

2016 Early Childhood Common Agenda

Building a smart, comprehensive early childhood system through effective policy to create a brighter future for young children and their families.

United in support of young children (ages 0-5) and their families, advocates of the Early Childhood Common Agenda propose the following framework for building a smart, comprehensive early childhood system for South Carolina. We acknowledge that children's opportunity for success is largely rooted in the social and economic well-being of their families and communities. Effective policy can counter adverse circumstances through a two-generation approach, equipping both parents and children with the tools they need to thrive. We urge our elected leaders and policymakers to consider this agenda as decisions are made to advance policies impacting young children and their families in order to create a brighter future for the Palmetto State.

Quality Early Care and Strong Family Supports

Children who receive high-quality preschool services are more likely to enter school prepared for success in academics and throughout their lives.¹ Many families struggle to afford care, however, with an average cost of \$1,181 per month. Fifteen percent of South Carolina parents report their employment is affected by child care issues.² This problem is exacerbated for low-income families, who are often forced by limited resources to choose care based on affordability and/or convenience rather than quality.³

Recommendations:

- Increase participation in the Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS), which includes established quality standards for child care, early care and education providers, by **creating a committee to recommend incentive measures led by the Division of Early Care and Education, Department of Social Services.**
- Improve the safety of children in Family Home Care Facilities by **allocating funds for additional staff to conduct compliance visits.**
- Ensure access to quality child care for families statewide by **sustaining full funding for second year ABC voucher program recipients.**
- Strengthen the quality early care and education system by **modifying membership and responsibilities of the State Advisory Committee on the Regulation of Childcare Facilities.**
- To empower parents with the knowledge of positive parenting practices and resources, **expand voluntary home visiting programs supporting children from prenatal to age five.**

¹ Espinosa, L. M. (2002). High-quality preschool: Why we need it and what it looks like. National Institute for Early Education Research; Fontaine, N. S., Torre, D. L. & Grafwallner, R. (2006). Effects of quality early care on school readiness skills of children at risk. *Early Child Development and Care*, 176(1), 99-109; Heckman, J. J. (2011). The economics of inequality: The value of early childhood education. *American Educator*, 35(1), 31.

² The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2014). *Creating Opportunities for Families: A Two-Generation Approach*. Baltimore, MD.

³ Washington Kids Count. (2009). *The State of Washington's Children: Poverty and the Future of Children and Families in Washington State*. Seattle, WA.

Economic Stability

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that 48.9% of women in South Carolina work full-time, year-round. Mothers who would be unable to continue working with the availability of child care yield an estimated \$1 billion annually in wages and salaries.⁴ Quality child care access increasingly affects the lives of working fathers as well, amplifying the impact on the state economy.

Recommendations:

- To support working families in meeting basic needs, **endorse a state-earned income tax credit (EITC), a refundable tax credit for eligible people who work and have income less than specified amounts.**
- Accurately allocate resources where families need them most by **using South Carolina's Self-Sufficiency Standard to measure cost of living across the state.** The Self-Sufficiency Standard is based on basic-needs, no-frills budgets created for all family types in every county.
- Promote equity and opportunity for all children by **supporting the use of racial impact assessments and production of opportunity impact statements that are applied to policy addressing early care and education.**

Supporting early childhood health, education, and development yields long-term returns on investments and a brighter future for South Carolina. We envision all children ready for school, stronger families, safer communities, significant government cost avoidance, healthy and productive adults, a more competitive workforce and a stronger economy for the Palmetto State.⁵

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In addition to the three partner organizations, many organizations from throughout South Carolina have committed their support for the *2016 Early Childhood Common Agenda*. For the most recent list of supporters, please visit scChildren.org/CommonAgenda.

⁴ Institute for Child Success. (2015). *The Economic Impact of Early Care and Education in South Carolina*. Greenville, SC.

⁵ Bartik, T. J. (2011). *Investing in kids: Early childhood programs and local economic development*. Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research.