



Early Care and Education: *Realizing a Collective Vision*



BACKGROUND

THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION INDUSTRY

The National Economic Development and Law Center (NEDLC), with a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, is working in states across the nation to quantify the direct effects of the early care and education industry on the economy, provide recommendations to expand and strengthen the industry, and build local partnerships aimed at increasing the industry's capacity to respond to the growing early care and education needs of America's families.

NATIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND LAW CENTER



The National Economic Development and Law Center, established in 1969, is a non-profit research and consulting organization dedicated to building economic health and opportunity in vulnerable communities. We work in partnership with a diverse range of colleagues to develop innovative strategies and programs that result in systemic change and help people become, and remain, economically secure.

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Introduction

On July 25 and 26 of 2005, the National Economic Development and Law Center (NEDLC) held a convening at its offices in Oakland, California. The meeting was a culmination of a three-year project funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Through the project, NEDLC replicated its successful economic impact of early care and education model, originally developed in California, in states across the nation. The model educates policymakers, business and civic leaders and economic development professionals about the importance of early care and education. By engaging these stakeholders in an on-going, collaborative dialogue, the model serves as a catalyst for systemic change in investment strategies and programs to grow and sustain the formal early care and education industry.

NEDLC worked in California, Minnesota, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Ohio, Illinois, and Hawai'i and partnered with a number of national organizations to move this model forward. The July convening was the first time leaders from the seven states and those on the national level met formally to talk about the economic impact model. The purpose of the meeting was to:

- Discuss how the early care and education economic impact model has been used, including goals set, strategies implemented, and lessons learned;
- Understand how the local, regional and national landscape affects early care and education efforts;
- Develop a learning community to enhance individual efforts; and
- Conceptualize strategies to support one another and the greater early care and education field in the future.

This report is based on the convening discussion and reflects participants' insights and ideas. It lays out highlights of the discussion that occurred in July.

Section One of this report describes the need for clear policy agendas and suggests key considerations in setting realistic goals. It also lists some of the policy ideas at the local, state and national levels that have emerged from this model to date. Section Two describes the benefits of, and strategies towards, effective messaging. Section Three discusses how these messages can be used to build new relationships and engage new local, state and national partners. These three sections lay out the necessary ingredients for effecting change. Finally, Section Four suggests ways that state and national leaders can build on their individual momentum to create a national initiative.

THE EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION ECONOMIC IMPACT MODEL

The primary teachers for most children are still their parents but in today's society, children also spend significant amounts of time outside of their parents' care. The research makes it clear that children's early education experiences, both inside and outside of the home, greatly affect their intellectual and social development as well as their ability to grow up to be engaged and contributing members of society. Therefore, in addition to the love and support of parents or guardians, access to high-quality infant and toddler care, pre-school and after-school programs is critically important. Access to quality programs benefits parents as well, by helping them provide safe and enriching environments for their children and enabling them to get to work or attend classes so they can provide for their children financially.

*NEDLC has developed
the economic impact
model with partners in
seven states:*

California

Hawai'i

Illinois

Massachusetts

Minnesota

North Carolina

Ohio

While the educational and social advantages of strengthening the early care and education system have been well established, awareness and acceptance of the economic advantages are not yet pervasive. As a result, early care and education has not gained the footing in state and national agendas that it could. NEDLC developed a model—the economic impact of early care and education—to build a base of information about the economic benefits of early care and education systems and to encourage innovative policies that strengthen the early care and education industry.

NEDLC began its economic impact of early care and education work in a small number of California counties in 1997 with funding from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. For each county, NEDLC developed an economic impact report. These reports were used as the basis for multi-year efforts towards systems change in each community. The project, known as Local Investments in Child Care (LINCC), included a learning community to build counties' mutual capacity and enhance their efforts. In 2001, NEDLC released a statewide economic impact report for California, the first of its kind in the country.

In 2002, NEDLC took this work nationally with support from a multi-year grant from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. NEDLC selected six states based on their data collection capacity, early care and education infrastructure, national leadership and geographic diversity.

