

Montgomery Moving Forward is leading the charge to engage our entire community – business, government, education, nonprofits, the faith community, philanthropy, and families – in building a stronger Early Care and Education system. Our economic well-being, both today and in the future, relies on it. We all have a stake.

Early Care and Education, from age 0 to 5, is an economic imperative.

TODAY...

When parents don't have access to or can't afford Early Care and Education (ECE) for their young children, it directly affects their ability to participate in the workforce. This, in turn, impacts employers.

In MMF's recent survey of local employers, 60% said that lack of child care had impacted staff productivity "moderately" or "a lot." In our survey of local employees, 68% reported taking at least one day off in the previous six months due to child care not being available.

The quality and availability of ECE also impact productivity and absenteeism. Nationwide, absenteeism and lost productivity due to child care issues costs U.S. businesses about \$4 billion each year.

In addition, there are many parents who would like to work and are simply unable to do so. The desire to pursue career paths and higher education is curtailed because early care is too expensive – or simply not available.

\$17,240

is the median cost of care for an infant at a child care center in the county. This is more than the average cost of in-state tuition and fees at a public college.

TOMORROW...

In Montgomery County's knowledge-based economy, education is the key to a skilled workforce and the pathway to success for families.

Currently, 57% of jobs in Montgomery County require a postsecondary education – job training, an associate's degree, or a bachelor's degree. In the future, 78% of new jobs in the county will require this level of education.

Many jobs go unfilled due to the skills gap – the mismatch between job openings and ready workers. In Maryland today, 20,000 jobs in the cybersecurity industry alone go unfilled. In Montgomery County, there are at least 30,000 unfilled positions across industries. The skills gap is real and will widen if we don't act now to attract, retain and grow a skilled labor force.

78%

of new jobs of the future will require postsecondary education.

Early Care and Education is key to closing the skills gap for the future, while also ensuring that today's workers can sustain their employment.

Many children in Montgomery County are not getting the early learning experiences they need to be ready for school success, as evidenced by the fact that 51% of children entering public kindergarten in Montgomery County lack the knowledge, skills, or behaviors required for kindergarten readiness.

The readiness rate is even lower for children from low-income households (70% not ready) and English Language Learners (74% not ready). These two groups are both growing segments of the county's student population. In addition, 79% of children with disabilities are not ready. All of these children are behind in one or more key areas that include language/literacy, mathematics, social skills, and motor development.

When we fail to invest in Early Care and Education, we create barriers for many working parents, seriously shortchange children, and hurt local businesses.

Investing in high-quality Early Care and Education is the most powerful tool available to overcome barriers to success and close the achievement gap.

Assuring our children are ready for kindergarten puts them on the path to success in secondary and postsecondary education, so they will enter the workforce ready to contribute, thereby building our workforce and economy for the future.

Our commitment to Early Care and Education must encompass ages 0 to 5, to ensure that every child has a solid foundation.

Research on brain development is clear: the first three years are a precious “use it or lose it” opportunity. These early years have a profound impact on cognitive and social skills.

During this time, the brain produces twice as many neural connections, and at a faster rate, than at any other time in life. Without sufficient early learning, substantial gaps in language acquisition are already evident by age 3.

Remediation is costly and often not successful. Overwhelming evidence shows that children who enter kindergarten already behind are likely to remain so through their educational careers and beyond.

51%

of children entering public kindergarten in the county are NOT kindergarten ready.

Montgomery County is facing an Early Care and Education crisis.

Montgomery County’s current system is a complicated tapestry of programs, services, and funding sources that does not meet the needs of families or employers.

Most of the county’s child care slots are outside of the public sector at nonprofit, for-profit, faith-based and family providers. The costs imposed by a complicated state regulatory system and the rapidly increasing costs to attract and retain quality staff are driving up the price of care.

Parent fees cannot fully cover the cost of high-quality care. Private providers are operating on an unsustainable business model and without intervention may go out of business.

The current system is also failing our future. Brain science and educational research confirm the importance of learning from age 0 and 5 as the foundation for future success.

National data show a return on investment of \$8.60 for every \$1 spent, and recent research by Dr. James Heckman and his colleagues found that high-quality 0-to-5 programs for disadvantaged children delivered a 13% per-year return on investment.

Nearly

100

family child care homes in the county have closed in the past 4 years.

Building a stronger ECE system is an economic imperative.

Early Care and Education is a smart investment that provides powerful returns across two generations – and the cost of doing nothing is very high.

