

Road Map to Universal School Readiness in the District of Columbia

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Preface

It has been an honor and privilege to see this document come to fruition. This is not the end of our journey to ensure universal access to quality early care and education it is simply the beginning. As we begin implementation will take the same, if not even more, collaboration and coordination both within the government and the early childhood community.

We trust that the *Road Map to Universal School Readiness* will not just be another policy paper that collects dust on a shelf, but rather will be used as intended: a solid foundation for transforming early care and education in the District of Columbia. This document outlines a plan and includes a variety of informative material in the appendices. This background documentation will hopefully make the process less stressful and much more attainable.

For many children living in the shadow of the capital, reaching their fullest potential is only a dream. There are some who are able to access the quality early care and education they deserve. Yet there are too few programs that provide the comprehensive services needed to meet the needs of our city's young children and their families. The challenges we face in our nation's capital are not unique; they simply reflect the challenges confronting early childhood communities throughout the country. The District of Columbia has the opportunity to become a model for best practices in designing an early childhood delivery system. This document is not proposing that every program be the same. We recognize the need for programs to have their individuality and address the needs of the children in their program. There is richness in providing culturally sensitive programs and advantages to diverse approaches. However whether a program is community based or in the public schools, every child development facility should be expected to have the core requirements that address the social/emotional, cognitive, physical, health, and nutritional developmental needs of **all** children. The quality of early childhood programs should never be compromised while at the same time the actual curriculum can be diverse and enriching.

In his book *Why We Can't Wait*, Dr. Martin Luther King quoted President Kennedy:

We are confronted primarily with a moral issue. It is as old as the Scriptures and as clear as the American Constitution. The heart of the question is whether all Americans are to be afforded equal rights and equal opportunities.... Those who do nothing are inviting shame as well as violence. Those who act boldly are recognizing right as well as reality.

I want to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for all the hard work and contributions everyone has made on this paper and especially to those who had set the groundwork before passing over. They acted boldly and tirelessly on behalf of young children and their families. The efforts of Barbara Chambers, Helen Taylor, Beverly Thomas-Dugger, Brenda Strong Nixon, Etta Horn Prather, Minnie Woods, and Annie Frazier are not forgotten and have helped us to move forward. I also want to extend my thanks to those who will read this document and embrace its concepts and in turn take action to make it a reality.

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Executive Summary

The development of the *Road Map to Universal School Readiness in the District of Columbia* demonstrates the potential of maximizing resources and the importance of developing a public/private strategy that strengthens our current disjointed system of early care and education programs. If provided with the adequate resources that assure quality and continuity, this can become a dynamic system that provides coordination across schools and child development facilities and serves as the cornerstone of a *universal school readiness system*. This collaborative effort recognizes the challenges and promise of moving forward and seeks to address the critical issues confronting early care and education.

Given the present interest and urgency to embark on fulfilling the vision of a city-wide strategy to universal school readiness, the following four major issues can be implemented immediately and viewed as significant steps forward:

1. **Finalize the MOU between DC Public Schools and the Office of Early Childhood Development (OECD).** Such action would help facilitate the Early Childhood Initiative outlined in the FY 2005 Budget and supported by the Council's Committee on Education, Libraries and Recreation FY 2005 committee budget report and the Council's Committee of the Whole.
2. **Maximize Federal dollars,** specifically the TANF funds. Under federal rules, the city can use 30% of the TANF block grant for child care. Also under these rules, the city has the discretion of directing additional TANF dollars to early care and education services. Medicaid can also help defray the cost of care for children with special needs.

It is equally essential to focus immediately on the pending TANF bonus funds for which the District is vying; the funding would most likely be available in September 2004. In the fall of 2003, the City Council, advocates, providers, and parents strongly lobbied the mayor to invest \$18 million of the TANF bonus funds in child care. Just over \$13 million was directed to the Office of Early Childhood Development for this purpose. In light of the need and the overwhelming support of the community to increase funding for child care subsidies, the mayor should commit a significant portion of the TANF funds to child care.

3. **Establish a sub-Cabinet Working Group that includes community representation** to coordinate programs and funding across public agencies. This can easily be accomplished with a Mayor's Order. This would demonstrate an ongoing public/private commitment to early care and education.
4. **Make early care and education a top priority in the city's budget and policy discussions.** Just as the mayor has made a major investment in economic development so too does he need to make a commitment to early care and education. Such a commitment would include funding and policy work.

Accomplishing these four recommendations -- coupled with the already well developed partnership that exists between the city, private providers and advocates -- would position the city to move forward with this plan as the foundation for ensuing universal school readiness planning and implementation. Make no mistake: the next steps will require commitment of effort and money. Momentum can be maximized by implementing the specific recommendations included in this paper; all recommendations are derived from the professional experience of the authors of this paper as well as from the best national and local research. The recommendations are:

- **Stable funding mechanisms must be established** to ensure the on-going availability of early care and education and to sustain the cost of maintaining high quality programs. Funding benchmarks need to be clearly defined along with realistic timelines.
- **It is essential to determine the true cost of sustaining a diverse early care and education system** involving both the public education institutions and community-based licensed child development programs. The established cost needs to include the cost of establishing as well as maintaining quality.
- **Systemic changes** are needed to ensure that collaboration and coordination are established in a formal rather than informal manner. Collaboration is required in- and outside of government as a matter of course rather than just as a one-time occurrence.

- **Staffing issues (including professionalism) are integral to quality early care and education.** The city must make a significant investment in the “people” part of the system so that adults have the skills to care for our children. There is a well-documented need for qualified professional staff. Teacher compensation, primarily in the non-profit sector, is inadequate and as such, the early care and education workforce is subsidizing the service given their low salaries. High turnover undermines the quality of the programs and actually costs providers scarce resources related to hiring and retraining.
- Taking a systematic approach is essential. While this plan needs to be implemented in phases, **there must be a date certain when universal school readiness will be a reality** in our nation’s capital.

This *Road Map Universal School Readiness in the District of Columbia* is the starting point for the **planned** journey toward universal school readiness in the District of Columbia.

This plan builds on current successes including:

- the Department of Recreation’s commitment to have 100% of its early childhood programs accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
- the successful accreditation of over 68 centers across the city over the past five years
- the investment made by the city to significantly increase the number of CDA-trained teachers in early care centers across the city
- the selection of the District of Columbia by the Kellogg Foundation as one of its SPARK sites.

A universal school readiness strategy in the District of Columbia includes the following components:

- Access to high quality, developmentally appropriate early care and education programs
- High quality professional development and training for early care and education teachers, regardless of the auspices of the program
- Equitable and stable funding of all programs regardless of auspices

- Consistent nationally recognized educational standards aligned with the k-12 education system
- Regular assessments of program quality and improvement
- Health and developmental screening and immunizations for all children by the age of four
- Alignment of systems that impact young children and families
- A campaign to rally the community in support of school readiness

Universal school readiness via a quality early care and education system is the foundation for high educational achievement in the District of Columbia. A comprehensive system to deliver school readiness is an investment in the quality of life for young children in our city, today and their role as civic leaders in the future.

Introduction

The goal of this paper is to provide a road map for moving from the current disjointed system to one that is focused on quality, centered around the child, considerate of and responsive to family needs, and is comprehensive and planned. This plan will focus attention on the needs of children ages 0 to 12 with special attention paid to children aged 3 and 4 who would be enrolled in a pre-k program. We will present information on a variety of components including the current status, sustainable funding mechanisms, professional development, and evaluation. Our ultimate goal is for the elected and appointed leaders in the District to embrace this plan and to implement it.

The availability of quality school readiness programs has many short- and long-term benefits for children, families and communities. **Children from low-income families who have quality early childhood development experiences are more likely to enter school ready to learn and succeed in school having developed socially, emotionally and physically. These children are also less likely to enter the criminal justice system than their low-income peers who do not receive quality preschool.** Families benefit when they are able to maintain stable employment or participate in training opportunities for employment. Communities benefit when the needs of children and families are met, including the ability to fully participate in the workforce.

