

**Community Strategic Planning:**  
**Elementary school principals and community based providers of early education and care**  
Child Growth and Development  
Literacy Assessment  
Dual Language Learners

**The Challenge**

Early education and care has evolved from a relatively invisible enterprise to a field on the cusp of being recognized as providing a public good for all children. There has been enormous growth in the number of programs and personnel in the field as well as the number of organizations that engage in this work. The early years are now understood as being learning years that can change the life trajectories of economically disadvantaged children while fueling a state's economic growth. However there still remains concern within the field about two key issues: 1) the widening gulf in the alignment between schools and other programs that serve children, and 2) the varied and fragmented sectors (various sectors Head Start, Family Child Care, public schools) serving the "whole" child. The challenge is to create a shared platform in the early education and care field to take collective responsibility in building a 21<sup>st</sup> century educational system that includes all children.

**The Solution: Principals and Early Care and Education Providers Work Together**

To improve educational outcomes for all children, early learning must be strengthened in whatever setting it occurs including elementary schools, child care centers, and family child care. In Massachusetts there exist several urgent needs:

- To strengthen the alignment of standards and assessment for children in from birth through Grade 3;
- To align the education of the youngest children with appropriate practices across all settings;
- To provide professional development opportunities to Principals and administrators who desire stronger preparation for leading programs in schools or community settings with children younger than kindergarten age;
- To develop additional *whole schools systems*, designed and devoted to the education of all children, including the earliest learner;
- Agreement as to what constitutes high quality Pre-K through third grade education; and
- To support the field in collaborating and developing unified policy and programs of benefit to all children.

**The "How": Focus on Principals**

Increasing numbers of young children are entering our nation's public school systems and many, because of the trend towards universal pre-school, are entering at younger ages. Their level of preparation when entering these systems varies greatly depending upon both their prior learning environments as well as their social and cultural backgrounds. However, their *potential* to succeed and *ability* to learn when first entering these formal learning environments is very similar. It is the learning environment that will make the difference---and the Principals' role is a critical one. Recognizing this, there is a need to shift focus from zeroing in on the "child's readiness" to working to develop policies and practices that focus, on the 'readiness' of schools and their leadership, to receive these children and maximize their opportunities for success. Leaders must further develop their skills and knowledge base with respect to vision, pedagogy and practice, supervision, family and community, and policy perspectives relative to the education of young learners. Despite some

successes, there remains a lack of common ground between early-childhood and elementary educators regarding the best practices for teaching young children.

### **Required Resources:**

Critical to building a system of early care and education is aligned strategy and planning from the prenatal period through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. To achieve the above goals requires the following resources:

- An annual series of state wide roundtables on issues that are timely, relevant and immediately actionable. Participants in the roundtable should **explore** and discuss with national experts, state leaders and colleagues, critical questions such as:
  - How do you measure progress in a 3-, 4- or 5-year-old, or during the early elementary school years?
  - What is developmentally appropriate assessment?
  - How can assessment tools and data be used to improve your practice and develop your staff?
  - What are the best ways to acquire useful, valid and reliable data?
- An annual (national) conference for elementary school principals.
- A toolkit for principals that features promising practices every Principal or EEC Director can use to support developmentally appropriate learning for young children. These toolkits should include video clips, photographs, text, slides, booklets and rubrics.

### **Proposed Next Steps**

EEC proposes to work with ESE to create an extended conversation among elementary school principals and a variety of community-based program sectors. Through three in-depth meetings in the 2010-2011 school year, EEC would support Principals and community-based providers in spending time learning together in three areas of timely importance to the Commonwealth:

- Child growth and development
- Literacy
- Dual language learners

These meetings will build a learning community and a sense of shared purpose, identity and responsibility. This work is a critical means of advancing key initiatives including the ESE Proficiency Gap Task Force report.

The vendor must have extensive experience working effectively and inclusively on a state-wide basis. The vendor must excel at building community and offering high-touch, high-impact work in schools and other early care and education programs. The vendor must also we emphasize family engagement and a community context. As a state-wide initiative, EEC would select principals from throughout Massachusetts giving priority to the Level 4 Elementary Schools, and include proportionate numbers of representatives from Head Start, family child care, center-based care and other programs.