In each state, NEDLC developed a partnership with a lead organization. Together, the state partner and NEDLC implemented the economic impact of early care and education model. A diverse group of stakeholders were convened, including early care and education experts, business leaders, researchers, elected officials, department heads, economic development professionals and bankers. This group advised NEDLC's research on the economic benefits of early care and education in the state, developed key recommendations that arose from the findings and laid the groundwork for investments and policies to support the formal early care and education industry.

The research and recommendations were then compiled into a state early care and education economic impact report.¹ The reports:

- Describe demographic and economic trends and their implications for the early care and education industry;
- Quantify the direct economic impact that early care and education currently has on the state's economy through gross receipts and direct employment;
- Discuss economic development and business benefits of child care, including bottom-line returns for individual businesses and substantial returns on public investment; and
- Provide recommendations for strengthening the early care and education system.

Since NEDLC pioneered this model, many other states have produced studies without working directly with NEDLC. Attesting to the power of looking at the early care and education industry through an economic lens, currently almost half of the states in the nation have studies produced or in preparation.²

In addition to work on county and state levels, NEDLC has always held a long-term view of systemic change on a national level. During the past three years, NEDLC has made it a priority to partner with key national organizations. NEDLC has fostered partnerships with national leaders, including Zero to Three, CLASP, the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, Legal Momentum and others, to build a collaborative network of engaged stakeholders in early care and education issues.

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

There is still no universally accepted terminology for the complex system of formal programs that educate and nurture children and/or enable parents to work or attend school. This system includes infant and toddler programs, for-profit and not-for-profit community-based centers, family child care homes, pre-school programs, Head Start, Early Head Start and after-school programs. This report uses the terms “child care,” “early care and education” and “early childhood programs” interchangeably to describe that system.

¹ All reports and accompanying executive summaries are available at www.nedlc.org.

² L.J. Calman and L. Tarr-Whelan. *Early Childhood Education for All: A Wise Investment*. New York, NY: Legal Momentum, 2005.

SECTION ONE

Setting Policy Agendas

The strength of the early care and education economic impact model is in the innovative strategies that emerge to support early care and education when viewing the system through an economic lens. To implement these new approaches, a clear and realistic policy agenda—knowing what you want to accomplish—is necessary. At the same time, advocates must be flexible enough to adjust agendas based on new insights and shifting contexts. For example, as new partners are engaged, they will bring new ideas and resources to the table. Similarly, shifts in fiscal and political climates may affect goals and strategies. Thus, policy agendas are constantly evolving. This section describes some strategies to create clear, realistic policy agendas. These considerations are critical as the field moves forward.

CONSIDERATIONS IN SETTING GOALS

Policy agendas must include short, mid- and long-term goals. Achieving a collective vision for early care and education is a long-term plan, but short-term objectives are necessary to move forward deliberately. Thinking along a broad time horizon with varying stopping points between six months to ten or twenty years down the road helps advocates ensure that they are moving towards systemic change. For example, having early care and education included in the requirements for a community development plan paves the way for future discussions about the needs of the community as the plan is written. That, in turn, may garner economic development efforts to build new or strengthen existing establishments to respond to the community's future early care and education needs. Having goals at various time points for advocates to work towards also helps ensure that the work to improve early care and education continues rather than stops after small gains are made in a few months.

Policy agendas must be responsive to, but not dictated by, fluctuating fiscal climates. When NEDLC started its work outside of California, most states were not experiencing massive revenue shortfalls and early care and education advocacy efforts were focused on increased funding. By the time economic impact studies were released, however, most states planned to use their report as an advocacy tool to minimize proposed cuts to

In 1997, California counties began using economic impact information as a tool to encourage facilities development, renovation and expansion. Advocates were successful in streamlining the planning and development process, establishing loan funds for child care providers and training providers to access commercial loan products. In 2001, following many years of work by advocates at the county level, the California Legislature passed a bill mandating a statewide project to support early care and education facilities financing needs. The resulting Building Child Care Project (BCC) provides a “one stop” centralized clearinghouse of information and services about early care and education facilities financing in California. BCC is designed to improve early care and education providers’ access to financial resources and to expand existing facilities financing resources. Funded by the California Department of Education, BCC is a unique collaboration of organizations. NEDLC acts as the lead agency with three partners: the California Child Care Resource and Referral Network, the Child Development Policy Institute Education Fund and the Low Income Investment Fund.

