

Educational Alignment for Young Children: The City Perspective

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YEF Institute's Mission:

To help municipal leaders
take action on behalf of
children, youth, and
families.

The National League of Cities (NLC) is the country's oldest and largest national organization representing the interests of cities.

The Institute for Youth, Education, and Families (YEF Institute) is a special entity within NLC.

The Institute focuses on several issue areas related to strengthening families, including early childhood and education.

YEF Past Early Education Initiatives

- **Cities Supporting Parents of Young Children (CSP)** -Initiated in July 2005 to provide practical help to municipal officials in creating local early education systems.
- **Cities and United Ways Promoting School Readiness Initiative** - YEF partnered with United Way of America (UWA) to promote school readiness by supporting informal caregivers.
- **Mayor's Book Clubs, Promoting Early Literacy in New Jersey** - YEF partnered with the New Jersey League of Municipalities (NJLM) to promote early literacy.



PreK-3rd: The Local Lens

- Many municipal officials share a vision of cities and towns in which children enter kindergarten ready to succeed and develop to their full capacity during the school years.
 - Improve short-and-long-term outcomes for children.
 - Lower drop-out rates
 - Increased earning potential
 - Better engage and support families in their child's educational success.
 - Strengthen the local schools and workforce.
- Early childhood investments are the starting place for a high-quality aligned system of preK-3rd (and beyond) education.



YEF Activities to Support Educational Alignment

- Formed an advisory board to serve as thought partners.
- Conducted city scans of alignment efforts.
- Formed a municipal peer learning community.
- Hosted community conversations in 4 cities.
- Currently developing in-depth case studies of educational alignment in 5 cities.

Key Elements of Alignment

- Formal partnerships or governance structures
- Access to quality early education
- School quality and organization
- Alignment of standards, curricula, teaching practices, and assessments
- Communication and data sharing

Key Elements of Alignment

- Qualified teachers and administrators
- Parent engagement and family support
- Programs to facilitate smooth transitions to school
- Public awareness of the importance of the early education
- Funding strategies

Local Examples: Seattle

- City began early childhood work in 1972. Strong municipal leaders to support efforts.
- Project SOAR - two early childhood initiatives merged.
- Families and Education Levy.
- Culturally relevant Child Care Task Forces.
- Projects focusing on Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care.

Seattle and Alignment

- New five-year plan to integrate pre-K and the early grades
 - Expand access to quality preschool and full-day kindergarten
 - Increase quality across the preK-3rd continuum
 - Develop and align learning standards, assessment tools, and data systems
 - Create seamless transitions
 - Increase support and interventions
- SPS Department of Early Learning created
- Aligned Assessments
- Culturally specific child care task forces

Local Examples: San Antonio

- City has been engaged in early childhood for years –managing child care subsidies and serving as the local Head Start grantee.
- Better Jobs campaign over a decade ago had early childhood component and targets.
- Early On media campaign to educate new parents about the importance of early learning.

San Antonio and Alignment

- Mayor Castro's strong education focus on youth aged 0 – 25.
- Commitment to qualified teachers and professional development.
- Very promising neighborhood approaches in partnership with some of the city's 15 school districts:
 - Casey's Edgewood Making Connections
 - Promise Neighborhood
 - Very Early Childhood Centers

Local Example: Boston

- City controls public school system and has a long history of early childhood commitment.
- Legislation passed in early 90's to increase availability of quality early learning programs for 3 and 4-year olds.
- Strong community engagement through Thrive in 5 to create ready families, ready educators, ready systems and a ready city.
- A cross-sector team developed a 10-year "Roadmap" which aligns families, educators, service providers, the private sector, and city departments.
- Countdown to Kindergarten effort to enhance early learning opportunities and support successful transitions into kindergarten.

Boston and Alignment

- The Boston Public Schools Ambassadors program organizes champions of public schools in Boston, who communicate the advantages of BPS to the public.
- The new Parenting in Action television show informs parents (pre-natal-K) about access to social supports.
- BPS offers pre-K to over 2,000 students.
- BPS's focus on improving 3rd grade performance and on 1st grade early literacy are bringing issues of alignment to the forefront.

What We Have Learned

- While still a relatively new issue, increasing national attention has focused on the importance of building comprehensive, connected early care and educational systems for both children and schools.
- Strong buy-in and support from the mayor and superintendent is critical.
- There are significant data tracking challenges to contend with.

What We Have Learned

- Important to have horizontal and vertical coordination.
- Must identify where all the children are.
- Must address funding and turf issues.
- Building relationships and gaining community buy-in are key.
- Be very clear about what is being aligned.
- Create structures early on where partnerships can flourish.
- Take full advantage of federal policy levers.

Questions?

Contact Information

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