To make sure all children are ready to succeed, we must enhance, expand, and recalibrate our ECE system to make education part of every child’s early care environment.

An aligned, coordinated system would offer increased accessibility and affordability for families – and greater return on investment for our community.

What will it take to create an Early Care and Education system with the capacity and commitment to serve every child from age 0 to 5 in Montgomery County?

Goals, Outcomes & Action Steps

MMF recommends the following goals, outcomes, and action steps to create a stronger Early Care and Education (ECE) system that supports economic opportunity for all and a thriving Montgomery County.

We envision a coordinated, comprehensive system that will support two important GOALS:

Attract and retain a talented **workforce of today** by supporting families with young children.

Ensure the skilled **workforce of tomorrow** by addressing the growing opportunity gap.

(Opportunity gap: the disparity in access to education and resources required for academic success)

In support of these goals, our community must work toward three KEY OUTCOMES:



Every family with young children will have access to affordable, high-quality Early Care and Education.

The cost and/or availability of early care will not be an obstacle for parents. The ECE system will have the capacity to serve all families needing early care.



Every child in the county will be ready for kindergarten and future school success.

The critical early learning that lays the foundation for school success will be an integral part of all early-care environments for children age 0 to 5.



Employers will be able to attract and retain skilled, productive workers today and into the future.

The ECE system will strengthen the entire county's current and future workforce. This will allow businesses to thrive and also attract more employers to the county.

The following ACTION STEPS provide strategic direction for achieving these key outcomes. These interdependent strategies support a fully cohesive, coordinated ECE system.

MMF recommends that all sectors come together to implement these Action Steps, which are important and necessary aspects of building an effective ECE system in Montgomery County.

1 Break Down Silos and Boldly Reform the ECE System

- **Align ECE services and providers to create a coherent, robust, accessible system.** The current system does not meet the needs of all families and employers. It should be aligned and organized around the needs of children age 0 to 5 and their families, rather than aligned based on funding sources. Such a system will require breaking down silos and creating strategic alignment among the many public and private entities currently involved in ECE provision. The goal: a more robust, more cohesive system where ECE serves the needs of all children, families, and employers.

- ▶ **Define and resource a coordinating body to provide ongoing, system-wide oversight for all ECE in the county.** The currently siloed system of public and private entities requires coordination to improve outcomes for children, families and employers. MMF is committed to serving as an ongoing convener of key discussions around systems improvement and alignment.
- ▶ **Establish shared measurement and accountability by defining common community goals and population indicators of their achievement.**
 - Encourage all ECE system partners to establish performance measures that align with community goals and population indicators.
 - Use an accountability framework to track progress on community indicators and share ECE system partners' performance measures publicly.
 - Determine who will monitor and report progress.
 - Use data to create and support improvement strategies on an ongoing basis.

ECE Systems Building: A Working Definition

The BUILD Initiative, a national group that specializes in helping communities build ECE systems, defines it as “the ongoing process of developing the structures, behavior, and connections that make all of the components of an early learning system operate as a whole to promote shared results for children and families.”

2 Improve ECE Access for ALL Families

- ▶ **Reduce the barriers many families face in accessing ECE.**
 - **Make ECE more affordable for families.** The high cost of care is a major barrier to most families in the county. In addition to increasing funding for the Working Parents Assistance program, create tax credits for families to make ECE affordable (see the Financing section for details).
 - **Develop more ECE options for parents who don't work 9 to 5.** Finding an ECE provider can be very challenging for parents who work nights and weekends, or whose schedules change from week to week.
 - **Add more ECE programs in underserved areas of the county.** We need to eliminate child care deserts – regions in the county where demand for early care is much higher than available services, as identified in the Office of Legislative Oversight report *Childcare in Montgomery County* (December 8, 2015) – and make sure that parents who rely on public transportation have convenient access to ECE options.
- ▶ **Promote and expand existing resources that support parents and young children.** Strengthen – through structure, staffing, and funding – the services in Early Childhood Services/DHHS for parents and caregivers. Market services as a one-stop location where parents and early education caregivers can turn for information about ECE, professional development, licensing, training, and parent supports. Build on existing resources to fully develop a one-stop central point of access, and provide information in multiple languages based on community needs.
- ▶ **Require the creation of additional ECE spaces in new developments and public building projects.** For instance, offer incentives such as below-market rates for ECE providers in public properties and offer incentives for creating ECE spaces in private development. There should also be an intentional effort to identify “storefront” type properties to ensure availability of high-quality/accessible child care in high-demand neighborhoods. Modify ECE regulations to support community-based nontraditional child care spaces, including modifying playground space and per-child square footage requirements (see Washington, DC as a model).