In Minnesota, a major goal after the release of the economic impact report in 2003 was to prevent severe state budget cuts to the early care and education system for the second year in a row. While there were still funding shortages, the cuts were not as bad as the previous year and two areas of the system saw their funding restored. Two years later, with the state's economic outlook less dire, Minnesota Business for Early Learning, a coalition of business leaders in the state, have called for a new allocation to early care and education in the form of a public-private fund for an expanded pre-school program. In 2005, the Governor and legislature committed \$1 million to the fund and they have expressed interest in continued support.

early care and education. This financial squeeze can shift the short- and mid-range goals of many state advocates.

Realistic policy agendas must consider the roles of political leaders. When early care and education advocates say they want to “engage government,” they may only need to get the assistance of one or two key change agents. Identifying key champions, such as legislators, governors, department heads, party chairs or others, can be enough to carry specific policies forward. There are a couple of warnings, however. First, it is critical to keep long-term goals in mind. For example, while there may be immediate gains from having a particular leader take on the issue, it may also carry the risk that child care issues will get pigeon-holed as that person's pet issue, which can lead the issue to lose

momentum over the long term. Second, it is critical to target leaders across the political spectrum in order to gain bi-partisan support and increase chances of success.

Realistic policy agendas must take into account both the opportunities and the barriers caused by the structure of the early care and education system. States

have a variety of structures for governance and oversight of the complex early care and education delivery system. Understanding the opportunities available under the existing governance structure will make policy agendas more achievable. In addition, advocates must modify policy agendas based on shifts in governance and oversight. A national agenda must be flexible enough to be effective within various state structures.

Policy goals and the strategic plans to implement them must be continually reassessed. As with any effort to

foster systemic change, leaders must learn as they go and fine-tune accordingly. Seasoned advocates must meet regularly to determine whether outside forces necessitate a shift in policy goals or whether they are merely obstacles or distractions that can be overcome. They must also continually evaluate the effectiveness of short-term objectives in working towards long-term goals. Similarly, they must assess priorities at the local, state and national levels to ensure the policy agendas are complementary. To strengthen everyone's work and make efforts more effective, leaders must incorporate lessons learned from others in the field.

In Massachusetts, the statewide economic impact report recommended increased integration of the child care and early education system. Partially as a result of the report, the state established a newly integrated Department of Early Care and Education combining three separate state agencies which had each previously overseen a portion of the system. The new department has prompted early care and education leaders to rethink their goals and strategies.

ELEMENTS OF POLICY AGENDAS

Early care and education stakeholders have generated many inventive and effective policy goals at the local, state, and national levels, including to:

- Increase funding from already existing public and private sources for program support, facilities, professional development and infrastructure for the field;
- Seek innovative sources of funding, such as economic development, drug prevention, transportation and workforce development dollars;
- Incorporate early care and education into community planning efforts, such as land use documents, community needs assessments and transportation plans;
- Include early care and education into economic development activities, such as business recruitment, support for small businesses and workforce development programs;
- Integrate infrastructure and oversight of the current system to offer seamless services with a blend of public and private funds; and
- Expand programs in credentialing, degree attainment and business training, and improve the availability of adequate wages and benefits, for early care and education professionals.

If the trailblazers who have learned how to improve upon and implement these agenda elements continue to be generous about teaching the rest of the field about their experiences, our effectiveness will grow. And, as the field builds its communication capacity to share lessons and insights, more stakeholders will be able to take advantage of others' previous experiences.

SECTION TWO

Developing Effective Messages

Moving a policy agenda forward requires effective messaging. Strategic messages both position the economic argument for early care and education effectively to increase the chances that local, state and national leaders will respond to it and ensure that everyone who is part of this effort speaks with a unified and informed voice. This section lays out factors that should be considered in developing such messages.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR MESSAGE DEVELOPMENT

Messaging terms must be consistent. There is still no universally accepted terminology for the complex system of formal programs that educate and nurture children when they are not in the care of their parents. “Child care,” “early care and education,” “early childhood programs” and “out-of-school time programs” are just a few of the terms that are currently used. As one convening participant noted, “Nobody argues about whether it is health care for old people, or health care for young people, for prevention or for sickness—it’s the ‘health care industry.’ In the child care world, there’s no such counterpart, and maybe that’s the problem. . . . If we get stuck in these semantic battles about different types of child care, that might actually really hurt the field.” Partners should work together and come to agreement on one term so there is unity in the message being delivered. The term should resonate with targeted audiences, such as business and government, as well as reflect advances in the field.

