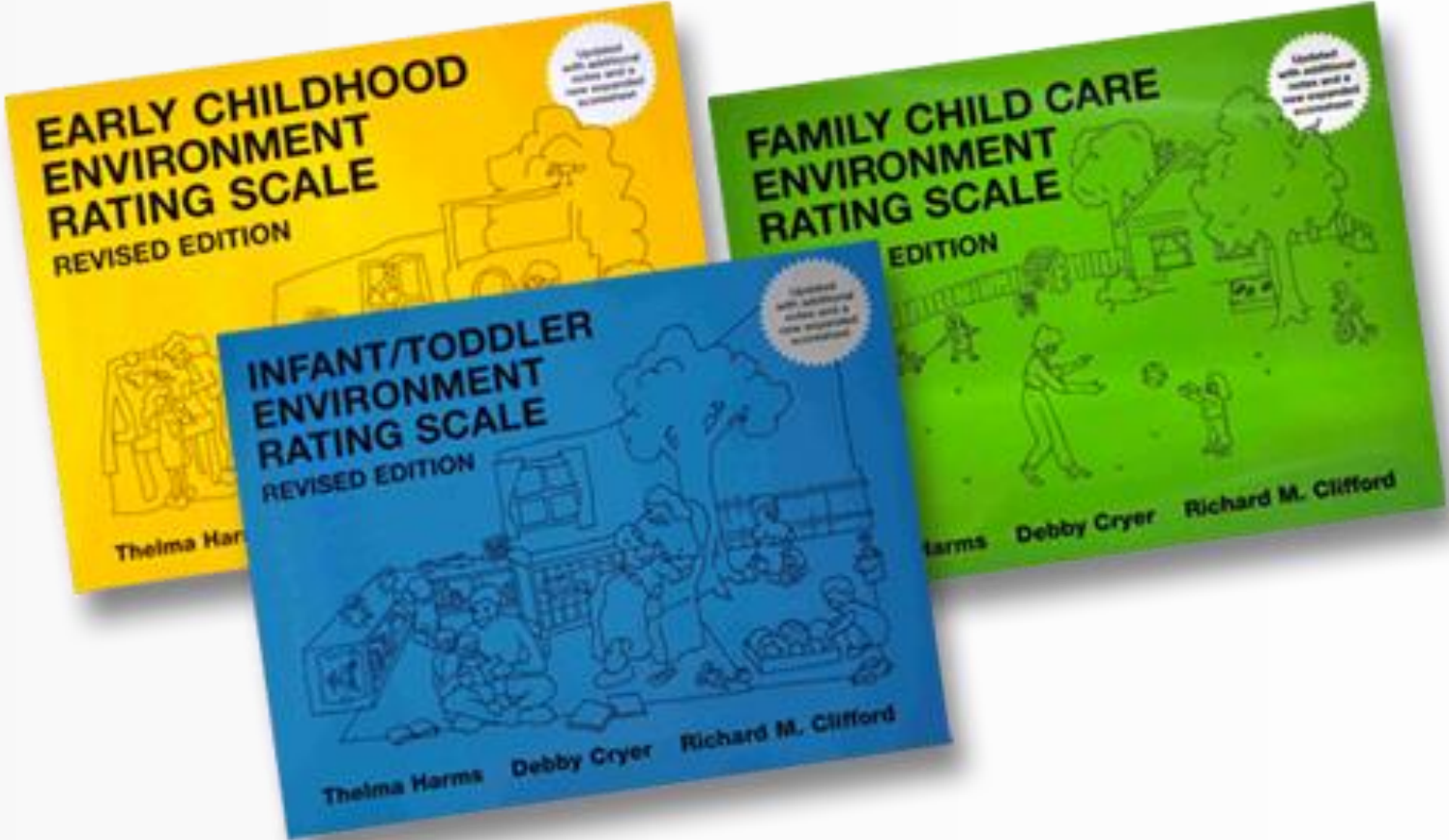
- **Greater school success**
- **Higher graduation rates**
- **Lower juvenile crime**
- **Decreased need for special education services**
- **Lower adolescent pregnancy rates**

The impact of quality is long-lasting!

What Does Quality Look Like?



How Do We Measure Quality?



