An Alignment Framework for an Equitable Early Care & Education System

Our understanding of how young children grow and develop is rapidly changing. A growing body of research now supports an inescapable conclusion, one that many city leaders and their community partners have long suspected: the learning experiences and opportunities that are available to children early in life play a powerful role in shaping their future academic success and wellbeing.

The implications for mayors and other municipal officials are profound. Over the long term, a host of key city priorities — including economic development, public safety, civic engagement and the stability of families and neighborhoods — all hinge at least in part on whether infants and toddlers thrive and young children enter kindergarten ready to succeed. Reaching critical benchmarks such as reading at grade level by third grade enables children to develop to their full potential during the school years and graduate from high school prepared for postsecondary education and a career.

The challenge for city leaders is that most communities do not have an aligned and equitable system of early care and education that consistently produces these results for all children. Historically, a patchwork quilt of programs that serve young children and their families have developed independently from each other, and the resulting fragmentation frequently impedes and limits their effectiveness.

More municipal leaders are turning their attention to how city government can work across sectors to support the alignment of equitable early care and education policies and programs. Through alignment, city leaders can prevent duplication of services; address gaps in services; unify city-wide policies and practices to improve quality and wellbeing; and create an equitable early care and education system.

In an equitable early care and education system, all children and families have what they need to ensure all children reach their potential.
Eight Elements of an Equitable Early Care and Education System

1. **Partnerships with multi-sector, collaborative structures**
   Public and private sectors work together to ensure the community has the policies, resources and infrastructure for creating an aligned and equitable early care and education system.

2. **Data-driven practices, policies and strategies that inform policy and support equitable outcomes**
   A shared system for data collection, analysis and reporting informs the decisions of all stakeholders.

3. **Family engagement and support**
   Families are fully engaged partners and cities foster relationships that fully engage families and children in successful, equitable early learning experiences.

4. **Access to affordable, high-quality early care and education**
   All families have access to affordable, diverse, high-quality early care and education environments.

5. **Coordinated continuum of developmentally appropriate care and education**
   The continuum of care in each community is aligned and offers developmentally appropriate care and education to its children.

6. **Professional development and support for the early childhood workforce**
   The early learning workforce is elevated and valued for its contribution and is appropriately compensated, trained and supported to give high-quality learning experiences to all children.

7. **Sustainability and coordination of sufficient resources, funding, policies and practices**
   Strong, sustained and coordinated community support on behalf of children and families which ensures sufficient resources and funding.

8. **Community awareness and engagement**
   An equitable early care and education continuum is a priority for all elected officials and community stakeholders.

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The National League of Cities is dedicated to helping city leaders build better communities. NLC is a resource and advocate for 19,000 cities, towns and villages, representing more than 218 million Americans. The Institute for Youth, Education, and Families, a special entity within the National League of Cities, helps municipal leaders take action on behalf of the children, youth, and families in their communities.

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF), founded in 1930 as an independent, private foundation by breakfast cereal pioneer, Will Keith Kellogg, is among the largest philanthropic foundations in the United States. Guided by the belief that all children should have an equal opportunity to thrive, WKKF works with communities to create conditions for vulnerable children so they can realize their full potential in school, work and life.