Messages for non-traditional stakeholders—those in business, government and economic development—are most effective when they contain economic information. The early care and education economic impact reports provide a solid base of information about the economic benefits of the early care and education field. Economic impact information is most effective when it is comprehensive and conservative. The reports that have been conducted have been successful in meeting these two criteria. The data has been comprehensive by quantifying the size of the industry with gross receipts and direct employment values that were an unduplicated count of the entire, complex formal system. The evidence provided has been conservative by underestimating the size of the industry, such as avoiding the use of economic multipliers that measure indirect and induced effects of the industry.

It is also critical that the data be community-specific and continuous. Local advocates are often the driving force behind state-level change. Information about early care and education in individual communities enables local advocates to implement policy agendas on a city or county level. Continuous data that is updated to incorporate the latest collected information is necessary to keep advocacy efforts alive. In addition to updating existing indicators, new studies will be necessary as new

constituents desire economic information about the early care and education industry. For example, research on socially optimal demand, that is, the level of

demand for high-quality early care and education that would offer maximum social and economic benefits, would be effective in measuring the shortages that business leaders and government might be asked to fill. Community needs assessments may need an economic framework and more in-depth economic research to engage economic stakeholders. Market studies would help early care and education businesses start up or expand strategically.

Messages about early care and education’s economic advantages must complement messages about its

educational and social benefits. Referring to the early care and education system as an “industry” brings in new and diverse stakeholders. However, it may alienate others because it does not encompass the human development and educational aspects of the field. It is critical that messages are tested to ensure that they resonate with intended audiences, complement other messaging campaigns and align with voter and public opinion polling data.

Messages about early care and education must support an integrated system.

The early care and education system must be integrated with other education systems. And, the various programs that fall within the early care and education system must be integrated with one another. For example, the emergence of initiatives around universal pre-school has created a false division between programs for three- and four-year olds and the rest of early care and education. To build support for a seamless, integrated system, all messages should work towards a shared understanding

of a continuum of early care and education that begins at birth, merges with K-12 education and links to higher education, job training, and skills development. The formal early care and education system is incredibly complex and many parents and providers blend programs to provide a continuum of care for one child. For example, one child may attend a Head Start program, a state-funded pre-school program, a private-pay child care center program and, maybe, even spend time in a family child care home. Her sibling may go from the same family child care home to first grade and then on to a private-pay after-school program. Messages should reflect the experiences of the majority of families which is a—hopefully seamless—integration of the complex system of early care and education.

BUILD Ohio partnered with NEDLC to produce a statewide early care and education economic impact report for Ohio. After the release of the statewide report, BUILD Ohio partnered with NEDLC to develop county-specific data. County fact sheets were then compiled for 27 key counties and were distributed in a briefing to state legislators in Columbus. NEDLC also conducted a training for advocates in those counties to enhance their local efforts.

A large portion of Zero to Three’s work is devoted to disseminating clear messages that are evidence-based. Similarly, CLASP provides key research, such as trends in federal funding streams and their effects on children and families, on a national level. This information enables advocates to create evidence-based messages that they can take to their legislators and business communities.

SECTION THREE

Building Relationships and Engaging New Partners

The reason messaging is so important is because it communicates compelling information to the right people. Similarly, the value of having a clear policy agenda is that it provides concrete objectives for people to work towards in order to create change. Both of these ultimately rely on building relationships.

Almost all systems change stems from building new relationships outside the traditional world of early care and education stakeholders. Building and sustaining relationships with individuals and entities in other fields expands the advocacy base so that policy agendas receive widespread support. In addition, new stakeholders can sometimes play larger roles by becoming active and integral partners in implementing and reassessing policy agendas, developing strategic plans, shaping key messages and becoming instruments for change. By bringing their different backgrounds to the problems facing early care and education, new partners become system innovators.

IDENTIFYING NEW PARTNERS

In addition to working with parents, communities and early care and education providers, state and national advocates have sought to find new allies across sectors—from business (including CEOs, Human Resource directors, and Chambers of Commerce), government (including local and state elected officials and department heads) and economic development (including planners and financial institutions).

