

Strengthening Early Care and Education from Birth through Third Grade 2017 Policy Priorities

Partnerships for Effective Use of Public Investments

School districts, child care centers, and Head Start in Kentucky want to serve more preschool-age children in high-quality, full-day learning environments. Strong Start supports these and other efforts to better coordinate scarce public and private resources. Kentucky has lost ground in preschool enrollment – falling in state rankings from 24th in 2008 to 40th in 2016. Creative, locally driven public/private partnerships can help reverse this trend. Strong Start urges Kentucky legislative and agency leaders to effectively implement recent changes to the state budget to:

- Maximize recent alignment of eligibility for **public preschool and child care assistance** at 160 percent of federal poverty to increase partnerships in the Commonwealth.
- Monitor the new **Preschool Partnership Grant Program**, funded through a \$7.5 million/year set-aside from the state preschool allocation. For fiscal year 2017, it has provided 23 communities grants of up to \$25,000 for partnership planning, and 46 communities with grants of up to \$150,000 to fund implementation. Another round of awards will be made for fiscal year 2018.

Voluntary Home Visiting with Real Outcomes

The Strong Start coalition continues its commitment to adequate funding and effective implementation of HANDS, Kentucky's voluntary, evidence-based home visiting program. Each year, HANDS provides home-based mentoring and coaching to more than 8,000 at-risk families across all Kentucky counties. Research conducted here in Kentucky shows that HANDS has a significant effect on improving birth outcomes, helping new parents improve their skills, and reducing child maltreatment. Home visiting helps Kentucky's babies have a strong start in life and Kentucky's taxpayers make a smart early investment. Strong Start urges Kentucky legislative and agency leaders to:

- Expand voluntary, home-based parent coaching programs that have been proven to produce real outcomes in communities in Kentucky.
- Continue efforts to evaluate and improve the performance of home visiting programs.

Early Educator Workforce and Quality Rating

Children and taxpayers benefit most from high-quality learning environments. The Strong Start coalition supports efforts to strengthen the early educator workforce. Research shows that teacher-child interactions have the largest impact on early learning. The coalition also supports continued implementation of the state's new tiered quality rating and improvement system (TQRIS) across preschool and child care. Strong Start urges Kentucky legislative and agency leaders to:

- Increase support for the recruitment, training, and compensation of the early education workforce across providers and across child care, preschool and early elementary grades.
- Support the development and provide for the continuous improvement of the TQRIS system.
- Create incentives to encourage more school districts and child care providers to meet higher levels of quality to better serve children and families across the Commonwealth.