The combination of brain research, welfare reform and family economic stability has raised the stakes for the provision of quality school readiness opportunities for children in the District of Columbia. There is every indication that the accessibility to such quality programs is integral to the present and future educational and emotional development of children and to the economic viability of low- and moderate-income families and communities. In the absence of affordable quality school readiness programs, children are exposed to unstable child care arrangements and unlicensed caregivers. Too, parents and unlicensed caregivers lose their foothold in the workforce and may return to TANF and lose job opportunities and income. (See *Waiting in the Shadow of the Capitol-Impacts of the Child Care Subsidy freeze on Families, Programs and Children* by the UDC Center for Applied Research.)

A number of well-regarded studies clearly show the return on investment for quality early care and education programs. The High/Scope Perry Preschool Project, for example, estimates that there is a more than \$7 benefit for every \$1 invested in quality early learning. Similarly, Steven Barnett of Rutgers University found that the High/Scope project yielded a \$150,000 per participant savings in reduced crime costs. (*A Framework for Universal School Readiness in the District of Columbia*, June 9, 2004, p. 1.) The District of Columbia's approach to developing a quality universal school readiness system, therefore, must include quality components. The components are:

- Trained professionals in every classroom
- A well designed and implemented curriculum
- Responsive programming for family needs
- Comprehensive services for all children
- A two-year school readiness program starting at age three
- An on-going, robust system of evaluation (*A Framework for Universal School Readiness in the District of Columbia*, June 9, 2004, p. 4.)
- Equity and funding across programs (*Universal Pre-kindergarten Program for Washington, DC*, June 9, 2004.)

Local work to improve the District's early care and education system and movement to achieve universal school readiness should be considered in the national context. The National Education Goals Panel, established in July 1990 and dissolved in the late 1990s, established eight goals to improve learning and teaching. According to the NEGP web site, the goals

were created by the Governors and the Congress. . . These goals help provide a national framework for education reform and promote certain specific changes needed to ensure equitable educational opportunities and high levels of educational achievement for all students. (www.seisummit.org/natlgoals.htm#Eight)

Goal 1, Ready to Learn, states that "All children in America will start school ready to learn." Specifically,

- Children will receive the nutrition, physical activity experiences, and health care needed to arrive at school with healthy minds and bodies, and to maintain the mental alertness necessary to be prepared to learn, and the number of low-birthweight babies will be significantly reduced through enhanced prenatal health systems.

- Every parent in the United States will be a child's first teacher and devote time each day to helping such parent's preschool child learn, and parents will have access to the training and support parents need.
- All children will have access to high-quality and developmentally appropriate preschool programs that help prepare children for school. (www.negp.gov/page3-3.htm)

Note: The other education goals are not discussed in this paper because they relate to older children. Details about the other seven goals can be found on-line at www.seisummit.org/natlgoals.htm#Eight.

The *status quo*: current data on kids and an assessment of the system

Status of children in the District of Columbia

While the District government and non-profits have been working to improve outcomes for children in the District, there are many instances in which no appreciable improvements have been made. Childhood poverty, for example, remains high, as does the incidence of child abuse and neglect and poor school performance. Certainly, quality early learning opportunities will not alone lead to dramatic improvements. As one part of a comprehensive plan to address the often abysmal indicators, however, the early care and education community has the potential to affect meaningful change in the lives of the city's young people.

Well-known indicators of child well-being of the District's children are:

- 12% of births were low-birth weight (2000 census)
- 32% of children live in poverty (2000 census)
- 14% of births in 2000 were to teen mothers (2000 census)
- 15% of children under age 18 were in families receiving welfare in FY 2003 (*What's in it for kids? A budget and policy analysis FY 2004*, DC Action for Children, 2004)
- 32% of the households in the District in 2000 were below 200% of poverty (2000 census)
- The violent crime rate was 15 in 2000, remaining relative stable from 1998 and 1999 (DC Agenda)

Perhaps not as well known is other data that is important to understanding the need for a comprehensive approach to universal school readiness. This includes:

- The District budget supports 40% of the children eligible for the Child Care Subsidy Program (FYs 2004 and 2005)
- As of April 7, 2004, there were 1,539 children on the waiting list for the Child Care Subsidy Program
- There are approximately 9,000 children waiting for market rate early care and education
- DC Public Schools, as of October 7, 2003, was serving 4,351 children in its pre-kindergarten programs

- The incidence of dropping out of high school is rampant – 35% of all District students drop out of high school. (*Vision for Growing an Inclusive City*, Draft, p. 41) Many consider this percentage low; they suggest that the 35% figure used by the Office of Planning significantly understates the drop out rates for Latino and African American youth.
- Both the local and federal government benefit from the Child Care Subsidy Program. The most recent calculation of the District’s subsidy of federal government workers in the child care subsidy program is \$3.5 million (FY 2002).

Assessment of the current system

There are approximately 13,260 three and four year olds in the District of Columbia. Of that number, approximately 2,517 three year olds are served in publicly supported pre-kindergarten and Head Start programs. (Only children with family incomes below the federal poverty line are eligible for Head Start.) Approximately 6,846 four year olds are served in publicly supported programs. These numbers may overstate the number of children served, because one child may be supported with funds from more than one funding stream. Using this data, 70% of three and four year olds receive some publicly supported early care and education experience. In 2002, the Office of Early Childhood Development reported that nearly 1,800 children ages 2-½ to four were on waiting lists for early care and education services. As federal funds for child care have declined, the numbers on the waiting list have increased.

Other important information about access and capacity include:

- There are 369 licensed child development centers in the District of Columbia. Of that number, 230, or 62%, participated in the subsidy system. The majority of the remainder are federal government centers operated for their employees or private employer-based centers operated for the benefit of their employees.
- Surveys conducted by the Center for Applied Research at the University of the District of Columbia indicate that child development centers in every ward are willing to expand services.

Public elementary schools typically operate at least one pre-kindergarten or Head Start classroom serving four-year olds. However, pre-kindergarten is neither compulsory nor

an entitlement. Four-year old children (unlike five year olds) can be denied a place in their neighborhood school.

A Snapshot of Organizations Serving 3 and 4 Year Olds (Fall 2003)

Agency/Program	Number of 3 yr olds enrolled	Number of 4 yr olds enrolled	Number Served	Comments
DCPS Pre-Kindergarten	1,079	3,272	4,351	
Head Start	1,438	1,535	2,973	Includes DCPS Head Start children – 1,876
Child Care Subsidy Program	1,184	1,641	2,825	As of 9/30/03
Board of Education charter schools		244	244	
Public Charter School Board schools		154	154	
Private and parochial schools	Unk.	Unk.	Unk.	<i>No known source of data</i>
TOTAL	2,517	6,846	9,363*	

**These are duplicated numbers, as children may participate in more than one program – e.g., Head Start or DCPS pre-K and Child Care Subsidy Program*

Source: Universal Preschool: An Initial Look at Promoting Universal Early Education for Children Aged 3-4, Draft January 2, 2004, p. 9.

The Administration is acutely aware of the “system” such as it is. In early 2004, the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Children, Youth, Families, and Elders made the following observations:

- Typical of many jurisdictions, the District of Columbia provides early childhood services through a patchwork of providers and funding without a single oversight body. [Emphasis added.] Three- and four-year olds can be served through as many as 6 citywide agencies [including DC Public Schools, DC Public Charter Schools, Department of Parks and Recreation, Office of Early Childhood Development] that subcontract to nearly 400 community providers.
- A child attending Head Start until 3:30 pm at a school setting might be part of the child care subsidy program for the rest of the day. Summer care may be provided through yet another funding or program source. That child would be counted as part of each program. Thus, at present, DC has no way to monitor services by individual child. In addition, private, parochial, or non-licensed care settings do not report in any systemized way. At best, we

can capture an estimate of children served and the level of need. (*Universal Preschool: An Initial Look at Promoting Universal Early Education for Children Aged 3-4*, Draft January 2, 2004, pp. 6, 7.)