- ▶ **Support and develop ECE programs that address the needs of Dual Language Learners (DLLs) and their families.** Increase DLL access to high-quality ECE, including pre-kindergarten (Pre-K) and Head Start, and encourage more bilingual ECE settings to maintain cultural connections and allow better communication between providers and families.
- ▶ **Support and develop community ECE programs that address the needs of children with developmental delays and disabilities and their families.** Increase access to high-quality ECE in the community for children with developmental delays and disabilities, age 0 to 5, to ensure that more children can receive services in regular early childhood settings. It is also critical to address early care for children with significant medical needs, and to ensure there are sufficient high-quality options for these children to receive before- and after-school care. Fully leverage the existing Infants and Toddlers Program as the county proposes expanding and creating more responsive options for infants and toddlers with disabilities.

A Question of Equity: Where Should Change Begin?

This question is an important one, since building a stronger ECE system is a complex process that cannot be achieved overnight.

Ultimately, an equitable system must provide every child and family with access to high-quality ECE. However, sweeping system-wide change is not always possible. In many instances, progress on this issue will need to be incremental.

Some children in our community have fewer opportunities or greater challenges than others. The concept of **incremental universalism** suggests that when universal change is not possible our interventions and investments begin with those children and families who have the greatest needs and the most to gain.

3 Educate and Engage Our Entire Community

- ▶ **Find creative ways to involve the whole community in ECE – all people and places that touch the lives of parents and young children.** Potential partners and pathways for engagement include:
 - Physical health mental health, dentists
 - Community resources such as libraries, museums, parks
 - Civic and community organizations
 - Faith communities
 - Media, including non-English media
 - Employers
 - Nonprofit health and human service organizations
 - Law enforcement
 - Retirees and volunteers
- ▶ **Conduct a public awareness campaign to bolster support for high-quality ECE as a community priority.** ECE is an issue that should matter to everyone who lives, works or plays in Montgomery County.
 - Identify messages that resonate with stakeholders – especially business leaders, policymakers, and parents.
 - Use the campaign to strengthen partnerships with individual and organizational allies and highlight the need for adequate funding.
 - Promote community-wide understanding that ECE matters because for children age 0 to 5, every environment – home, school, or early care – is a learning environment.
 - Articulate the benefits of using licensed providers.

4 Facilitate Strategic Financing

- ▶ **Address the inadequacy of funding for ECE.** Providing access to affordable, high-quality ECE for every family must be a community-wide goal. All sectors can help develop and implement solutions that adequately fund a cohesive, equitable ECE system. A successful financing solution must include a coordinated set of public and private resources. Here are some specific examples of what sectors can do:

State government can...

- Identify funding streams that offer/attract a match from local jurisdictions.
- Raise the rates and eligibility incomes for child care subsidies (which are among the lowest in the country) so they come closer to the actual cost of care.
- Expand/create tax credits and deductions (for employers, providers, centers, and families) that would help make early care and education more affordable to provide and use.

Businesses can...

- Offer the Dependent Care Assistance Program (DCAP), an employer-sponsored flexible spending account for child care, as an option in employee benefit packages.
- Invest in ECE through a public/private partnership or scholarship program.
- Add on-site ECE and adopt policies that support families of young children.
- Share their perspectives on the importance of ECE with key audiences, including policymakers.

Local government can...

- Support through the availability of below market- rate space (county owned or reduced property taxes for non-county owned), especially in ECE desert areas.
- Look at ECE funding options that include children age 0 to 5, not just funding specific to Pre-K programs.
- Include in funding discussions resources for informal providers – such as stay-at-home parents, grandparents, extended family, and friends – who take care of a large portion of the 0-to-5 population in the county, to increase quality of care and school readiness.
- Expand/create tax credits and deductions (for employers, providers, centers, and families) that would help make early care and education more affordable to provide and use.
- Prioritize funding to focus on children and families who have the greatest needs.

Philanthropic organizations can...

- Prioritize ECE in their funding decisions, in particular seeking to support innovative scalable solutions for increasing ECE access.
- Establish a coalition of funders, businesses and education advocates to create an ECE scholarship program (similar to one in Minnesota).