State and national advocates have also identified some new potential allies that they believe can contribute if they become more engaged. These include:

- Community development corporations
- Workforce development agencies
- Business reporters
- National Association of Counties
- Advocacy groups
- Facilities financiers and developers
- Affordable housing organizations
- Housing and Urban Development
- The U.S. Small Business Administration
- Small Business Development Centers
- Labor unions
- The faith-based community

STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING NEW RELATIONSHIPS

Building relationships with individuals in new stakeholder groups may require leaving comfort zones and learning new ways of describing and going about doing work. In creating a national effort, it is critical to go beyond “the usual suspects.” Successful strategies rely on finding credible sources and providing them with effective messages that are delivered at the right time.

North Carolina Partnership for Children, the lead agency in producing *The Economic Impact of the Child Care Industry in North Carolina*, received the early support of the state’s Secretary of Commerce and the Chair of North Carolina Citizens for Business and Industry (the state’s Chamber of Commerce). These two champions have helped inform the rest of the business community in North Carolina about the economic benefits of the child care industry in the state.

The business, government and economic development champions who are already engaged in early care and education can build on their own involvement by engaging their peers and expanding the number of stakeholders. One or two key individuals, credible sources and powerful motivators in their fields, can carry the message to their peers and engage a larger number of their community

members. One idea at the convening was the establishment of a National Speakers’ Bureau for business and government leaders who are already actively involved in speaking about early care and education issues. The bureau would serve as a clearinghouse of available speakers and a coordinating center for speaking engagements and efforts. Participating members would build their leadership profile, help meet the high demand for speakers and help to expand the number of stakeholders.

Engaging new constituencies requires incorporating targeted messages into appropriate materials. In addition to reports detailing the economic impact of the child care industry, complete with methodological appendices and possibly more

The Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis weighed in on early care and education in 2003 when Art Rolnick, Senior Vice President and Director of Research, and Rob Grunewald, Regional Economic Analyst, published an article stating that investments in early care and education out-perform typical economic development investments. Since that time, Rolnick and Grunewald have been true champions in carrying the message of early care and education as an economic development tool to business leaders and economists. Their October 2003 conference entitled “The Economics of Early Childhood Development: Lessons for Economic Policy” brought leading economists together with child development researchers, health professionals and other academics to share their research on early childhood development. Rolnick and Grunewald have also proposed a model for providing targeted early childhood interventions to young children in low-income families by using a public-private partnership to create a statewide endowment.

than 100 footnotes and citations, consumer-friendly materials must be developed to present key messages. On the state level, leaders have developed computer presentations with accompanying talking points, one-page fact sheets, policy briefs and pocket cards with key messages for advocates and their constituencies. To local advocates, they have provided sample press releases, newsletter articles and county fact sheets. The goal is to get the key information into a user-friendly format for specific, targeted audiences. These materials must also be disseminated in mediums most likely to reach the intended audiences, which are not likely to be typical child care news and advocacy mediums. Press conferences, website postings, business trade journals, academic publications and legislative committee hearings are all delivery tools that have led to success by advocates.

Deciding when to disseminate messages determines whether they are heard. As soon as economic information has been collected, it starts to get old. That means when a report about the economic impact of early care and educa-

tion is completed, there is an incentive to get the information packaged into messages and out to intended audiences as quickly as possible. However, other external events may require that the timing of the report's release be altered. Those factors should be considered when setting the timeline for compiling and publicizing the report's results. For example, many state advocates have been successful in strategically working around the specific calendars of target audiences, such as legislative sessions or fiscal deadlines. In some cases, the research schedule was made shorter and, in others, the release date of information was delayed a month or two for maximum impact. Additional events were also often held after the report's release, in order to coordinate with key audiences' schedules.

Early care and education advocates must “speak the language” of new stakeholders.