Based on the work of the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Children, Youth, Families, and Elders as well as the Executive Office of the Mayor, early care and education advocates, and others, it is safe to say that the leading shortcomings of the current system are:

- inconsistency regarding quality including staff development, resources for children, evaluation, ratios, curriculum, standards, and outcomes
- inconsistency in meeting the needs of families including the number of hours services are available and difficulty in providing the services (or access to) the services families need such as health and mental health care
- inconsistency between systems regarding funding equity (such as the number of hours a child is served)
- inconsistency across funding/management agencies regarding space requirements
- there are no standards for addressing essential developmental components

Adding to the confusion is the range of funding sources for early care and education and the strings that are attached. Generally, funding for these programs is from Local funds, Federal funds, Intra-District transfers, foundations and other private support, and parent fees. The exact make up of the funding for each managing agency (Office of Early Childhood Development and DC Public Schools) depends on their specific mandates as well as their resourcefulness in applying for federal and other grants, either alone or in partnership with others. Similarly, the method for paying for the services differs by managing agency. While DCPS and DC Public Charter Schools pre-k programs are funded via the Per Pupil Spending Formula from the central administration to the individual schools, non-profit and for-profit child development facilities are paid on a reimbursement basis by the Office of Early Childhood Development.

One of the most significant strengths of the current system is the fact that it allows for parents to select the program that best suits the family and child. The mixed delivery system of child development centers, Head Start, and pre-kindergarten provides options for parents, an important consideration for young children. This system is appealing to parents and for this reason, it is essential that the more robust early care and education system under discussion here maintains and expands diversity. Accessibility is also important. The current system provides options for families at all income levels; this cannot be lost or else we will fail children and their families.

Components of a well-designed system

Component basics

A robust early care and education system is a necessary first step toward achieving universal school readiness. The District of Columbia has an extensive network of child care centers, pre-kindergarten classes, Head Start, and family child care homes. The relationship between these building blocks – which currently is strong – must be strengthened and supported. **They must be woven together in to a comprehensive system that includes the infrastructure to promote and sustain the high levels of program quality necessary to achieve universal school readiness in a population of at risk children.** Absent the supportive infrastructure, the effectiveness of early care and education programs to promote school readiness cannot be assured. A significant investment of public dollars demands the accountability and outcomes that investments in infrastructure can provide.

James Gallagher and Richard Clifford, of the federally funded National Center for Early Learning and Development, note the following components for a support system for early childhood services in their paper *The Missing Support Infrastructure in Early Childhood*:

1. personnel preparation
2. technical assistance
3. applied research and program evaluation
4. communication
5. demonstration
6. data systems
7. comprehensive planning
8. coordination of support elements (<http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v2n1/gallagher.html>)

The authors further suggest that the challenge for policy makers is

how to engineer these favorable conditions in the face of the many problems and limitations that child care workers and directors are confronted with, namely, limited government support, restricted family resources, and a fragmented support system. (<http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v2n1/gallagher.html>)

Other researchers point out that infrastructure represents a small portion of the hourly per pupil cost of early care and education. However, the absence of infrastructure can compromise the effectiveness of the early care and education dollars. “Infrastructure encompasses accountability, professional development, facilities, regulation, and data

evaluation capacities. All too often, costs are calculated without factoring in these essential functions of the system.” (Sharon Lynn Kagan, *Equal Access to Early Learning*, National Black Child Development Institute, 2002.)

This paper provides specific suggestions of ways to implement a planned and well-conceived system including the operational and infrastructure needs. Fortunately, the District of Columbia possesses many of the basic elements.

Evaluating early care and education

The District needs a multi-faceted system to measure impact and quality over time. Suggested components of this system include 1) a longitudinal study which tracks an appropriately drawn sample of children from pre-k through high school, 2) a process quality component and 3) a structural quality component.

The District would be well served by taking the lead from Dr. Linda M. Espinosa’s article entitled *High Quality Preschool: Why We Need It and What It Looks Like* in the November 2002 edition of *Preschool Policy Matters* from the National Institute for Early Education Research. This piece discusses process and structural quality and the methods for determining their level. Foremost amongst the recommendations in the article is that which urges the implementation of a longitudinal study. A cost analysis comes in as a close second. Such an analysis could assess process and quality currently being implemented on a pilot basis in the District and make recommendations regarding strengthening or changing that which is currently being implemented.

This government-sponsored and -managed longitudinal study will be complemented by privately-funded and operated efforts. Currently, the SPARK initiative is planning to track 1,000 children over three years as they move from early care settings to the first grade. The findings from this pilot will undoubtedly be used to form a basis for continued evaluation and assessment of the link between program quality and child outcomes and inform a process of continuing improvement.

Furthermore, the District should do considerably more in the areas of outcomes and assessment. In a seminar held in the District, Drs. Lynnette Aytch and Richard Clifford of the Frank Porter Graham Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill indicated that a battery of assessments could cost as much as \$500 per child. This is a worthwhile,

and necessary, investment if the city is interested in ensuring that children benefit from their experiences in early care and education settings. The seminar speakers further suggested that a well-planned system also provides targeted technical assistance, continuous professional development and external quality assurance and program integrity at schools and other early care and education sites. **All of this will require resources not currently in the District's budget.**

The District's neighbor to the north recently adopted a comprehensive, state-wide approach to early care and education. The Maryland Partnership for Children, Youth and Families, managed by now-OBP staffer Justin Kopca, has been influential to our thinking. For these reasons, **we recommend that the city convene a mini-conference with those who participated in the development of the plan to help us move closer to a universal school readiness system.**

Outcomes

There is no question that the District of Columbia must institute outcome measures for early care and education. At a minimum, *the areas that must be measured are: social, behavioral and cognitive development; literacy and language skills and motor development.* There are a number of ways to assess these areas. For example, many states use the school readiness assessment given in kindergarten. These tools not only assess individual outcomes, but collective results can be a driver of program changes and improvements. Currently, the District of Columbia does not have a school readiness assessment that is administered in a standardized manner.

The first step to be undertaken is for the District to define and implement one definition of successful early care and education for children entering kindergarten. This must be done consistently across **all** early care and education programs that receive District government funding (through OECD or other agencies). These programs include those operated or overseen by the Office of Early Childhood Development, the Department of Parks and Recreation, DC Public Schools, public charter schools, and the Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation.

Indicators related to the definition should be drawn from the range of clear scientifically based indicators in these areas that contribute to school success. Further, OECD as the leader of this effort should continue to work with national early childhood experts from such organizations as the National Association for the Education and Young Children

(NAEYC), National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI) and Head Start to ensure that implemented assessments are age appropriate, based in best practices and are culturally sensitive.

Information, to the extent possible, should be benchmarked so as to allow parents and other caregivers, city leaders, budget managers, and the general public to assess improvements and remedies to system or program deficiencies.

Implementation of a single early learning standard

Such a standard is necessary for all early care and education programs regardless of setting. The District government should adopt more stringent standards even before the federal government, via the Child Care and Development Fund block grant, does.

Public education and outreach

The existence of a quality early care and education system is meaningless unless people who need it 1) know about it and 2) use it. For this reason, the development of a public education and outreach plan is essential. We are not suggesting necessarily that the city hire a high-priced PR firm. Rather, we are suggesting that we start with 1) a coordinated strategy, 2) a unified message(s) and 3) the wealth of resources with which we communicate already. Specifically, we recommend:

- Coordinating a unified strategy to increase public awareness of the impact of and need for early childhood and parent education programs. Parent involvement is the key to the success of this initiative.
- Utilizing public access forums such as MACECD, OCTT, subsidy providers, ANCs, civic associations, and non-profits.
- Identifying a PR firm that will assist the city on a *pro bono* basis.
- Holding forums for government officials and highlighting the importance of early care and education would be a means of clearly defining this initiative as a priority. This would help government officials to focus and collaborate both on a financial and programmatic basis which would result in maximizing resources.
- Developing a citywide early childhood public engagement campaign –utilizing the term early care and education – that highlights the benefits of a comprehensive universal preschool initiative.
- Communicating with the business community with the goal of engaging them in the need to expand early care and education opportunities.