- ▶ **Facilitate and convene meetings of community stakeholders to address financing issues and solutions by looking at best practices and innovative models for ECE financing from around the country.** The objectives outlined in this community Call to Action cannot and should not be funded by a single source. To provide a starting point, MMF will convene an Early Care and Education Summit in early 2018 to focus on strategic financing, and will continue to play a convening and facilitating role around strategic financing.

5 Strengthen ECE Workforce and Infrastructure

- ▶ **Create affordable, accessible, integrated career pathways for ECE providers and support ECE workforce development strategies that improve educational quality.** All entities currently involved in or planning to become involved in training child care providers (Montgomery County Public Schools, Universities at Shady Grove, Montgomery College, WorkSource Montgomery, and Department of Health and Human Services) must work in collaboration with Maryland State Department of Education to provide affordable certified training to meet credential requirements and articulate an ECE career pathway. Make training and ongoing support available to all ECE teachers in order to ensure that ALL children, including those in informal care settings, have a high quality ECE experience.
- ▶ **Address the issue of high teacher turnover, which affects the quality of ECE.** The annual turnover in the ECE workforce is approximately 30%, compared to 16.3% for MCPS elementary school teachers (FY14). We need to provide fair compensation, professional development, and viable career paths for the teacher-caregivers who nurture young minds.
- ▶ **Advocate for changes at the state level to address barriers that currently impact ECE providers.** We need to streamline and reduce the complexity of child care regulations. State regulations and requirements for gaining / maintaining licensing and certification, in addition to the already high cost of providing care and the low salaries, are driving qualified early educators out of the field. Unfunded mandates from the state are increasing provider costs, reducing the supply of qualified child care professionals, and driving up tuition prices.
- ▶ **Create coordinated ongoing support structures/networks informal providers in high-need neighborhoods.** These networks should be facilitated by trusted local groups and connected to DHHS and MCPS. They should support parents and caregivers by educating about best practices to encourage early learning, and be designed to encourage participation (with attention to language and time of day that meet the needs of parents and providers). Where possible, support providers to become licensed.
- ▶ **Develop the business acumen of ECE providers.** ECE providers face challenges common to other small businesses. To make sure they remain viable we must provide supports, such as professional development, and small business management, and encourage innovation. Encourage existing small business development resources to create specialized supports for child care providers.
- ▶ **Recruit more bilingual providers to work with Dual Language Learners (DLLs) in early education settings.** More than 40% of children entering kindergarten in Montgomery County are DLLs. There is a growing body of research that supports best practices in teaching DLL children. The ECE workforce needs to be trained and coached in how to meet this growing need in our community.
- ▶ **Increase providers' understanding and preparation to work with children with developmental delays, disabilities, or trauma in ECE settings.** Approximately 5,000 children in Montgomery County ages 0 to 5 receive services to address their developmental delays and disabilities. The ECE workforce needs to be trained and coached in how to meet this growing need in our community.
- ▶ **Work in concert with the Washington Region Early Care and Education Workforce Network,** an effort that seeks positive change in the ECE professional workforce.

Reaching Unlicensed Providers: A significant number of children in the county are cared for by unlicensed providers. We must develop strategies and mechanisms to move unlicensed providers up the licensing value curve to continue to improve the quality of child care offerings. This is both a quality improvement and an economic development strategy. Recognizing that government cannot sanction unlicensed care, we recommend that trusted local providers be involved in this effort.

6 Support and Deepen Family Engagement

- ▶ **Add or expand Parent Resource Centers and other proven family support programs.** Programs can include resources such as text-based systems that use technology to reach parents with helpful developmental tips.
- ▶ **Provide parents with resources, education, and strategies to help nurture the development of their young children.** Reach all parents – including families that do not access the formal early learning system – where they work, learn, live, and play.
- ▶ **Re-establish the Home Visiting Consortium to coordinate home visiting programs to include Head Start, Early Head Start, Family Support Network, Healthy Families, and Operation Smile.** The consortium should coordinate services and training, and share best practices to reduce duplication and better serve families.
- ▶ **Build on existing programs that help low-income parents and children at the same time.** Develop a demonstration project in a high-need, high-impact neighborhood to leverage existing programs and demonstrate the value of systems change. Initially target communities where most families do not access the formal ECE system, as suggested by the concept of incremental universalism.

Many of these Action Steps align closely with strategies put forth in the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services *2017 Early Care and Education Strategic Plan*.