New stakeholders in business or government have their own perspectives and expectations. For example, business leaders tend to want shorter meetings that address a specific request. Early care and education staff versed in the practices and modes of thinking of other fields, such as economic development or business, can facilitate dialogue, particularly if they also have contacts and pre-existing relationships in those fields. Some organizations benefited from hiring “boundary crossers,” who have multiple skill sets and knowledge backgrounds and can act as a bridge between two disparate fields. Other advocates received training in business and government practices to reach out to non-traditional stakeholders. Local advocates, who may not have resources to hire additional staff with boundary-crossing skills, should acquire training and develop techniques to establish relationships with these new stakeholders.

Engaging new partners is a constantly evolving process.

Business and government leaders probably won't join efforts without targeted messages and a clear idea of what they are being asked to do. Yet early care and education advocates need non-traditional stakeholders' expertise to help refine meaningful and resonant messages and to direct what they can do. When they do join efforts and become planning partners, the messages and policy agenda should take their input into account and change accordingly. When new partners see their ideas incorporated, they become stronger partners. Thus, early care and education advocates must have a flexible roadmap for success and recognize that this effort takes continued dedication and time. The power of those partnerships, once they are formed, are well worth the time and expense.

Action for Children, the Illinois Facilities Fund and Chicago Metropolitan 2020 are three Illinois agencies which each have particular expertise in one area of early care and education and economic development. They formed a partnership to develop information and messages around the economic benefits of early care and education in the state in order to engage business leaders and elected officials. Together, these three agencies widened the net even further by bringing together an Advisory Committee of diverse stakeholders to produce *The Economic Impact of Early Care and Education Industry in Illinois*.

Enterprise Honolulu is an economic development agency that is well respected and well known in the business community in Hawai'i. Its director understood the importance of quality early care and education for sustainable economic development. He developed a partnership with the director of Good Beginnings Alliance, the lead early care and education agency in the state. During the implementation of the early care and education economic impact model, the Good Beginnings' director asked Enterprise Honolulu to co-host the economic impact report meetings and the report's release. During the report writing process, the two organizations also hosted a visit from Art Rolnick, Senior Vice-President and Director of Research at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis. Rolnick gave a breakfast address to nearly 100 business leaders in the state and had one-on-one meetings with key leaders in economic development and financial institutions. The invitations to the economic impact report's release event were sent by both organizations and attendance by the business community was tremendous. Enterprise Honolulu now regularly includes the director of Good Beginnings in its economic development meetings.

SECTION FOUR

Realizing a Collective Vision

There have been notable successes in the beginning of the long journey to systemic change towards a high-quality, sustainable, affordable, accessible, fully integrated early care and education system. In order to advance a national movement, partners in this effort must build from the momentum of our previous work and move forward collectively. We can begin to realize a collective vision by:

- Developing state and national policy agendas;
- Disseminating a national message;
- Engaging new partners; and
- Establishing a national learning community.

DEVELOPING STATE AND NATIONAL POLICY AGENDAS

The time to develop coordinated state and national policy agendas around the economic impact of early care and education is now. State and national partners must design and facilitate planning processes that result in articulated vision statements, strategic goals and action plans. The need for realistic policy agendas, clear messages and effective dissemination strategies for multiple campaigns at the local, state and national levels necessitates a thoughtful planning process which will only be successful if efforts are coordinated.

In realizing this collective vision, convening participants began to discuss potential national goals, including to:

- Position early care and education as a component of economic development, workforce development and family economic self-sufficiency;
- Create a more seamless integration of early care and education with economic and workforce development systems at the federal level;
- Encourage the use of federal economic development and workforce investment dollars, such as Workforce Investment Act funding, for quality early care and education systems;
- Promote a continuum of learning where early care and education is part of the larger context of life-long education and human development; and
- Increase and diversify the amount of public dollars available for early care and education.

DISSEMINATING A NATIONAL MESSAGE

In order to implement a national policy agenda, the field must first create a receptive environment by positioning early care and education in a way that ensures positive consideration from our target audiences.

The process of developing the state economic impact reports, and the campaigns that states have launched in order to disseminate the findings of those reports, have laid the

foundation for “reframing” the early care and education field as an economic driver. Staff on the local, state and national levels who are dedicated to this work and who can coordinate their efforts, combined with additional research on effective messaging and marketing strategies, are additional resources that are needed to create momentum to propel this important issue into the national arena.