- Developing ongoing contacts with the print media that will provide extensive coverage, including special pullout sections and features news segments.
- Utilizing local TV and radio contacts to air public service announcements (PSAs) and program specials highlighting the importance of quality early childhood development and parent education.

What children need to grow

Foundation elements

Children require support in a number of areas in order to be ready for school. Early care and education addresses many of these needs and can be a gateway to others. However, the providers of other services that contribute to school readiness must also conceive of their work in that context. **The needs of children and families must be supported in all areas of school readiness.**

Above all, the desired early care and education system in the District must be child- and family-focused.

The dimensions of school readiness identified by the National Education Goals 2000 panel describing children ready to learn are:

1. physical well-being and motor development
2. social and emotional development
3. approaches toward learning
4. language development
5. cognition and general knowledge

Physical well-being includes health care and immunizations, proper nutrition and full use of a child's arms, legs and the important muscles of the hands and fingers. Social and emotional development includes the ability to exercise some control over strong emotions, for example using words to express anger rather than hitting, showing respect and compassion, and loving connections to parents and caregivers. One concern is the effect of grief and loss on young children in under-resourced communities. Approaches toward learning include the ability to persist at a task and follow classroom routines. Language development includes vocabulary and an understanding that print has meaning. A prominent study documented a gap of 30 million words between the cumulative experience of 3-year-old children of professional parents and the children of parents on

public assistance. Cognition and general knowledge includes critical thinking skills and facts about the home, neighborhood and larger world.

Rich early learning experiences can have an impact on child development. Developing human beings are complex and the interplay of systems requires comprehensive programs, experiences and services addressing all of the social, emotional and physical domains.

Young children require support and nurturing in each of the dimensions of readiness. Research into the developing brain has ended the nature versus nurture debate: environment and experience impact the physical development of a young child's brain. "The pace of learning...will depend on whether and to what extent the child's inclinations to learn encounter supportive environments." (*Eager to Learn, Educating our Preschooler*, Bowman, Donovan, Burns, Editors, National Research Council, National Academy Press, Washington, DC 2000) This is the foundation on which all subsequent development will build. Deprivation in any area can compromise school readiness. Consider, for example, that

- uncorrected vision or hearing deficiencies limit the sensory input to the developing brain, undermining language development
- poor social skills or inability to follow rules and routines and result in exclusion from peer group play
- poor nutrition can compromise a child's ability to pay attention and enjoy learning opportunities

[NOTE: This section was based on *From Neurons to Neighborhood: The Science of Early Childhood Development* by The National Academies Press Institute of Medicine in 2000.]

Establishing a child-focused system

We suggest that school readiness for young children and their families must be the guiding principle for the delivery of services (See illustration). Programs exist to serve children and their practices must be aligned wherever practicable. Examples of needed alignment are:

- Education standards for 3 and 4 year olds must be aligned, regardless of setting

- Education standards must be related to kindergarten standards
- Forms should be aligned and use of common forms promoted wherever practicable
- Service providers should document their efforts and use evaluation information to evaluate policies and practices to promote continuity and alignment
- Services should be linked and the rules and regulations should be consistent
- Services must be culturally appropriate and available in the home language of children and families

The elements relating to alignment and transition are less about cost than they are principles of leveraging, allocating and mobilizing existing funds. *Safe Passages* envisions smooth transitions and collaboration among services to support children and families. This way of doing business must be embedded in the practices of service providers and government institutions. Services must be grouped around the family. Currently, providers and points of entry for services are scattered and fragmented. The city's goal – a seamless system of programs and services – must be implemented and agencies must be held accountable.

Equally important to these alignment principles are the services that are to be aligned. The array of programs and services that improve school readiness for 3 and 4 year old children include health, recreation, early care and education, social services, parent education, and mental health. Devolution has resulted in an environment in which there is a range of providers using differing forms, eligibility, priorities, and standards. The major shortcoming of this environment is that it is generally not child-focused and coordinated. This shortchanges children in the short and long terms.

Central to a well-designed universal school readiness system is the coordinated provision of all the services and supports that children need, ranging from health and mental health care to nutrition to recreation.

Health care

Physical health is an important domain with respect to school readiness. While the District of Columbia has a strong policy framework for public health insurance and coverage and some health programs, the challenge facing the District is to aggressively coordinate implementation of existing policies with adequate funding, high levels of quality,

accountability, and customer service. Only time will tell for sure, but the medical passport provision of the Maternal and Family Health Administration under the Department of Health should help us move forward.

All children enrolled in early childhood development programs – including in schools – are required to have an annual physical as a condition of enrollment. However, the absence of a fully functioning tracking system for immunizations, blood lead level results, EPSDT screens, and general health information makes it difficult to ensure that the multiplicity of systems that touch children are coordinated. Currently, work is underway to implement the Human Services Coordination Information System, a database capturing services delivered to children that is accessible to those systems working with children. Work is also underway on a pilot server-based system, Welligent, out of the Maternal and Family Health Administration in the Department of Health. Welligent is specifically for use by school nurses. Finally, a group of government officials, advocates and providers is working on merging the immunization and blood lead level results. At this time, there is no information about how these systems will work together. If they do not, one thing is clear: the city will have invested in duplicative systems that have diverted time and energy from other pressing needs.

Federal law requires that children who have DC Healthy Families receive a specific set of screens at varying ages. Known in the District as HealthCheck, EPSDT includes vision, dental and physical screens. Medicaid pays for treatment for dental, medical, hearing, vision, and other needs that are identified. While EPSDT is, in theory, a valuable program, in practice, much is left to be desired. For example, only 60% of the 85,160 children eligible for HealthCheck services in the District received them. (Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, 2003) The gaps in service clearly have a negative effect on children; when their problems are not identified, they cannot be treated. For this reason, it is imperative that the city immediately fix the problems associated with HealthCheck, if not for the terms of the *Salazar* court order then for the children.

Children of the District of Columbia have a high rate of public or private insurance coverage. According to *Kids Count 2004*, only 9% of children in the city were without health coverage in 2002. Local advocates estimate that between 9% and 12% of the city's children are uninsured. (*What's in it for kids? A budget and policy analysis FY 2004*, DC Action for Children, 2004) The national Kids Count data book suggests that the

percentage of fully-immunized two-year-olds in the District is somewhat less, at 74%, than the national average of 79%. (*Kids Count 2004*, Annie E. Casey Foundation)

Age group health screening can be a useful public health tool, even when children receive physicals from a primary care physician. The District of Columbia has been successful in reducing infant mortality through public health campaigns using federal funds. A public health campaign for school readiness would raise awareness of the importance of health and developmental screening for this age group.

Nutrition

Good nutrition is essential for children to grow and learn appropriately. Access to nutritious food, therefore, is an important element of school readiness. The District's food stamp program served an average of 38,240 each month in FY 2003. Unfortunately, as the national research shows, families often run out of benefits during the third week of the month, leaving children hungry. Access to WIC – which is largely federally funded – could be expanded with the addition of Local dollars. Overall, then, the city has much work to do to ensure that children have a steady stream of nutritious food at home. While the District's non-profit community does provide food to those without, the supply is insufficient to meet the need.