Taking Action: MMF's Ongoing Role

ECE systems change is a complex endeavor that will require ongoing deliberation, and there is a clear convening role that must be filled. MMF is uniquely positioned to convene stakeholders from across sectors because it is a vehicle for change, not a service organization or program.

MMF remains deeply committed to leveraging the collective impact approach to serve in a convening and facilitating role around ECE systems improvement and alignment. This will include activities such as convening an Early Care and Education Summit in early 2018 to focus on strategic financing, and facilitating a continued public awareness effort to help the county achieve the goals set forth in this Call to Action.

Background

How We Selected Early Care and Education

The decision to embrace Early Care and Education (ECE) was the result of a six-month community engagement process that gathered input from more than 500 residents and leaders in Montgomery County. ECE emerged as a top concern for nearly everyone we consulted.

In choosing an issue on which to work, MMF considers issues of critical importance to Montgomery County that relate to economic well-being. In particular, we seek out issues – like ECE – that are ripe for systems change, affect a large number of people, and have a disproportional impact on families who are economically disadvantaged.

ECE builds directly our first issue, workforce development. ECE has as direct impact on today's workforce because working parents with young children need access to affordable, high-quality ECE. At the same time, ECE plays a critical role in fueling the workforce of tomorrow by helping to ensure that all children are ready for school and life.

Focusing on Early Care and Education supports MMF's larger vision of economic opportunity for all and a thriving Montgomery County.

Montgomery County already has a number of local champions for ECE, which is one of the reasons it was readily identified as a key issue by a wide range of stakeholders. However, based on community input, we saw an opportunity to add value by fostering cross-sector dialogue, advocating for alignment of all components of the system, and focusing attention on children age 0 to 5.

As seen in many communities working to improve their ECE systems, tackling this complicated issue requires sustained cross-sector cooperation around a shared vision. This made the topic a strong fit for MMF's collective impact approach, which is a way of working that allows an entire community to work toward a shared vision.

What follows is a brief overview with highlights from the events and conversations that helped MMF shape the goals, outcomes and actions steps put forward in this Call to Action.

What We Did: Convening, Learning, and Listening

In late 2016 through 2017, we convened a variety of ECE events and conversations, large and small, that reached more than 1,700 participants from across sectors.

These efforts built on the input of more than 500 community members we consulted during the issue-selection process.

Our ECE events and outreach allowed MMF to engage in a sustained strategic conversation with a broad range of community stakeholders and national experts.

We gained a deeper, more nuanced understanding of ECE in Montgomery County – including challenges and needs specific to our community. What we learned helped shape this Call to Action.

Event/Activity	Participants
Community Symposium	175
Breakfast for Business Leaders	30
Discovery Day (Site Visits)	40
Four Learning Gatherings	270
Employer & Employee Surveys	157
Employer Focus Groups	24
Parent Speak Outs	52
Community Meetings, Issues Workgroup, Leadership Group, Expert Providers Group, etc.	1,000+

Community Symposium

On November 17, 2016, we brought together 175 experts and leaders from across sectors at a community symposium entitled “Early Care and Education: The Economic Imperative.”

The symposium provided an opportunity for a lively cross-sector discussion of the future of ECE in Montgomery County, and it launched a year of conversations and activities designed to engage and educate stakeholders, seek further input from the community, and examine local data trends.

Key questions that shaped the symposium and our ongoing exploration of ECE included:

- ▶ What do business leaders, experts and researchers have to teach us about the path forward?
- ▶ What’s working in Montgomery County and what’s missing?
- ▶ Why should ECE be a priority for everyone in the county?
- ▶ What can we learn from other communities to accelerate progress?

Breakfast for Business Leaders

On February 6, 2017, we convened a group of 30 business leaders to raise awareness and gather feedback, with a focus on how ECE impacts employees in the workplace.

Those in attendance represented some of the largest employers in Montgomery County, ranging from Westat with 2,000 employees, to Montgomery County Public Schools with 22,000 employees. Larger employers also included Adventist Health Care, Discovery Communications, Holy Cross Health, Kaiser Foundation Health Plan, Marriott International, and Montgomery College.

The conversation also included mid-size employers (300+ employees), including the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association and Social and Scientific Systems, and several businesses with 25 to 60 employees, including Buchanan Partners, Burness, EurekaFacts, and United Solutions.

- ▶ These business leaders were especially concerned with how ECE impacts productivity and how availability/affordability of ECE affects their ability to attract and retain employees.
- ▶ Business leaders questioned how a broad ECE system would be financed.

