

# PRINCIPLES FOR CHILD CARE



A Campaign of Child Care Advocates and Allies  
Developed by the National Women's Law Center

**High-quality child care** is fundamental to the economic security of women and families and is central to the economic success of our country. But the nation is facing a child care crisis that is leaving families, children, and workers behind. Families are getting crushed by the high-cost of child care and facing the impossible dilemma of choosing between a paycheck and their child's care. At the same time, funding for child care assistance has stagnated and failed to keep pace with inflation—only 1 out of 6 children who qualify for benefits receive them—and child care workers are paid so little that nearly half are part of families enrolled in at least one of four public support programs in 2016.

Our families and our country cannot wait any longer. We need substantial federal investments that will give all families access to affordable, comprehensive, high-quality child care and early childhood programs. We need investments that will put child care within reach for all families, ensure our children receive high-quality care and education, and support the excellence of our child care professionals.

The Child Care and Early Learning Coalition remains committed to fighting for substantial investments in child care and early education that are so important to children, families, and early childhood professionals. The principles that we believe should guide this significant new federal investment reflect a shared responsibility for giving our nation's children a strong start in life through equitable access to high-quality child care and early learning.

## **PRINCIPLE 1: High-quality child care that meets families' needs should be affordable for all low- and middle-class families with children birth to age thirteen.<sup>1</sup>**

- All eligible families receive child care assistance, with more financial support provided to those most in need.
- Families are able to access the early learning and child care settings that best meet their needs, including licensed and regulated child care centers and family child care homes, as well as informal providers.



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- Underserved populations, for whom these challenges are particularly acute, including communities of color and immigrant families, families with infants and toddlers, families needing care during nontraditional hours, families with children who have special needs, and families in rural communities, have sufficient options to meet their needs.
- Families are able to apply for child care assistance on-line or in person, using simple forms and clear criteria, with support from community-based organizations that provide language access for parents.

### **PRINCIPLE 2: All children receive high-quality care and education.**

- Funding is sufficient to provide high-quality care and education, with payments and other supports to enable child care providers to improve and sustain increased levels of quality, as measured by a set of agreed-upon quality criteria.
- Provider payment rates are sufficient to make it economically feasible for providers across all settings and all communities to serve children receiving child care assistance, and sufficient to support and sustain high-quality care.
- Resources are specifically targeted at expanding the availability and improving the quality of child care for infants and toddlers.
- Resources and supports are available to all child care programs and providers to ensure high-quality and appropriate inclusive services for all children including those with disabilities and social, emotional, and behavioral needs.

### **PRINCIPLE 3: Early childhood professionals are diverse, effective educators and leaders and have a compensation and recognition system that supports their excellence.**

- Funding levels and payment rates are sufficient to ensure that all early childhood professionals receive a baseline living wage<sup>2</sup> coupled with a pathway towards higher wages with parity in pay with K-12 educators tied to standards and credentials, based on knowledge, skills, and competencies.
- Early childhood professionals are able to access high-quality professional development and training, including higher education programs for associate's and bachelor's degrees in early childhood education and other credentials, with scholarship funding and other supports.
- There is a commitment to retaining and attracting a diverse workforce, and ensuring that diversity is well distributed across staffing levels and across all types of care.



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Members of the national Child Care/Early Learning Coalition are committed to supporting significant new investments in child care to ensure that children have access to high-quality and safe child care settings that are affordable to parents and that the child care workforce is well-compensated. The following organizations believe that these principles should guide the development of these investments:

AFSCME	National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education
9to5, National Association of Working Women	National Association of Family Child Care
Center for Community Change	National Council of Jewish Women
Center for Frontline Retail	National Domestic Workers Alliance
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)	National Indian Child Care Association
Child Care Aware of America	National Organization for Women
Child Welfare League of America	National PTA
Children's Defense Fund	NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Common Sense Kids Action	National Women's Law Center
Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children	Ounce of Prevention Fund
Early Care and Education Consortium	Parents as Teachers
Early Childhood Policy Research	Partnership for America's Children
Easterseals	RESULTS
Every Child Matters	Save the Children
Faith Partnerships, Inc.	Save the Children Action Network
First Focus	SEIU
IDEA Infant Toddler Coordinators Association (ITCA)	Teaching Strategies
Make it Work	United Way Worldwide
National Association for the Education of Young Children	YWCA USA
	ZERO TO THREE

1 Federal regulations for the Child Care and Development Fund set 7 percent of family income as the benchmark for affordable child care, see Child Care and Development Fund (Preamble to Final Rule), 81 Fed. Reg. 190 (September 30, 2016), available at <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2016/09/30/2016-22986/child-care-and-development-fund-program>. This benchmark was established based on data showing that 7 percent is the average amount spent on child care among families who pay for child care (including those who receive child care assistance and those who do not), see U.S. Census Bureau, Who's Minding the Kids? Child Care Arrangements: 2011, Detailed Tables, Table 6: Average Weekly Child Care Expenditures of Families with Employed Mothers that Make Payments, by Age Groups and Selected Characteristics: Spring 2011 (2013), available at <http://www.census.gov/data/tables/2008/demo/2011-tables.html>.

2 The Economic Policy Institute's Family Budget Calculator measures the income levels needed by families, across 618 U.S. communities, by estimating community-specific costs of housing, food, child care, transportation, health care, other necessities, and taxes. According to EPI calculations, in all communities, a family of two or more with one worker would need a fulltime wage of at least \$15 per hour - just over \$31,000 (the income for a family of three at approximately 200 percent of the federal poverty level) - to afford these basic expenses. Economic Policy Institute Family Budget Calculator, available at <http://www.epi.org/resources/budget/>.