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Starting Off Right: Promoting Child Development from Birth in State Early Care and Education Initiatives

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Starting Off Right: Promoting Child Development from Birth in State Early Care and Education Initiatives describes a menu of strategies some states are using to improve early care and education for infants and toddlers, and supports to their families. In the period from birth to age 3, early experiences shape the architecture of the brain—including cognitive, linguistic, social, and emotional capacities—at a phenomenal rate. Early care and education is a key strategy states can use to promote positive development for very young children, including those in low-income families. And since a growing proportion of very young children spend extensive time in the care of someone other than a parent, state policies to promote the quality and continuity of those settings and relationships should be part of a strategy to assure children are ready for school.

Despite compelling evidence of the importance of child development from birth, a clear state early care and education policy agenda that addresses infants and toddlers is still emerging. This paper provides illustrative state examples of specific policies to promote child development birth to 3, as well as ideas for state funding and governance structures that provide attention and resources for all children birth to age 5.

This project was made possible through a grant from the A.L. Mailman Family Foundation, along with general support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the George Gund Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, the Moriah Fund, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation.

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