Early Childhood Success

The first eight years of a child’s life matter enormously to their development and build the foundation for future health and wellbeing. City leaders are well-positioned to champion the needs of their youngest residents to ensure that all children achieve their full potential. The National Leagues of Cities’ Institute for Youth, Education and Families (YEF Institute) helps city leaders build and align early childhood systems to help all of our cities’ children thrive.

Why Early Childhood?
Research shows that 90% of a child’s brain development occurs by age 5. Yet too many of our cities’ youngest residents are falling behind and not reaching their potential. Evidence of the achievement gap between children living in poverty and those who are not can be identified as young as 9 months. Significant disparities in early cognitive skills exist by socioeconomic status and by race and ethnicity. However, investments in early childhood programs and systems building are yielding high rates of return and help to improve outcomes for children. City leaders have a vested interest in ensuring that every young child receives the quality early childhood experiences that are critical to later success in school and life.

What We Do
The Early Childhood Success team in NLC’s YEF Institute provides city leaders with the tools to help them build strong early learning communities that serve young children 0-8 and their families. We bring city leaders together from across the country to help them achieve their shared mission: to lead thriving cities.

Our Vision
Cities, towns and villages are places where all children reach their full potential, where families feel supported and can live safe, healthy lives.

Our Mission
Improve city leaders’ capacity to reach across neighborhoods, align programs, design policies, and ultimately build systems that are responsive and supportive of young children and their families.

We offer city leaders a framework for early childhood systems building and alignment at the local level. We provide technical assistance to help them convene local stakeholders to develop shared goals in order to act together to put families at the center and promote policies, practices, programs and services that improve outcomes for all children. We offer city leaders a peer learning platform to share their efforts and learn from each other.

Key elements of our technical assistance include: Tailored information about the latest research and promising practices; Connections to national experts and resources; and Opportunities for peer learning and sharing across city teams through in-person meetings, conference calls and webinars.
Current Initiatives

Building an Early Learning Nation

City Leadership for Building an Early Learning Nation is an initiative to support local officials in developing and strengthening community plans to ensure that young children grow up safe, healthy and ready to learn. The ultimate goal is to become an early learning nation, community by community, by 2025. NLC is partnering with the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) to deepen the early learning efforts in a select group of communities and expand the number of communities working to improve early childhood experiences.

Aligning Early Childhood Systems

Promoting an Equitable Early Care and Education Framework to Build an Early Learning Nation builds upon NLC’s work to align educational policies and programs for young children more effectively. This initiative revised and enhanced NLC’s current alignment framework based on lessons learned in its work with cities and launched an Early Childhood Network to promote systems alignment among a cohort of 14 cities.

Early Childhood Workforce

Cities Supporting the Early Childhood Workforce is an initiative that delves into cities’ work on early childhood workforce issues, highlighting successes across the country, and connecting local leaders to one another. NLC worked with seven cities to help them deepen support the early childhood workforce through the development of policies, programs, and systems of professional development. Based on this work, NLC is developing an organizing tool that will have practical, “how-to” action steps that highlights key opportunities for city leadership on the early childhood workforce. It will also serve as a framework that will help guide how leaders think and talk about the early childhood workforce; identify key elements to consider for an early childhood workforce agenda; and provide examples of promising practices from across the country.

Cities Supporting a Strong Prenatal to Age Three Agenda

Cities Supporting a Strong Prenatal to Age Three Agenda provides technical assistance to an initial cohort of six cities to increase the number of children from prenatal to age three (PN-3) who receive health, family support and child care services that they and their families need to succeed. This customized help from NLC will aid cities in integrating PN-3 initiatives into their local strategic plans and accelerate the adoption of promising policies and practices. NLC will serve as a member of the steering committee of the Pritzker Children’s Initiative and contribute content for this initiative specifically tailored toward NLC’s audience. NLC is partnering closely with the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP), the National Association of Counties (NACo), StriveTogether and the National Institute for Children’s Health Quality (NICHQ), and the Sorenson Center for Discovery and Innovation over the course of this project.

NLC’s Early Childhood Reach

The Early Childhood Success Team has been working with cities for over 18 years focusing on a wholistic view of the early childhood continuum from prenatal to age 8. We are working with over 40 cities, reaching 2 million (est) young children birth to age 8 years.