Home visiting

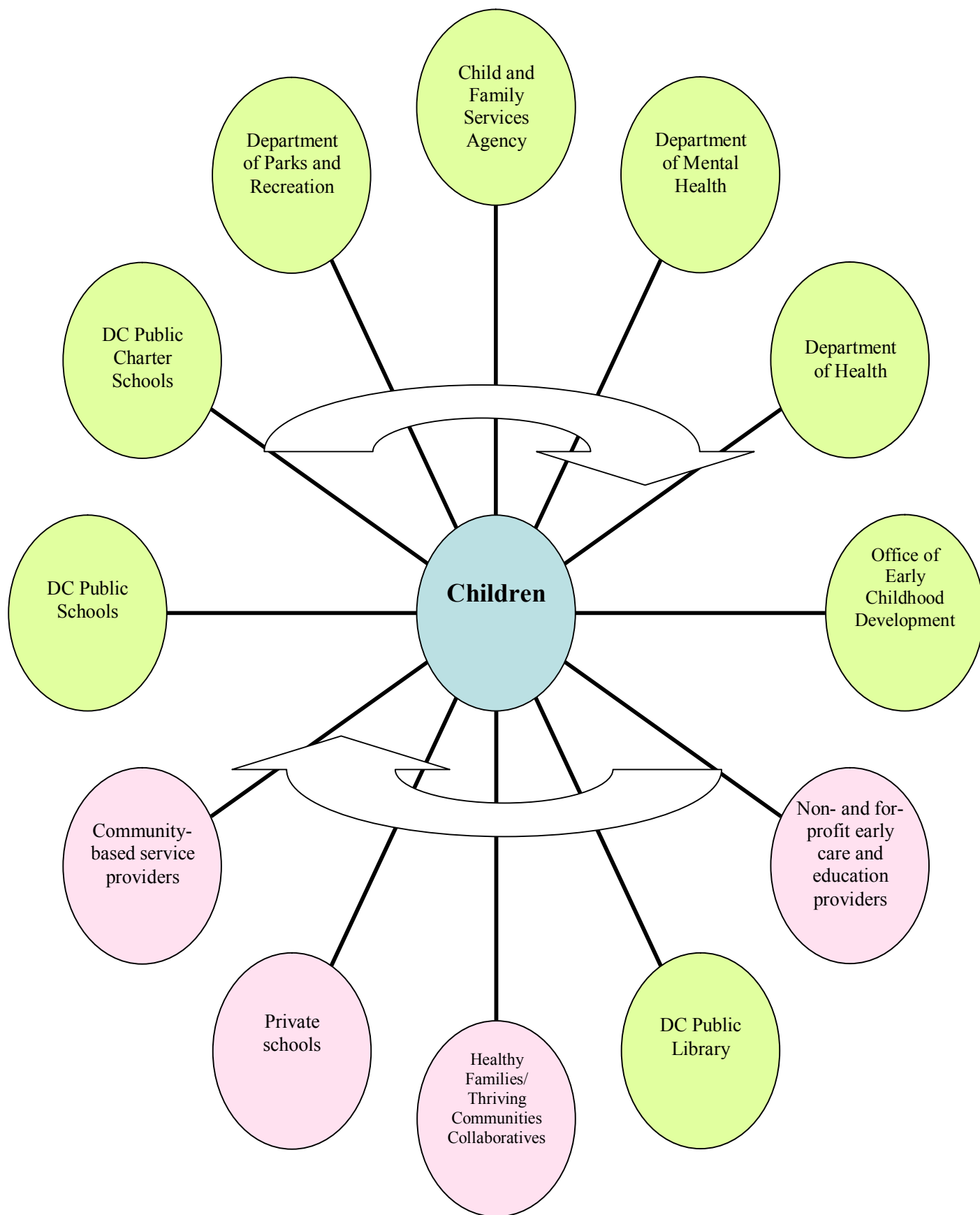
One often neglected service in the city is home visiting. Over the past few years, a group of providers have come together as the DC Home Visiting Council. The District of Columbia Home Visiting Council works to strengthen the District's focus on the importance of home visitation in supporting families and community. The Home Visiting Council identifies best practices in home visiting, develops standards for the practice of home visiting, and facilitates the implementation of these practices by providing technical assistance, coordination, training, funding, and other resources to various agencies throughout the District of Columbia. The Council, as demonstrated here, is perhaps the single most promising "solution" to the disconnected service delivery system. Additional funds are required to take this program to scale; the benefit, of course, is the consistent provision of services as well as the fact that partnering organizations are diligent in their data collection efforts in order to demonstrate program effectiveness.

Parent education

Parent education contributes significantly to the health of individual children and to the overall health of the community. As families achieve their full potential, the well-being of their children is assured. For these reasons, a comprehensive system of early care and education must include accessible, integrated, and universally available parent education. This parent education should be incorporated into the fabric and community life in its many forms.

Currently, the Washington Parent Education Collaborative is supported with private, foundation support and some funds from the Office of Early Childhood Development. There is an enormous demand for these services on a voluntary basis with documented demand at least double the supply. The Collaboration works in partnership with the providers of services to young children. The expansion of the resources in this existing structure and the addition of classes that address the parents' role in school readiness would be an important factor in improving school readiness, especially in the area of social and emotional development.

Child-focused System



Ensuring program quality and professionalism

Program quality

In June 2000, the District of Columbia chose to institutionalize quality by implementing a tiered-rate reimbursement system. Known as *Going for the Gold*, the system encourages the improvement of quality and rewards achievements with higher reimbursement rates as facilities move up in the system. *Going for the Gold* quality components are: national accreditation, compliance with licensing regulations, director qualifications and training, staff qualifications and training, staff compensation including benefits, parent involvement and consumer satisfaction, and learning environment. The leading problem with *Going for the Gold* is that it relates only to providers in the subsidy program. **What the District needs is a more comprehensive approach to quality.** Nonetheless, the OECD quality initiative can be used as a starting place to make quality the norm.

Systems-focused initiatives

As has been noted, there is no consistent requirement or measurement of quality in the current early care and education system. Consistent quality is the cornerstone of a revamped and first-rate system in the District. For these reasons, it is being recommended that the following attributes of a quality system be implemented:

- A cycle of continuous improvement in the areas of evaluation, self-reflection, training, implementation, and evaluation. Programs would be evaluated in three areas over each 5 year period, with a goal of accelerating improvement.
- Best practices, evidence-based curricula and operational elements be the standard for early care and education practice in the District
- Requiring accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) for all programs. The NAEYC standards are widely recognized to be the “gold standard” in early learning.
- An assessment of the current status of quality in the city and using it as the stepping stone for improving quality across agencies and programs.

The District is not starting from a blank slate. In fact, the Office of Early Childhood Development has established a goal of promoting accreditation and rewarding accredited programs with high reimbursement rates (e.g., *Going for the Gold*). One success is that all preschool programs administered by the Department of Recreation are accredited by NAEYC. Beyond these, a number of other preschool programs are nationally accredited.

The initial step in moving toward universal top quality programs, as was indicated above, is the assessment of where all early care and education providers are in the components listed above. This assessment provides the benchmark for where we are; from this point, the city should aggressively increase the number of accredited programs and programs that continually assess themselves and make improvements. If this proposal sounds familiar, it should: It parallels the assessment component of Medical Homes DC, a new, exciting and progressive plan to improve access to top-notch health services in the city.

It is also incumbent on the District to benchmark provider ratings on the Early Literacy and Language Classroom Observation Scale (ELLCO) and the Early Childhood Educational Rating Scale (ECERS) or Family Day Care Rating Scale (FDERS). In-service training and coaching has been developed for ELLCO and should be extended to include in service coaching in response to ECERS and FDERS results. This benchmark should include all providers. As was recommended regarding accreditation, the city must couple benchmarking with regular training and coaching in order to ensure continued quality. Research has demonstrated that such training and coaching has a direct impact on reading scores, which in the District are tragically low for DCPS fourth graders. Building and sustaining the capacity to deliver these services for preschool programs can greatly impact school readiness. The kindergarten assessment will allow us to evaluate student outcomes.

Child-focused initiatives

Individual assessments of children are integral to the quality of an early care and education system, and more importantly, to the success and well being of children. Currently, the District of Columbia does not expend local funds for routine developmental screening for young children. The Early Intervention Program (in the Office of Early Childhood Development) can provide screening up to age three under the federally funded Individuals with Disabilities Act for children aged 0-2. These children receive important services that can prevent more significant developmental delays later on. However, there is no universal access to developmental screening for three and four year olds.

