

NLC's Campaign for Early Childhood Success - 2003

Overview

In 2003, under the leadership of President John DeStefano, Jr. (Mayor, New Haven, Conn.), NLC launched a year-long campaign to encourage municipal involvement in improving outcomes for young children ages birth-five years. As the focal point of the campaign, Mayor DeStefano challenged cities and towns across America to develop multi-year early childhood plans for their communities. Over one hundred cities took the City Challenge for Early Childhood Success. Each one is working to create a long-term, strategic agenda for addressing the key needs of that municipality's youngest residents in areas such as early learning, health care, and parent education and support.

Campaign Events & Resources

Throughout the Campaign year, NLC, through its Institute for Youth, Education, and Families (YEF Institute), offered several opportunities for participation in the Campaign and developed a number of resources to support city efforts to improve early care and education.

December 2002

Campaign for Early Childhood Success Launch—The full Campaign was launched at the 2002 Congress of Cities (CoC) in Salt Lake City with a track of early childhood workshops, a call to action by Mayor DeStefano in a plenary session, and the dissemination of several new publications. Publications released included, a new NLC Futures Report, *Our Children, Our Future: Promoting Early Childhood Success in America's Cities and Towns* and the YEF Institute's latest action kit for municipal leaders, entitled *Supporting Early Childhood Success*. For more information about these publications, see "Additional Resources."

March 2003

Plenary Session at the 2003 Congressional City Conference—President DeStefano was joined by actor/director Rob Reiner for a major plenary session on early childhood. During the session, Mayor DeStefano commissioned 12 Early Childhood Champions and also issued a challenge to the membership to develop early childhood strategic plans (See below). In addition, Mr. Reiner also aired a new video for policymakers entitled, *Why Early Childhood Matters*, produced by the I Am Your Child Foundation (which he co-founded) and provided copies of the video to all attendees.

City Challenge for Early Childhood Success—At the 2003 Congressional City Conference, Mayor DeStefano challenged at least 100 NLC member cities and towns to commit to developing strategic plans on early childhood. These kinds of plans establish goals and objectives for a community in areas such as early learning, health care, and parent education and support. Cities that already had plans were also welcome to join the Challenge and share their experience with other municipalities. One-hundred and eight cities and towns have joined the Challenge.

Audioconference on Early Childhood Planning—On March 27, 2003, the YEF Institute hosted a free, hour-long audioconference entitled, *Planning for Early Childhood Success: Practical Steps for Cities & Towns*. This call was specifically designed for cities and towns participating in the Challenge and highlighted concrete ideas for conducting local assessments and for designing and strengthening action plans. The call featured city representatives from San Antonio, Texas, New Haven, Conn., and Santa Monica, Cal.

June 2003

Plans for the Future: A City Forum on Early Childhood—Seventy-five participants from 40 cities and towns attended this two-day national training and networking meeting in Washington, DC, on June 12-13, 2003. The meeting provided targeted assistance and support to municipal officials committed to the City Challenge for Early Childhood Success. Discussion topics included collaboration and priority setting, building public support, and ideas for financing, implementing and enhancing existing plans. Throughout the forum, participants had a variety of small group session with similarly situate cities to facilitate peer learning opportunities.

September 2003

Early Childhood Learning Communities—The City Forum on Early Childhood held in June provided an environment for many small group and one-on-one discussions that allowed participants to learn directly from one another. To continue and expand these important conversations, the YEF Institute launched two “Early Childhood Learning Communities” in September 2003. Each Learning Community is made up of approximately ten local officials and/or key municipal staff who are interested in exploring topics related to early childhood on a regular basis. Through quarterly conference calls, Learning Community members will share challenges, discuss strategies, mentor one another, gain valuable insights on what works, and develop new approaches to supporting early childhood.

October 2003

Little Kids, Big Plans Week—NLC designated October 19-25 as Little Kids, Big Plans Week, when local officials across the country hosted townhall meetings or community summits focused on early childhood. These events offered city leaders the opportunity to raise awareness about the importance of early childhood development, celebrate existing programs, or launch new initiatives. The YEF Institute developed an “Organizing Guide,” including a sample press release and city resolution, to offer assistance to cities as they planned their events. Over 25 cities and towns participated in the week and held events that ranged from mayoral breakfasts and community meetings to tours of early childhood program facilities. To cap off the week, Mayor DeStefano and Washington, DC Mayor Anthony Williams hosted a national press conference at the Penn Quarter Child Development Center in Washington.

Release of New NLC research report—NLC’s Center on Research and Municipal Programs conducted a survey of municipal officials and city staff on early childhood and other family issues in the winter 2003. *Strengthening Families in America’s Cities: Early Childhood Development* is the first research report based on the survey findings. The report shows that city leaders in the U.S. view early childhood development as a top priority. The study also found that many cities and towns are taking steps to promote early care and education in their communities.

December 2003

Events at 2003 Congress of Cities—Several events were planned for the 2003 Congress of Cities in Nashville, TN to recognize the cities and towns participating in the City Challenge for Early Childhood Success:

- **City Challenge Reception**—Mayor DeStefano hosted an afternoon reception to honor the 108 cities and towns committed to the Challenge for Early Childhood Success. City officials were acknowledged for their leadership on early care and education issues and were presented with a certificate of achievement and appreciation.
- **Recognition at General Session**—Mayor DeStefano formally acknowledged the cities and towns that have committed to the Challenge for Early Childhood Success during the Delegates Luncheon. Representatives from Challenge cities were recognized as a group for their decision to promote early care and education in their communities.
- **Workshop Featuring Challenge Cities**—A special CoC workshop, *Strategic Planning for Early Childhood: NLC’s City Challenge*, highlighted the progress Challenge cities have made and how their experiences can be useful to fellow city officials.

For more information:

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