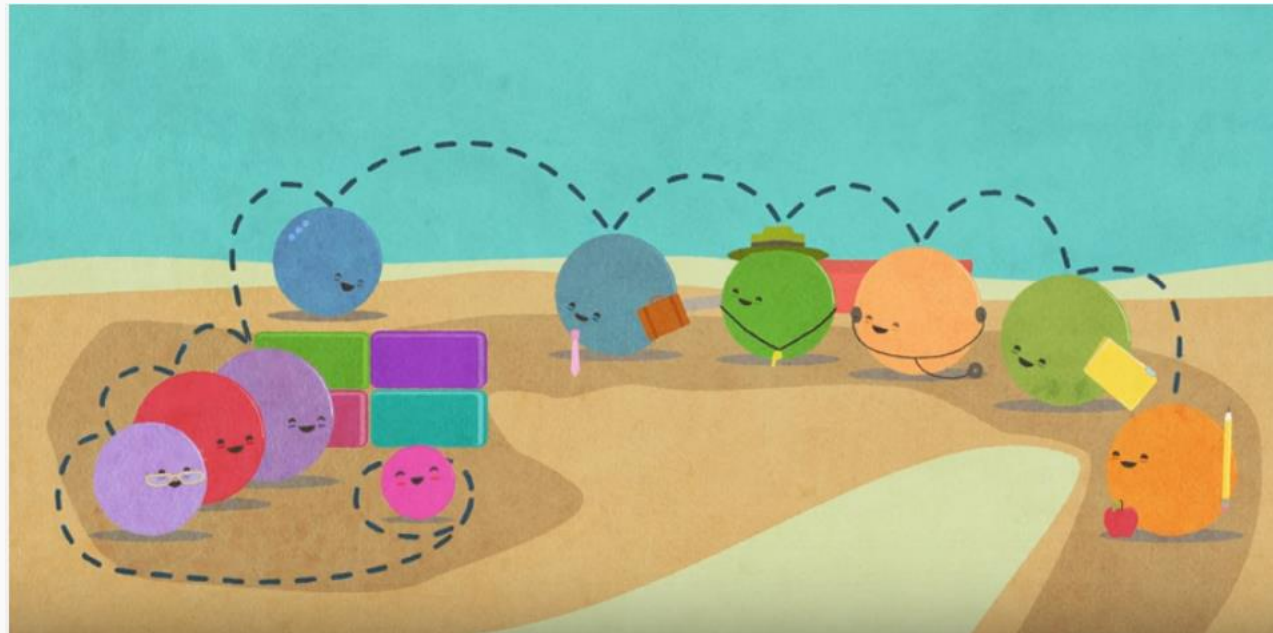
The Workforce is the Key to Quality



Early Childhood is Infrastructure



We All Have a Role to Play



Building Early Learning Communities

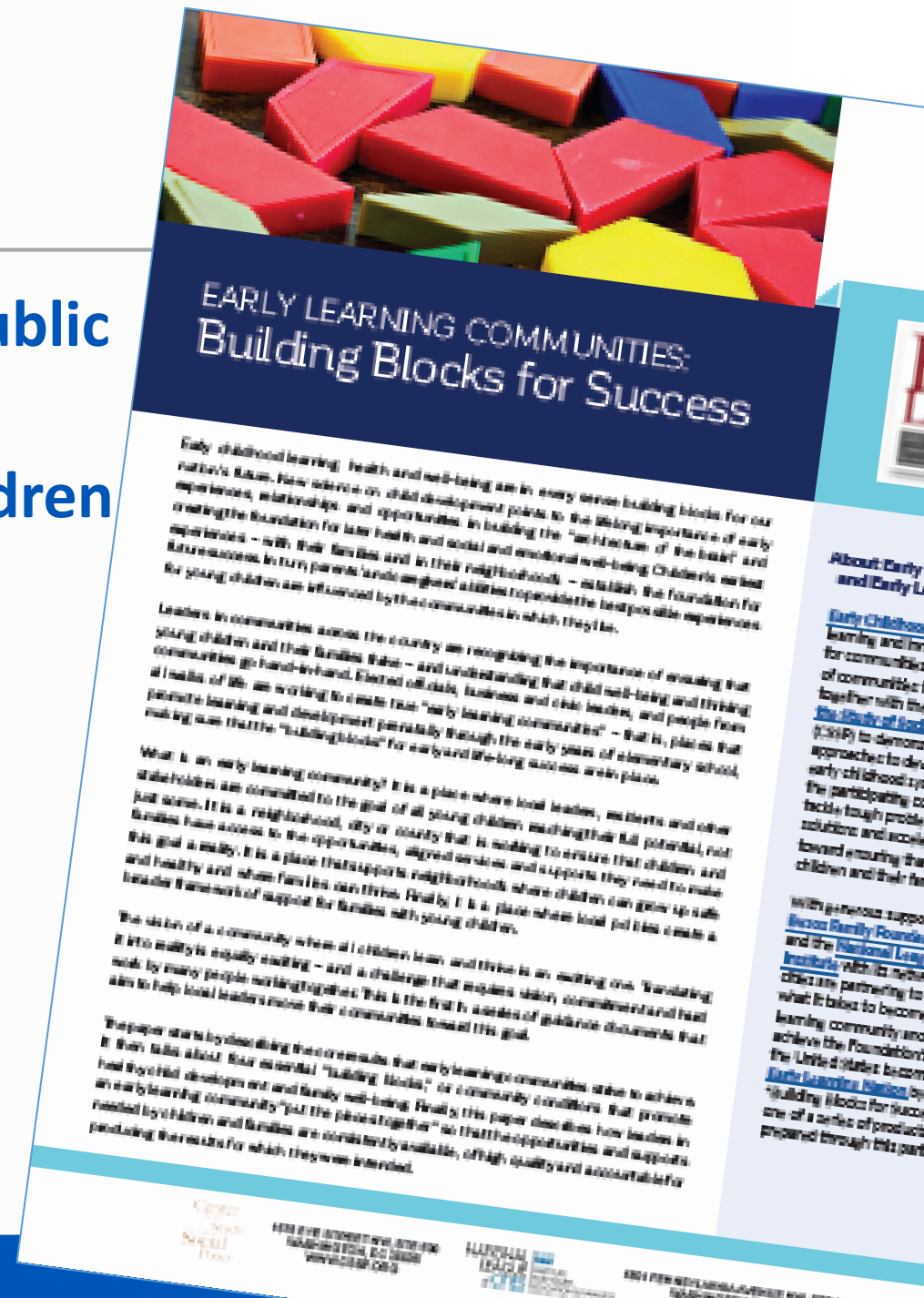


Building Blocks of Early Learning Communities

1. Community leadership, commitment and public will to make early childhood a priority
2. Quality services that work for all young children and their families
3. Neighborhoods where families can thrive
4. Policies that support and are responsive to families

Infrastructure:

- Effective leadership, Sustainable financial backing, Use of data to drive change, Support for service providers



Build Your Early Learning Community

Every Early Learning Community is unique. There is no one design that will fit every community. Each community will choose the actions that fit their community best. However, there are steps your community should take as you begin your journey that will give you a strong foundation and help sustain your efforts into the future. These are the steps to lay that foundation.

1 Identify one or more champions – that might be you!

2 Pull together stakeholders with an interest in early childhood.

Ensure that representation is equitable and inclusive of parents and other caregivers and folks with many different backgrounds and experiences (including neighborhoods, socioeconomic statuses, sexual orientations, abilities, races and ethnicities).

3 Designate a person to coordinate efforts, make connections across partners and keep the work moving.

This person will bring the community and stakeholders together, facilitate conversations and decision-making, keep the group focused on the vision and build relationships with and among stakeholders in the community. He or she will also coordinate efforts to support and fund different actions and initiatives.

Identify potential funding sources for your improvement efforts and for longer-term investment in early childhood.

4

Use the Progress Rating Tool to determine your community's current level in each of the foundations of the building blocks.

Be sure that your assessment of your current status reflects the experience of different population groups within the community – by looking at disaggregated data and by asking members of various population groups to share their experiences and perspectives on the community.

Focus on equity and closing gaps – Look at how children from various subgroups in the community are doing to identify where additional investments or coordination are needed.

5

Develop an Action Plan targeting a few building blocks or foundations where you would like to advance to a higher level.

The more specific you can be about planned action steps, timeline, budget and who is responsible, the better!

As you make your Action Plan, be clear about your desired results, how you will know whether you are making progress and how you'll gauge whether your efforts are making a difference.

7

Regularly review your community's status on the Progress Rating Tool as your community takes actions and makes progress. Determine where your community wants to go next and assess what actions will take you to the next level.