Likewise, there is no standard measure of school readiness or kindergarten readiness in the District of Columbia, although it is a Board of Education mandate. All kindergarten students in DC Public Schools and DC Public Charter Schools should receive a portfolio-based assessment of their school readiness in the fall of their kindergarten year. These data should be used to guide instruction in kindergarten. In addition, these data can be

used to guide improvements in program and professional development in the early care and education system.

Student achievement in DCPS begins at the pre-school level. However, DCPS has no system-wide benchmark of where their students are when they enter kindergarten. Nationally, data suggest that as many as 1 in 3 kindergarteners may not have the approaches to learning and general knowledge that are expected at kindergarten entry.

Other quality-related initiatives include public-private partnerships. Examples of these include:

- *Book distribution:* OECD distributed 5,000 books for children in Head Start and Child Care programs in collaboration with DC-based First Book.
- *Coordinated school readiness initiative:* The Kellogg Foundation selected the District of Columbia as one of eight sites across the United States to participate in a national initiative to unite community resources to better prepare children for school. The National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI) is the recipient of the \$4 million award for the District to implement a five-year plan to smooth the transition to school for children who are likely to start school unprepared. This initiative is called SPARK (Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids) and OECD is a major partner.

Ensuring professionalism

Policy Matters: Improving the Readiness of Children for School makes a strong case for the interconnectedness of professional development and compensation. As the city moves to implement top quality programs in the array of early care and education program options, it should be expected that the cost of providing the services will increase. At the moment, many professionals who work with our children are paid as little as \$15,714 a year. This is \$7.83 per hour, 27% above the minimum wage. Yet raising staff qualifications will necessitate increasing salaries.

The need for continuous professional development for all early care and education workers – from directors to teachers to aides – cannot be overstated. Without a doubt, the quality of the staff is critical to the quality and success of the program and most importantly on the outcomes achieved by children. For these reasons, **the regular and rigorous education and training of the teachers is the cornerstone to building and maintaining a quality universal school readiness system.**

Using professional in the context of services for children indicates the importance of adults as role models and teachers.

Numerous studies have shown that the child/staff ratio and the qualifications of the teachers are paramount in accessing the success of the program. As discussed in the Center for the Study of Social Policy's publication, *Policy Matters*, it is essential that policymakers understand that "readiness" is "the match between the readiness of the child and the readiness of the environments that serve young children." (p. 3) What this means is that it is as important for the child to be ready to learn as it is for the program to be able to care for children as they are developmentally.

This in turn highlights the objective that "all children will have access to high-quality and developmentally appropriate preschool programs that help prepare them for school." This concept is not unique. It is also the main premise for the report released by the Committee on Economic Development, *PRE-SCHOOL FOR ALL: Investing in a Productive and Just Society*.

The District of Columbia has established quite a robust professional development system on a shoe-string. Examples of professional development opportunities include:

- Programs at the University of the District of Columbia served 1,339 professionals in FY 2003. Of these, 22 professionals earned their Associate of Arts degree, and nine earned their Master's in Early Childhood Education with a concentration in Administration. (Note: Information about the program is available in the appendices.)
- A total of 487 early care and education professionals enrolled in Child Development Associate (CDA) training programs, and 285 professionals were awarded CDA scholarships.
- School readiness and literacy are the focus of an \$800,000 Early Learning Opportunities Act (ELOA) grant. The grant, made to OECD on behalf of the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Early Childhood Development, focuses on Wards, 1, 7, and 8 and will educate parents, caregivers, child care providers, librarians, and health care providers on what they need to do to make sure

children are healthy and ready to learn. Technical Assistance staff has conducted an assessment of early literacy practices in early childhood settings and will train early childhood educators and directors to strengthen and improve their practices. (From *OECD NEWS YOU SHOULD USE*, January 2004.)

Currently, OECD relies on Federal (Child Care and Development Fund) and Local funding to finance professional development opportunities. As the examples demonstrate, the University of the District of Columbia plays an integral role.

In *Policy Matters*, the Center for the Study of Social Policy recommends a **standard of \$800 per early childhood educator. We agree with this figure and suggest that this guideline should be applied beyond providers in the subsidy system to the entire early care and education system.** The government should fund all public programs and those programs which are directly tied to the government, such as subsidy program providers. The leading additional costs for scholarships and substitutes could also be provided for students working toward AA degrees in Child Development at the University of the District of Columbia.

Funding, cost and facility requirements

Sustainable funding

A rich mix of funding sources and mechanisms for operating and capital projects is essential to create and maintain a sustainable early care and education system. Such a mix learns from the more economically savvy issue of affordable housing that uses tax credits, developer exactions, commercial linkages, and dedicated funding. The rich mix also relies on using law enforcement and justice, community development and economic development resources to meet the operating and capital needs of the system.

In order for a robust financing system to be implemented, mayoral leadership is required. The expectation is that the Mayor will direct the deputy mayors for Planning and Economic Development and Public Safety and Justice to collaborate with the Deputy Mayor for Children, Youth, Families, and Elders and agencies under their purview to bring resources, either current or potential, to the table in order to fully fund the operating and capital needs of the school readiness system. This model of collaboration has proven useful in a number of states across the country which have embarked on the creation of a universal school readiness system.

By way of background, it is important to note that the District government has relied heavily on Federal funds, namely TANF funds, to bolster the Office of Early Childhood Development budget, and specifically that of the Child Care Subsidy Program (CCSP). Since 1997 when welfare reform was implemented in the city, more than \$160 million in TANF funds have been allocated to the CCSP. During this same time period, Local funding has remained flat. In fact, the first increase in seven years will occur in FY 2005 with a \$10 million boost proposed by Mayor Williams.

Taking the lead from states and jurisdictions across the country, **we propose that a wide range of funding sources and mechanisms be considered and where appropriate, implemented with all due haste.** Some that other states have used are:

- Creatively using federal funds – from agencies such as the Department of Education and the Department of Justice (see appendices for more funding opportunities)
- Using Community Development Block Grant funds to finance the renovation of existing and building of new child development facilities
- Lottery receipts

- Tax increase on tobacco products directed toward early care and education programs
- Designation of a portion of motor vehicle registration fees to early care and education
- Special license plate related to child care and fee directed to fund early childhood development programs
- Including a check box on tax forms allowing taxpayers to contribute \$1 for children
- Expanded tax credits for child care expenses
- Allowing jurors to waive their fees to support children

Other mechanisms worthy of consideration are:

- using the commercial linkage concept to link the creation of new housing to a contribution to a early care and education fund.
- implementing developer exaction fees to add child care facilities in housing developments of a certain size.
- encouraging large businesses to incorporate child care centers into their facilities for their employees. These businesses would also fund the entire operation.
- working with the federal government to pay the child care costs for its employees who qualify for the city’s Child Care Subsidy Program.
- having the District government pay the costs of child care for its employees whose children are in the subsidy program.
- Using Tax Increment Financing (TIF) to encourage commercial and housing developers to either add early care and education facilities or to contribute to a fund for the system’s capital needs.

Accessing the maximum funding from local and federal government sources is in itself leveraging funds. As noted in the appendices, some funding will be directed to partner agencies (i.e., DC Public Library). No matter, children will reap significant benefits from this funding and program implementation. But leveraging will also occur when the private community (individuals, foundations and businesses) contributes financially having seen a heightened commitment by the government to children. The city and supporters of universal school readiness must be diligent in ensuring that private and other funds are, in fact, leveraged.

Thusfar, the discussion has focused on operating funds needed for early care and education. However, capital funding is also required for a well-functioning, quality system. Currently in the District, capital needs related to early care and education are one of the most under-resourced components of the system. The 2002 market rate study conducted by the University of the District of Columbia found that many providers were interested in expanding their capacity but lacked the funding to do so. Ready access to capital funds from the District of Columbia is necessary as many providers are not able to access the private market. The benefit to this model is that 1) it expands capacity of the early care and education system and 2) it positions providers so that they can, at a later date, access funding from non-government sources. Needless to say, improving business functioning, while not central to this discussion, certainly leads to a more stable system.