ECE Discovery Day

On May 12, 2017, we held a Discovery Day that combined ECE site visits with a follow-up discussion facilitated by Tamara Halle, co-director of early childhood research at Child Trends.



During the morning, we organized small-group site visits to a wide variety of ECE settings, with 40 participants visiting nine sites across the county. Participants visited family child care providers, school-based programs for children with disabilities, Head Start programs, and private providers. They interacted with ECE providers and learned about the challenges of providing ECE.

- ▶ This event highlighted the complexity of the ECE delivery system in Montgomery County, which is a combination of private, public, family child care, and faith-based ECE facilities/programs.
- ▶ Participants observed that different funding streams add further complexity (for instance, one site featured two side-by-side classrooms with different funders, each with different regulatory and reporting requirements).

- ▶ Facilitator Tamara Halle reminded participants that studies of the investments in the early years of life (age 0 to 5) have the highest return on investment, even more than investments during the school-aged years.

Issues discussed after the Discovery Day site visits included:

- The need for high-quality care for all children, and the need for multilingual staff.
- The high cost of quality care and the difficulty retaining qualified staff.
- How low salaries mean that many ECE workers struggle to provide for their own families.
- The need for professional development for community child care providers, including those providing informal care.
- The need for a system that includes all people who care for young children.

Learning Gatherings: a Four-Part Series

During 2017, MMF held four learning gatherings that explored ECE topics with local and national experts. Together, 270 members of the community attended these four large events.

Participants included representatives from business, government agencies, elected officials, providers, and funders. The sustained engagement from so many individuals and organizations had a synergistic effect, allowing us to make connections between what was learned at each event and build on previous conversations.

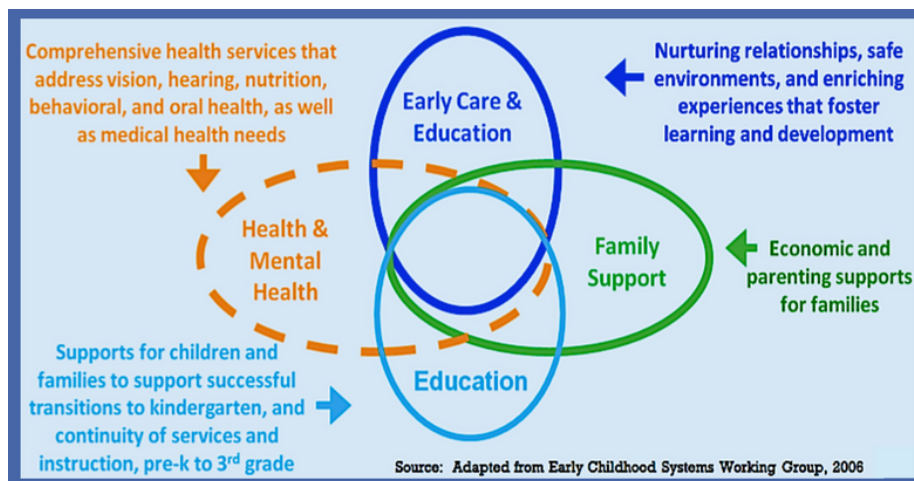
1st Learning Gathering (March 29, 2017) Building a System for Early Care and Education

Speakers:

Miriam Calderon, Bainum Family Foundation and Senior Fellow, BUILD Initiative
BB Otero, Principal, Otero Strategy Group

Otero and Calderon both have extensive experience at the local, state, and national level on early childhood policy and practice, including supporting the development of the ECE Strategic Plan for Montgomery County. Their presentation brought together the elements that contribute to an ECE system for families with young children: care, education, and health.

- ▶ A systemic approach goes beyond ECE programs and practitioners to also include health, mental health and other family needs. A system breaks down silos and creates an ecosystem of supports for families, as depicted in this chart from Otero and Calderon's presentation:



- ▶ Creating a comprehensive ECE system includes coordinating leadership, strategic financing, enhancing and aligning standards, ensuring accountability with shared outcomes, and engaging diverse stakeholders.

