



National Governors Association
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NGA Center for Best Practices Supporting Leadership for Early Childhood

Overview

The first years in a child's life are critical to healthy brain development and future academic success. They provide a window of opportunity with enormous implications for the rest of a child's life. Research shows that high quality care and early learning experiences are linked to children's success in school and in life, and save money by preventing future expenses for remedial education, incarceration, and cash assistance. Governors are raising awareness and championing state efforts to meet the needs of young children from birth to school entry and beyond. The NGA Center for Best Practices supports the work of governors and their policy advisors to promote school readiness and support those leading efforts to build a comprehensive system of services for children ages birth to five.

Focus of Center Activities - 2006-2008

As stated in *Building the Foundation for Bright Futures: Final Report of the NGA Task Force on School Readiness*, the nation's governors recognize the potential for closing the persistent achievement gap by addressing the developmental needs of young children within the context of their families, communities, and schools. The task force identified five core principles which guided the recommendations:

1. The family plays the most important role in a young child's life.
2. Responsibility for school readiness lies not with children, but with the adults who care for them and the systems that support them.
3. The first five years of life are a critical developmental period.
4. Child development occurs across equally important and interrelated domains.
5. Governors and states can pursue various options to promote school readiness.

Over the next three years, the NGA Center will engage in a portfolio of activities that are tightly aligned to the framework, principles and recommendations of the NGA task force report. Through a combination of efforts at the state and national level, the NGA Center will seek to support leadership among governors and national organizations to build Ready States that can provide a foundation for bright futures for our nation's youngest children. Project descriptions follow below.

Additional information and links to early childhood publications are available through the NGA Center for Best Practices Education Division website:

<http://www.nga.org/center/edu>

Supporting Gubernatorial Leadership for Early Care and Education

With a three-year grant from the Head Start Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the NGA Center will seek to guide up to four states through an intensive policy audit and strategic planning effort to build a comprehensive and integrated system of policies and services for children ages birth to five. States will be selected through a competitive RFP open to all states. The NGA Center will appoint a selection committee of national and state policy experts to make recommendations on the final state selections. The NGA Center will also appoint a national advisory committee of experts in early childhood policy and systems-building to offer guidance in the development of the policy audit tool and leverage the successes of current state early childhood systems-building initiatives (such as the Build Initiative of the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative, and the State Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems planning initiative of the federal Maternal and Child Health Bureau.) NGA Center staff and expert consultants will conduct a series of site visits to each state to provide direct guidance and assistance throughout the strategic planning and implementation process. The RFP will be released in March 2006.

Governors Early Childhood Summits

With a grant from the Buffett Early Childhood Fund, the NGA Center will award \$10,000 mini-grants to up to 10 governors over the next three years to hold a Governor's Summit on Early Childhood. The intent is to support Governors seeking to raise awareness and support for a comprehensive school readiness agenda for children ages birth to five. Summit grants will be awarded in two rounds over three years. Up to five state grants will be awarded per round through a competitive RFP process that will be open to all governors. The NGA Center will appoint an independent selection committee of state policy and early childhood experts to review applications and make grant recommendations. Successful proposals will demonstrate strong gubernatorial commitment to building a policy agenda that is based on the core principles, policy framework, and key recommendations of the NGA Task Force on School Readiness. States must involve key state and community leaders, including governor's cabinet members, business leaders, legislators, foundation representatives, mayors, and other community leaders. Successful proposals will set clear goals and objectives for using the Summit to inform state policy and strategic planning efforts, and express a strong commitment to implementing policy change following the Summit. The NGA Center will appoint an independent selection committee of state policy and early childhood experts to review applications and make grant recommendations. NGA Center will award \$10,000 grants to as many as five states per round to plan and produce the Summits. NGA Center staff will provide technical assistance and consultation to governors' offices prior to and following the summit to achieve the state's intended goals. The first RFP will be released in January 2006.

National Collaborative for Ready States

The National Collaborative for Ready States is a three-year initiative, hosted by the NGA Center for Best Practices, to strengthen connections among national organizations that are working to support policies for young children in states. The goals of the Collaborative are to maximize the collective impact of its members' individual initiatives and identify opportunities to leverage, rather than compete, for state attention, action and resources to meet the needs of children ages birth through five. The Collaborative will play an advisory role to the NGA Center's early

childhood work, and will be a mechanism for achieving greater cohesion among our projects and those of other organizations. The NGA Center, with the help of the members of the Collaborative, will also house profiles and links to current state-focused, national early childhood initiatives on the Collaborative's webpage, housed in the NGA Center's Early Childhood website, by January 2006. The Collaborative is supported by a three-year grant from the Buffett Early Childhood Fund.

State Early Childhood Policy Leadership Forum

The State Early Childhood Policy Leadership Forum is a joint initiative of the NGA Center for Best Practices and ZERO TO THREE which seeks to support a small group of high-level leaders who are actively guiding statewide comprehensive early childhood policy initiatives for children ages birth to five. The goals of the Forum are to build a national network and learning community among state early childhood policy leaders to: increase their knowledge, expertise, and leadership skills; promote systems change and improve coordination of services for infants, toddlers and preschoolers at the state and local level; promote the development of diverse state and community early childhood leaders, and bring the state perspective to the national level and provide national recognition to state leaders in early childhood. Through a combination of intense policy and leadership retreats, technical assistance, monthly conference calls and newsletters, and a private listserv, the Forum seeks to provide the Fellows with: access to cutting edge research and policy developments; in-depth technical assistance from two of the nation's leading organizations for early childhood policy; and a formal peer network for sharing ideas with colleagues across the country. Fellows will also serve as advisors to the NGA Center's state-focused activities and to the National Collaborative for Ready States to ensure that our collective efforts are responsive and supportive of state needs. Established in 2001 with support from the MacArthur Foundation, the Forum now connects over 20 individuals from around the country with support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Heinze Endowments, the William Penn Foundation, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

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