Current capital needs include traditional bricks and mortar needs (renovation of current facilities and building new ones) and other material needs including furniture and learning materials (manipulatives and language and literacy materials) for programs.

Perhaps the best mechanism to fund the capital needs of private agencies (non-profit and for-profit) is a government-funded and –managed revolving loan fund.

Such a fund would offer no-cost or low-cost loans to child development facilities. The fund would serve a number of important purposes. The first, a public policy goal, is to ensure sufficient capacity and quality of early learning opportunities in communities. The second is to quickly expand capacity in a way that financing from the private market could not. Third, a revolving fund would provide on-going support for the on-going needs of the system.

The military model – increased funding represents understanding of value of early care and education

Finding the funds to cover the costs of quality early care and education is a question of community will and strong government leadership. A case in point is the military early care delivery system. The National Women's Law Center published a report *Be All That We Can Be: Lessons from the Military for Improving our Nation's Child Care System*. The most significant lesson was that the military recognized the need to commit additional resources and, in fact, dedicated resources to their early care and education system. The report noted that

The military could not have achieved its successes without a substantial increase in resources. Funds appropriated for military child care have climbed dramatically in recent years, from about \$90 million before the enactment of the Military Child Care Act to \$352 million in FY 2000. (National Women's Law Center, 2000.)

The report also made the following points:

- Although it is difficult to quantify the level of public investment in civilian child care today, it is woefully inadequate to meet the need, especially for low-income families.
- Both the federal government and the states should recognize, as the military has, that increased funding for child care ultimately pays for itself in the stability of the workforce and the healthy development of children – and increase their investments dramatically.

The cost of care

To date, the system, community and elected officials have focused on government funding for subsidies and professional development and on family payments to market rate providers. This focus distracts us from the real issue – the cost of caring for children in early care and education settings. In order to move the idea of universal school readiness forward, we need to take a lesson from the private schools and higher education arenas which fairly consistently assert that the cost of educating students far exceeds tuition payments and, in fact, relies on private donations and returns on endowment investments.

Why is this important? Precisely because the cost of caring for 3 and 4 year olds, for example, far exceeds the reimbursement OECD pays for subsidies. Providers, such as Nation's Capital Child and Family Development, regularly fundraise in order to supplement subsidy reimbursements, parent co-payments and market rate fees to ensure that quality programming is maintained. Until we embrace the idea that the true cost of providing services to 3 and 4 year olds (full-day and year-round) is \$19,500 per year (at a minimum and based on known outlays in FY 2004), we will continue to underfund the system and not adequately serve children.

It is difficult to calculate current expenditures per child. The reasons are numerous:

- Expenditure, reimbursement and cost all vary by the age of the child
- Expenditure, reimbursement and cost all vary by the length of time in care (full-day or part-day and school-year or year-round)
- Expenditure, reimbursement and cost all vary by the type of program (Head Start, DCPS pre-k, family day care home, child development center)
- Expenditure, reimbursement and cost all vary by the quality level of the child development facility (here, speaking only of programs in the Child Care Subsidy Program that actually have children enrolled)

The monumental gap between reimbursement and cost is directly linked to the standard on which the District bases its budget. The reimbursement rates currently used by the Office of Early Childhood Development date back to 1998 market rates. The reimbursement paid to Gold centers (programs that are accredited) equals \$33.86 per day per child daily for pre-school. Even when taking cumulative inflation into account, the cost is underestimated by a minimum of 14.7% (calculated on 1998 - 2003 figures). A new market rate is being compiled by UDC and those figures should be more realistic and address actual costs. This amount for Gold Centers compares to a per-pupil allotment of \$7,112 for pre-k in public and public charter schools for a part-time day during the school year. The children in DCPS and DCPCS programs are frequently served by programs funded by OECD for after-care. Full-time Head Start programs (full-day, year round) can easily cost upwards of \$14,000 per child per year.

As this information suggests, there is a disparity between the allotments directed to caring for a pre-k child. This is problematic for a number of reasons, the most important of which are:

- The current system is inequitable. Not only do some providers get more money than others, but some providers care for children for shorter hours (without regard to family need).
- Allotments do not reflect actual costs. Some local estimates put caring for a pre-k child at close to \$19,000 per year for a quality experience. Some non-profits make up the difference by fundraising; others do not.

It is the general consensus that reimbursement for early care and education programs need to be equitably distributed whether the service is provided by DCPS or community- based licensed child development centers. To reach equity,

all systems must be engaged in a frank discussion about 1) their allotment/reimbursement and what it pays for, 2) supplemental funds that are directed to the program and what they pay for, 3) the hours and days children are served, and 4) what is not being done because of limited funding. These discussions will not be easy. But they are necessary. Until we are able to determine this cost, the city will continue to under fund the subsidy program (and professional development in market rate facilities) at the same time that it demands quality.

The District cannot wait to address the issue of inequity. Based on data from US Census Bureau, it is estimated that in 2006 there will be 6,977 three year olds and 6,693 four year olds in the District of Columbia. (US Census Bureau, Population Projections Consistent with 2000 Census)

Facility needs

One important vehicle to expand capacity and support from specific government agencies and businesses is to multi-purpose new and existing sites. For example, building a new employment center and adding space for a child care center in an underserved community considerably reduces the cost of building of a free-standing early care and education facility. Repurposing unused or underused spaces in DC schools or other government buildings, too, is a cost-effective and efficient cost-sharing way to expand child care.

Early care and education facilities are one of the most under-resourced aspects of the system in the District of Columbia. There are more than 360 licensed child development centers in the District of Columbia; pre-kindergarten and kindergarten classrooms in the more than 100 elementary schools in the DC Public Schools and uncounted others in the growing charter school systems. However, no structure or funding source is available for the development, improvement or expansion of facilities for young children who participate in non-school based early care and education programs.

The District has had a patchwork system for developing increased facility capacity and specifically for infants and toddlers where the 2002 Market Rate and Capacity survey indicated that they represented 5,000 of the more than 9,000 children on lists for child care services. By and large, child development facilities under the purview of the Office of Early Childhood Development have received funding for capital expenses out of the OECD operating budget. Not only are operating funds not sufficient, but a more appropriate mechanism for funding capital needs is through the capital budget. Those early care and education programs operated in DC Public Schools facilities reap the benefits of the DCPS capital budget.

Since 1988, the Office of Early Childhood Development has collaborated with the following to expand the early care and education facility capacity:

1. On- and near-site child care at Federal government agencies for their employees
2. On-site child care for District of Columbia government employees in compliance with DC Law 6-169, D. C. Employees Child Care Facilities Act and D. C. Law 7-220; there has been no funding for the facility components of either of these laws
3. On-site child care with private employers such as law firms and off site, but financially supported facilities, such as with the Marriott Corporation
4. Public-private partnerships such as the Penn Quarter center downtown, the DC Developing Families Center in northeast and the two Frederick Douglass Early Childhood and Family Support Centers in Southeast
5. A limited number of groups have developed facilities with funds received through a competitive process for Community Development Block Grant Funds
6. Voluntary inclusion of child care space by developers of moderate and low income housing initiatives
7. Washington Metro Bankers partnership with Community Development Corporations to provide loans and technical assistance to family child care providers
8. The CareBuilders Initiative was funded by the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services for 18 months

One useful model

The CareBuilders Initiative could be a model to build on in the District. In April 2001, Washington Area Community Investment Fund (WACIF) formed a partnership between the Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC), The Enterprise Foundation, District of Columbia Bar Pro Bono Corporation, Washington Architectural Foundation, and District of Columbia DHS Office of Early Childhood Development (OECD) to establish the CareBuilders' Initiative to implement the facility expansion recommendations of the University of the District of Columbia, Center for Applied Research and Urban Policy (CARUP) *Market Rate and Capacity Utilization Study*. The recommendations are to improve the access to affordable quality child care services in the city, and achieve the goals of the Child Care Development Fund. In addition to the Partners, the Initiative has enlisted the services of specialists from various industries with experience in finance management, real estate, and business development for the child care industry. The CareBuilders' Initiative provided technical assistance and provided access to resources for facility renovations. WACIF was responsible for managing, coordinating, administering, and documenting this effort.