2nd Learning Gathering (May 19, 2017)

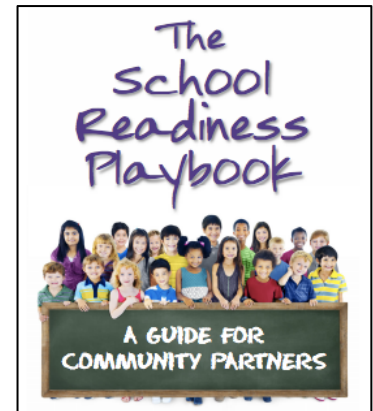
Engaging the Whole Community

Speaker: Nina Sazer O'Donnell, Early Childhood, Family, Community and Public Engagement Consultant

Sazer O'Donnell is coauthor of *The School Readiness Playbook: A Guide for Community Partners*, which is a compendium of the latest thinking and best practices on community-level collaborative efforts to increase school readiness for young children.

Sazer O'Donnell defined school readiness as “the conditions, skills, knowledge, and behaviors children need when they start kindergarten, including: physical health and well-being, language and communication, social-emotional development (also known as ‘executive function’), cognitive development, and general knowledge.”

She also shared strategies and tactics for engaging people from across the community in ECE issues. After the event, a smaller group of leaders from across sectors met with O'Donnell for further in-depth discussion:



- ▶ ECE is a community investment because we all have a stake in the future of our county.
- ▶ Participants had the opportunity to break into small groups and discuss how the themes and trends outlined in the presentation are affecting Montgomery County. The top three issues chosen by the small groups were equity, family engagement, and workforce issues.
- ▶ With regards to parent engagement, Sazer O'Donnell introduced the idea of meeting parents where they “pay, play, pray, and get paid.”
- ▶ In answer to a participant’s question about “where to start?”, Sazer O'Donnell pointed to the concept of incremental universalism, which recognizes the fact that all children need supports and high-quality learning environments to be school ready at age five. However, some children have fewer opportunities than others, or greater challenges, and incremental universalism suggests that system change begin with those children.

3rd Learning Gathering (September 17, 2017)

Exploring Cost, Quality, Availability and the Needs of Dual Language Learners

Speakers:

Alieza Durana, Senior Policy Analyst, Better Life Lab, New America

Amaya Garcia, Senior Researcher, Education Policy Program, New America

Durana, co-author of The New America Care Report, presented the case that an effective ECE system should be built on three pillars: affordable cost, high quality, and easy availability. She also discussed strategies for working with informal caregivers. Amaya Garcia presented demographic data and research about dual language learners in Montgomery County, and throughout the nation. New America suggests the following best practices, when considering dual language learners in an ECE environment:

- ▶ Promote the use of the home language in all care settings.
- ▶ Strong emphasis on oral language development.
- ▶ Pay attention to the role of culture and early language experiences.
- ▶ Scaffold DLL learning using common modifications (e.g. visuals, explicit vocabulary instruction, authentic learning experiences).

A compelling case was made for support and empowerment of providers (formal and informal) who work with dual language learners.

4th Learning Gathering (November 8, 2017)

Acting Collectively for Equity in Early Care and Education

Speaker: JaNay Queen Nazaire, Managing Director for Performance and Results, Living Cities

Nazaire discussed the particular importance of equity in Early Care and Education. She noted that traditional services and systems have often perpetuated barriers to equity. In thinking about equity, Nazaire encouraged participants to think about removing barriers for all children.

Nazaire also reviewed the principles and necessary conditions of collective impact, and reminded the participants of collective impact's potential to achieve real changes in community conditions by bringing together cross-sector leaders. She also discussed the importance of building a results framework, in which you build hypotheses and promising practices, measure progress through feedback loops, and learn what's working and what's not working, and most importantly, why.

Collective impact:

- ▶ Requires working in multiple strategy areas, changing multiple systems, and attracting leadership from multiple sectors.
- ▶ Is not delivering or scaling one specific program or strategy.
- ▶ Creates enduring change to impact generations to come.
- ▶ Can be influenced by other factors not within the control of the initiative.
- ▶ Requires 10-20+ years to achieve shared impact.

ECE Learning Gatherings sponsored by:

Greater Washington
Community Foundation

Kaiser Permanente

Marriott International

Asbury Communities

SunTrust

Montgomery County Economic
Development Corporation

Employee and Employer Surveys

Employers and parents of young children are key stakeholders in the ECE system, and we wanted to be sure their perspectives and concerns were well represented in our collective impact process and the resulting Call to Action.

To that end, Westat, on behalf of MMF, administered two surveys, one to employers in Montgomery County and one to employees, on the types of supports that working parents of young children need and want.