ENGAGING NEW PARTNERS

Successful implementation of state and national policy agendas requires that leaders both strengthen their current relationships and build new ones with academics, national policy experts and advocacy organizations so that efforts are coordinated across organizations. In order to accomplish this, state and national partners must develop high-performance work teams and coalitions and collaborations through goal-setting, role-negotiation, mutual accountability and conflict resolution.

First, groups must set a consensus policy agenda. Second, each entity’s role in addressing agenda items must be carefully negotiated so that efforts are coordinated and each entity’s position is respected. Third, the group must hold its members accountable and ensure that all individuals feel a responsibility to complete assignments. Finally, as conflicts arise, clear and respected processes for resolving issues and returning to a collective enterprise must be implemented. For example, diverse stakeholders have different expectations for what is supposed to happen at meetings and how meetings should be managed. As partnerships are formed, having an outside facilitator may take the pressure off any one entity to manage meetings and can help ensure that meetings meet content and process goals for each stakeholder.

Teams build commitment by appreciating differences and creating win-win collaborative agreements. For example, when business leaders and early care and education leaders are finding ways to ensure that all workers have access to quality early care and education programs, they must work together to find a solution that benefits both parties, such as on-site, employer-sponsored child care or business advocacy for increased public support of quality early care and education. When both sides enjoy the results of finding such mutually beneficial solutions, commitment to continuing the process builds.

ESTABLISHING A NATIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY

It was many participants’ hope that this convening would be the first meeting of what will become an on-going learning community. State advocates were enthusiastic

The Family Initiative at Legal Momentum, formerly the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund, is popularizing the issue of early care and education and getting key messages into mass media. Legal Momentum tests and launches targeted messages, disseminates this information to early care and education advocates to provide them with the tools they need to help them better position their efforts and communicate, and builds bipartisan support for these issues at the federal level, with the goal of supporting the early care and education workforce and increasing funding for early care and education. For example, one finding that the organization publicized was the results of focus groups they conducted with working women in America that found that they do not believe that it is the government’s responsibility to care for their children but they do believe that government should play a role in helping them fulfill their responsibility to raise their children.

about sharing best practices and helping others avoid common pitfalls, and they want to continue to have the opportunity to learn from others as they strategize about how to advance in their own state. They were also prepared to share knowledge with and from local advocates in their states. In addition, national advocates want to know what is working in states and how that work can be coordinated.

A successful learning community must rely on a variety of communication mechanisms. In-person meetings can be combined with conference calls and a list serve to facilitate peer-based information sharing, problem-solving and continuous learning for states involved in this effort. On-line resources, such as a clearinghouse of information that would contain successful strategies, recent reports, useful templates, messaging pieces, a glossary of economic terms and current and proposed legislative initiatives, can also enhance the learning community.

State and national leaders must identify and meet collective training needs that will help advocates move forward. Participants at the July convening identified various types of training that would be beneficial, including grassroots organizing, data collection and analysis, economic development, communications and advocacy. Creating a national learning community provides the opportunity for developing appropriate training models that can be shared.

As the national initiative progresses, new participants should be included. One of the successes of the economic impact project is that new partners are continually being brought to the table to discuss and implement innovative strategies to strengthen the early care and education system. Including new partners, such as members of the faith-based community, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, labor, community development corporations and the National Association for the Education of Young Children, will continue to improve that effort.

CONCLUSION

Understanding the economic benefits of the early care and education system enables advocates to develop innovative solutions that help to strengthen the industry. It also builds public support for a seamless, sustainable high-quality system by developing an understanding that a quality early care and education system is as critical to communities as other infrastructures, like transportation or housing.

Reframing early care and education empowers its supporters. Early care and education experts can now ask economic and policy leaders for their partnership instead of their help. Advocates, each with his or her own newly realized strength, combined with the momentum of others in the field, will be able to achieve far more than each of us can alone.

Advancing our collective vision with generosity, clarity, and renewed energy can create real, lasting change that benefits children, families, communities and the economy.

It is time to coordinate
our efforts to achieve
more than each of us
can alone.



NATIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND LAW CENTER

The National Economic Development and Law Center, established in 1969, is a non-profit research and consulting organization dedicated to building economic health and opportunity in vulnerable communities. We work in partnership with a diverse range of colleagues to develop innovative strategies and programs that result in systemic change and help people become, and remain, economically secure.