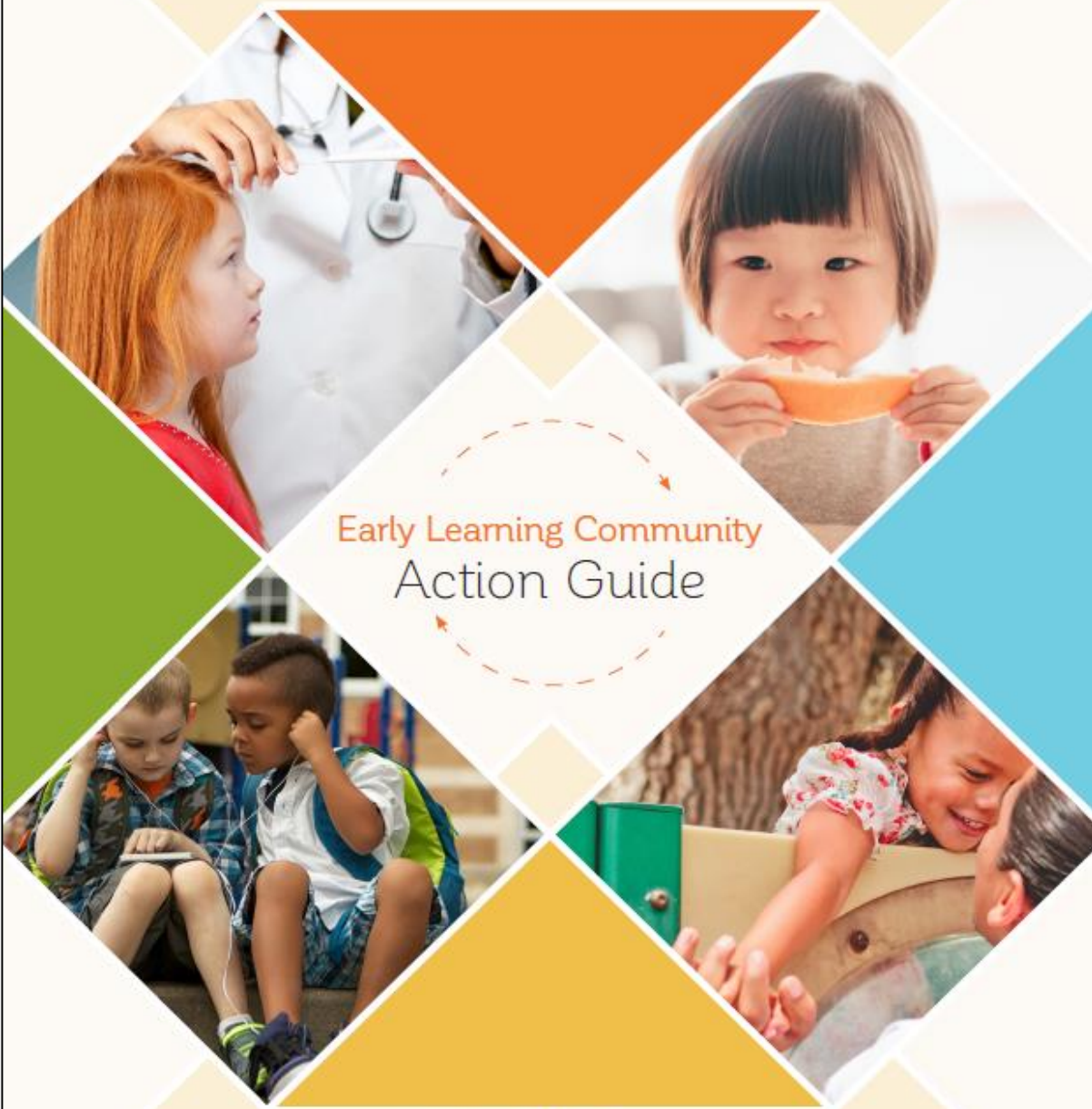
6

Engage parents, service providers and community residents in developing plans to move your community to a higher level.

Partner with parents to find the best solutions – Parents in the community, and especially parents in underserved communities, will be your best partners in finding and implementing solutions that work for them. Engage parents, caregivers and other community residents at every point along the way.



The Early Learning Community Action Guide is a joint project between the National League of Cities (NLC) and the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP), with generous support from the Bezos Family Foundation. CSSP and NLC are working with networks of cities and counties to achieve the vision of the United States becoming an Early Learning Nation made up of communities that prioritize kids and families and promote learning and development for early and lifelong success.



Early Learning Community
Action Guide

PROGRESS RATING TOOL

BUILDING BLOCK #2
Quality Services that Work for All Young Children & Their Families