It is imperative that the City Administrator coordinate a facility roundtable with the goal of developing a strategy to improve and expand facilities. Those who are necessary at the table are:

- Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development
- Deputy Mayor for Children, Youth, Families, and Elders
- Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice
- Mayor's Office of Religious Affairs
- DC Public Schools
- DC Public Charter Schools
- State Education Office
- Partners from the CareBuilders Initiative
- Chamber of Commerce
- Federal City Council
- Federal government – including executive branch agencies and the Congress
- MACECD
- Executive branch policy staff
- Board of Education

Making the plan a reality

There is absolutely no question that leadership at the highest level of government is required to make this plan a reality. During the FY 2005 budget process, Mayor Williams demonstrated his commitment to young children by increasing Local funding for early care and education by \$10 million. But as has been shown here, much more is needed. We are proposing, for consideration by the Mayor and his designees, the following implementation plan for the recommendations made throughout this plan.

Phase 1 (FY 2004):

1. Establish a sub-cabinet working group.
2. Identify additional resources that can be directed to early care and education in FY 2005 including TANF bonus funds for which DC is eligible, increased tax revenue (re: the recent announcement by the CFO that the revised revenue estimate is \$100 million higher than previously thought) and other federal funds that may be available.
3. Prepare an MOU between DC Public Schools and the Department of Human Services to transfer the approximately \$4 million in additional funding for pre-k in SY 2004-2005 to DHS. The highlights of the MOU will be that OECD is responsible for spending the funding on 3 and 4 year olds and DCPS will retain the right to count the children served by the \$4 million in the student census.
4. Reinvigorate the Child Care Services Assistance Fund established by Act 7-295, "Child Care Services Assistance Fund Act of 1988" with authority designated by the Mayor in Mayor's Order 89-131 (June 9, 1998).
5. Include a provision in the TIF renewal legislation that mandates that commercial and residential builders that build spaces of a minimum size (to be determined) to either build a child development facility or contribute to the Child Care Services Assistance Fund.
6. Continue negotiations with HOPE VI developers regarding building child development facilities.
7. Begin work on the FY 2006 budget including funding for universal access for 3 and 4 year olds and for infants as well as the Child Care Services Assistance Fund.
8. Publish draft regulations (update 30 year old regs)

Phase 2 (FY 2005):

1. Expand access for 3 and 4 year olds through the Pre-k Access Incentive Initiative
2. Ensure universal access for 4 year olds (via Head Start, pre-k, child development centers; the greatest capacity for expansion is the last)
3. Adopt standards for four-year-old children across systems (draft completed)
4. Focus expansion of quality, professional development, capital improvement on 4-year-old classrooms (specifically, sustain and expand ELLCO, expand capacity for NAEYC accreditation and ECERS)
5. Go live with the Child Care Services Assistance Fund with the focus on classrooms with 4-year-olds (refurbishment, language and literacy materials)
6. DC government picks up the tab for local government employees with children in the Child Care Subsidy Program
7. Negotiate with feds about paying DC for their reliance on the Child Care Subsidy Program (federal payment addition or some other mechanism)
8. Negotiate with the ten largest business users of the subsidy program to pay their fair share
9. Implement DCPS kindergarten assessment
10. Focus attention on maximizing federal grants (law enforcement, justice, CDBG, etc.)
11. Include additional funds for evaluation in the Mayor's proposed FY 2006 budget.
12. Increase Local funds in the Mayor's proposed FY 2006 budget.

Phase 3 (FY 2006):

1. If not already done, secure federal payment.
2. Implement universal access for all 3 year olds (via Head Start, pre-k)
3. Adopt standards for three-year-old children across systems
4. Focus on expansion of quality, professional development, capital improvement on 3-year-old classrooms (specifically, sustain and expand ELLCO, expand capacity for NAEYC accreditation and ECERS)
5. Expand reach of Child Care Services Assistance Fund to classrooms with 3-year-olds and facilities with infants
6. Expansion of infant slots and use of them
7. Increase Local funds in Mayor's proposed FY 2007 budget

8. Institute developmental screenings at age three in order to determine whether children are developing in the manner of their age peers. This screening allows areas of delay to be identified early on. In many cases, delays are within a normal range. In other cases, treatment, corrections, and interventions can begin before school. Children can begin school with the appropriate accommodations or settings.

Phase 4 (FY 2007):

1. Complete infant expansion
2. Initiate expansion for 5 and 6 year olds
3. Focus on expansion of quality, professional development, capital improvement on 5- and 6-year-old classrooms (specifically, sustain and expand ELLCO, expand capacity for NAEYC accreditation and ECERS)
4. Expand reach of Child Care Services Assistance Fund to classrooms with 5- and 6-year-olds
5. Increase Local funds in Mayor's proposed FY 2008 budget

Conclusion

The District of Columbia is in strong position to move to universal school readiness via a well designed quality early care and education system. While the basic infrastructure of the early care and education system is fragmented, the fundamental components do exist. In many respects, the District of Columbia is a leader in this field. However, current programs are inadequate to meet the needs of this population of young children. What is lacking is the public will and public funding to transform a decent, but disjointed system into a comprehensive, collaborative system of consistently high quality programs and services.

The policymakers in the District are aware of the merits of the investment in early care and education. High quality early care is an investment in the city's present by helping parents work. High quality early care is an investment in our city's near future, as young children begin kindergarten ready for school. It is an investment in the city's future as children move through their childhood and adolescence requiring fewer resources from social services, special education and the juvenile justice system.

A quality early care and education system with the goal of universal school readiness must be comprehensive and include the following components:

- Access to high quality, developmentally appropriate early care and education programs
- High quality professional development and training for early care and education teachers, regardless of the auspices of the program
- Equitable funding of programs regardless of auspices
- Consistent nationally recognized educational quality standards
- Regular assessments of program quality and improvement
- Health and developmental screening and immunizations
- Alignment of standards and practices with K-12 systems
- Alignment of systems that impact young children and families
- A campaign to rally the community around school readiness
- Sufficient and stable funding to ensure a stable quality professional early childhood workforce that also ensures universal access to quality programs

As has been discussed throughout this paper, school readiness requires support for the five domains of growth and development and a strong infrastructure to ensure sustained high quality service delivery. The absence or neglect of one of these components

undermines the investments in other areas. Governmental agencies, families and communities must collaborate to make universal school readiness a reality. We must not work together merely to “feel good” about helping children and families. Rather, **we must collaborate as collaborating is the only way we can achieve the goal of a creating and maintaining a quality early care and education system.**

Key collaborators include the business community (especially the top 10 businesses) and the federal government. Both use a tremendous amount of resources in the Child Care Subsidy Program and, as a beneficiary of the largesse of the city, they should come to the table with resources to ease the strain on the public and private systems. We must co-locate child development facilities with other government programs and businesses where possible. There is already a precedent within DC Law 6-169, DC Employees Child Care Facilities Act of 1986, which mandates that any new government building shall include space for a child care facility.

Similarly, we must be creative in revenue generation and maximization efforts as well as implementing family-friendly policies inside government. For example, the District government could offer certain employees the opportunity to work from home after school hours. In this way, parents could be home for their children. A study done by Fight Crime Invest in Kids supports this idea; they have estimated that the peak hours for juvenile crime are 3:00 – 6:00 pm. The government, too, could consider allowing parents to work part-time (30 hours per week) so that they can be home for their children once they get out of school during the regular school year. Implementing such family friendly policies would be voluntary though it could result in encouraging greater parent responsibility and addressing the shortage of quality after school programs. The additional funds generated from personnel savings could be earmarked for early care and education initiatives. Implementing such a policy would help address two critical child care areas: preschool and school age.

Universal school readiness is the foundation for high educational achievement and civic engagement in the District of Columbia. A comprehensive system to deliver school readiness is an investment in the quality of life for young children in our city, today and their role as civic leaders in the future.