

Birth to Five Policy Alliance

Shifting the Odds for Young Children at Risk

The Birth to Five Policy Alliance was established in 2005 to help to shift the odds for young children at risk through developmental supports in the first five years of life.

The first weeks, months and years of every child's life lay the foundation for success in school. The prenatal period through school entry are years of both great opportunity and serious risk.



Nurturing relationships, enriching experiences and good health provide key ingredients for positive early development. Yet, research has shown that a number of factors put young children at risk including poverty, poor nutrition, inadequate early stimulation and exposure to language, lack of access to preventative health care, and other

factors, such as high levels of toxic stress, maternal depression, limited parental education, single-headed households, substance abuse and family violence. Children who face these risk factors often are far behind their more advantaged peers right from the start.

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Grantees include the Center for Law and Social Policy; the Committee for Economic Development; the Council of Chief State School Officers; Fight Crime: Invest in Kids; the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC); the National Center for Children in Poverty; the National Conference of State Legislatures; the National Council of La Raza; the National Governors Association; the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child; Ounce of Prevention Fund; United Way of America; and ZERO TO THREE.

Birth to Five Policy Alliance Strategies

The Birth to Five Policy Alliance is focused on three strategies to support state efforts that:

- Support state policymakers—including governors, state legislators and other public officials—in their work on behalf of young children and families;

- Build the capacity in states for policy innovation and investment by reaching out to businesses, law enforcement agencies, civic leaders and other advocates for children; and
- Research, policy analysis and information sharing about state policy and trends in early childhood development.

Policy Goals

To promote early childhood development and learning, the Birth to Five Policy Alliance is focused on increasing investments to ensure strong families, positive early learning experiences and good health. Such policies support:

- **Parent and family relationships** through home visiting, parent education, family literacy and efforts to reduce child poverty.
- **Positive early development and learning** through early childhood development programs (Early Head Start, Head Start, preschool and quality child care).
- **Good health** through early developmental screening, access to health care services, and mental health and nutrition.

The Alliance promotes a range of innovative financing mechanisms, including dedicated funding streams such as special funding to serve the youngest and most vulnerable children ages birth to 3; prekindergarten with a set-aside for infants and toddlers; and public-private partnerships for children ages birth to 5.

For more information, visit the Birth to Five Policy Alliance website at www.birthtofivepolicy.org.

Support State Policymakers

The National Governors Association (NGA) Center for Best Practices is funded to provide competitive grants and technical assistance to governors to hold forums in their states on issues that affect at-risk children ages birth to 5. In 2005-2006, seven states—Arizona, Illinois, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, South Carolina and Washington—held governor's summits on early learning from birth to age 5. In 2007-2008, the NGA Center distributed grants to 10 states—Alaska, Connecticut, Florida, Kansas, Maine, Michigan, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah and Virginia. In addition,



the NGA Center for Best Practices will provide technical assistance to directors of state early learning councils.

The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University will convene a national symposium, partnering with the National Governors Association Center on Best Practices and the National Conference of State Legislatures, to inform state legislators, gubernatorial policy advisors, and business and civic leaders about scientific advances in early childhood development and program evaluation.

The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, the National Conference of State Legislatures and the Council of Chief State School Officers support their constituents through meetings, technical assistance and other activities.

Build Capacity in States

The Alliance is focused on building the capacity of key stakeholders who can play a role in improving state policies for at-risk children, including state advocates, child development experts, and new champions such as business leaders and law enforcement officials.

The Ounce of Prevention Fund is providing support to nine states—Colorado, Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Washington and Wisconsin—through several strategies, including peer consultation and support to advocacy organizations; state policy grants to state advocacy organizations; and a Peer Advocacy Roundtable.

ZERO TO THREE (ZTT) is working with its network of child development experts, the ZERO TO THREE Policy Network, which includes more than 7,800 infant and toddler professionals. ZTT will support early childhood professionals in six states who will become birth to three advocacy leaders.

Three organizations are reaching out to new champions. The Committee for Economic Development is engaging business schools and business leaders in events geared to inform and mobilize business leaders on early care and education issues. United Way of America focuses on support for local United Way leaders and their advocate partners to ensure they have the knowledge and support to foster the engagement of local business leaders. Along with its traditional efforts to reach out to law enforcement leaders, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids is identifying and supporting business leaders at the community and state levels in support of early childhood policies.

Research, Policy Analysis and Information Sharing

To inform efforts nationwide, Alliance organizations are engaged in research, tracking state policies and trends, and supporting innovative policy development to shift the odds for young children in their first five years. Resources include the following.



- The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University brings the integrated science of early childhood—neuroscience, developmental and behavioral science, the economics of human capital formation and the applied science of program evaluation—to policymaking through scientific working papers, science briefs and public engagement.
- The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) is charting key child care policies that support early learning and healthy child development and reporting on policies that expand preschool with community-based providers.
- The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is developing a comprehensive framework to guide states in preparation and professional development of the early childhood workforce.
- The National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) has developed 50-state profiles of state policies in early health, family support and early learning. NCCP also will work with several states to produce up-to-date snapshots and state policy choices.
- The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) is tracking state legislation and state appropriations in early learning and developing a set of options for state policymakers to consider.
- The National Council of La Raza (NCLR) is disseminating its report, *Buenos Principios: Latino Children in the Earliest Years of Life*.
- The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices is gathering information about state early learning councils and public-private partnerships for early childhood financing.
- ZERO TO THREE (ZTT) provides guidance, recommendations and technical assistance to states on early learning guidelines and will release a report, *Common Visions, Different Paths: Five States' Journeys Toward Comprehensive Prenatal-to-Five Systems*.