21 Access to high-quality, basic services that proactively promote health, learning and family strengths

LEVEL 1 City or county leadership have a comprehensive overview of services available throughout the community and whose needs are not being met.	IS THE COMMUNITY MEETING THIS LEVEL?		HOW HAS YOUR COMMUNITY DEMONSTRATED PROGRESS TOWARD THIS LEVEL?
	Yes, we are making significant progress	We are just getting started	
LEVEL 2 Leaders, residents and service providers work together to increase access to high-quality services for underserved families.	Yes, we are making significant progress	Not yet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Map the availability of core services (pediatric and family practice clinics, early care and education programs and family support programs such as home visiting providers and family resource centers) in neighborhoods throughout the city alongside numbers of young children in each neighborhood, and public transportation options linking neighborhoods to those where more services are available. Where possible, include demographic data, like income, race and ethnicity to help identify gaps in access. Identify tools that service providers can use to assess the level of quality appropriate to a variety of settings to estimate conversations already do community assessments, planning time, pay and developmentally appropriate practices. Leverage assessments and surveys already conducted within or around your community. For example, many Head Start grantees and hospitals already do community assessments. Check with these entities to see if they have recent results. Survey or conduct listening sessions with parents of young children to learn about their needs, how they currently access services, what needs remain unmet and what would make accessing services easier for them. Take care to hear from parents in underserved neighborhoods and marginalized populations. Ensure that parents who can't attend a scheduled event have other opportunities to join the conversation such as through Facebook or Twitter chats and online surveys. Conduct listening sessions with early care and education providers to determine their needs for additional support for themselves or for the families they serve. As with parents, offer multiple avenues for providers to engage in these conversations. Other: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish incentives for service providers (e.g., early care and education, mental health providers or anything else identified in gap analyses) to locate in areas of greater need or to better reach marginalized families, including by supporting existing service providers to expand into additional neighborhoods or extend hours of operation to meet families' needs. Establish a cross-sector collaboration of providers in early care and education, health, social services and basic services in areas of most need, so providers may determine standards of quality and align services, referral incentives or support for deeper collaboration, including cross-sector output and outcome measures. Reach out to informal (family, friend and neighbor) child care providers and find out what support they need to provide the highest quality care, and help interested providers move toward licensing. Encourage co-location of programs and services to expand the range of services available in underserved neighborhoods. Promote the importance of "medical homes" for young children, both by educating parents about the benefits of finding a consistent provider for their children, and by supporting health care providers to provide comprehensive services for the children and families they serve. Implement a unified application and/or waitlist for early care and education programs so that parents only have to complete one application and get the first available spot that meets their needs. Support early care and education providers in providing professional development to staff. If not, citywide trainings for teachers and joint trainings for pre-K and kindergarten teachers. Consider how trainings can be accessible to in-home providers and centers without staff in classrooms during the day. Implement high-quality preschool in a way that reaches underserved families and addresses gaps in school readiness. Other:
	We are just getting started	Not yet	

BUILDING BLOCK #2 CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

Structure of the Guide: Foundations & Levels

Foundations: Each building block is divided into three to four foundations, or the characteristics you would expect to see when that building block is in place in a community.

Level 1 describes the minimum standard for the foundation. This level will be the first thing a community will want to establish on their path to building that foundation. In many cases, the first level involves assessing the current situation in order to identify strengths and areas of need.

Level 2 describes a step up from the minimum, showing that a community is taking initiative and making continued progress.

Level 3 indicates that a community has made a deep commitment to this foundation and is fully integrating it into their early childhood system and across other sectors.

Building Block 2: Quality Services that Work for All Young Children and Their Families



Foundations:

- Access to high-quality, basic services that proactively promote and support health, learning and family strengths
- Routine screening, identification, referral and linkage for risks/needs
- Timely access to more intensive services for children and families at risk and those with identified needs
- Families and parents actively engaged as partners

Access to high-quality, basic services that proactively promote and support health, learning and family strengths



Level 1: City or county leadership have a comprehensive overview of services available throughout the community and whose needs are not being met.

Level 2: Leaders, residents and service providers work together to increase access to high-quality services for underserved families.

Level 3: Quality services are available throughout the community and easily accessible to residents of historically underserved neighborhoods.

What is your role?



Routine screening, identification, referral and linkage for risks/needs



Level 1: Providers are trained in administering screenings and know where to refer families when concerns are identified. Populations that aren't receiving screenings are identified and efforts are made to reach them more effectively.

Level 2: Residents have access to screening and referral services throughout the community.

Level 3: A centralized point of intake is available for referrals and follow-up.

Timely access to more intensive services for children and families at risk and those with identified needs



Level 1: Early intervention and prevention services are available in multiple settings throughout the community.

Level 2: Support is available for families to advocate for themselves as they navigate through systems.

Level 3: Families experience a seamless system of supports in response to identified needs.

Families and parents actively engaged as partners



Level 1: All child and family service providers receive training and support to help them approach parents as partners.

Level 2: Parent leadership is integrated into every sector of the early childhood system.

Level 3: Parent leadership and resident engagement are the established norm throughout the community, including for government and government-funded activities.



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