We asked employees in Montgomery County about current child care arrangements and monthly costs, concerns related to child care, perceptions about how various supports would improve their productivity or ability to work and whether their companies offered those supports, satisfaction with supports currently provided by their employer, and their desired additional supports. This survey was taken by 140 employees (32 gave partial responses).

We asked employers about their perceptions of how certain challenges affect their employees' productivity, how various supports would improve the productivity or retention of working parents and if their company offered those supports, and the types of supports they would like to be able to offer and the challenges to providing those supports. Seventeen employers took the survey (three gave only partial responses).

- ▶ 60% of local employers said lack of child care had impacted staff productivity "moderately" or "a lot."
- ▶ 68% of employees surveyed reported taking at least one day off in the previous six months due to child care not being available.

- ▶ On average, employees took 6.6 days off in the past six months for reasons related to their child (including child illness, child care not being available, and for doctor or dentist visits for their children).
- ▶ The three top concerns for employees were finding child care that matched their work hours (73%), finding reliable care (72%) and finding a convenient location (69%).
- ▶ 48% of surveyed employees found their current child care arrangement via a referral from a trusted friend or relative, while 38% found their current child care arrangement via an Internet search.

Parent Speak Outs and Employer Focus Groups

MMF and WorkSource Montgomery gathered authentic voices from the community to inform our respective ECE and Two-Generation Poverty research.

Parent Speak Outs

We partnered with community organizations, such as CentroNia, Identity, and the Community Action Board, to reach low-income and non-English speaking parents, as well as young parents who were not using formal care for their children.

The goal was to give voice to and gain input from a diverse cross-section of parents of young children in Montgomery County. A total of 52 parents participated in six speak outs.

One of the speak outs, which had 12 parents in attendance, was conducted in Spanish. Two other speak outs, with a total of 25 parents, had a Spanish interpreter present.

- ▶ In general, parents raised concerns about affordability, flexibility, and convenience surrounding their ECE decisions.
- ▶ Several parents indicated that they left the workforce because the cost of child care was either more than their paycheck or too large a portion of their paycheck. Several left the workforce when they experienced a problem with the quality of care their children received and were unable to secure alternative affordable, high-quality care.
- ▶ Several parents indicated using a complicated combination of center-based care, parents, friends, and relatives to care for their children when parents were at work. This was especially true for parents who worked irregular or erratic shifts.
- ▶ Several parents experienced disruption of care when they lost full-time employment and either they no longer had access to subsidized care or could no longer afford or find part-time care.

Employer Focus Groups

In partnership with WorkSource Montgomery, we facilitated three employer focus groups with business leaders in Montgomery County with a total of 24 focus group participants representing a wide range of fields, including banking, biotech, commercial real estate, communications, education, government, health care, hospitality, and nonprofits.

The goal of these focus groups was to provide an opportunity for employers and business leaders to discuss the interplay of workforce issues, such as recruitment, retention, and workforce development within a successful ECE system.

Participants were provided read-ahead materials, resource links, and case-study examples to foster a robust roundtable-style conversation.

- ▶ The business leaders in our focus groups were primarily concerned with employee recruitment, retention and productivity, both for the current workforce, and to a lesser degree, the future workforce.

- ▶ Participants were a self-selected group with a better understanding of the ROI of ECE than the general employer pool, and they suggested a robust education and awareness campaign targeting the broader business community would be a vital first step. In particular, they noted, employers need to understand the ramifications of not investing in the ECE system.

Expert Providers Group

We convened an Expert Providers Group, comprised of 15 individuals, including front-line providers and representatives from Department of Health and Human Services Early Childhood Services, DHHS child care policy office, Montgomery County Public Schools, Community Action Board, CentroNia, Maryland State Family Child Care Association and Family Child Care Association of Montgomery County, Montgomery Child Care Association, Wonders Early Learning and Extended Day, and Rock Spring Children's Center.

This group met monthly to provide input and guidance, including their feedback on this Call to Action. The group also collaborated on an ECE glossary of terms and mapped funding and programs for ECE services, training, and parent supports currently offered in the County. The feedback provided by this group was invaluable to our understanding of the precarious state of ECE in the county. Some key themes and takeaways from this group include:

- ▶ The issue in Montgomery County is not simply a lack of child care slots. Providers noted that additional capacity exists with existing providers, but parents can't afford to pay for care. This is a disincentive to providers opening new slots.
- ▶ A "system" of private child care centers and family child care homes does not currently exist in Montgomery County or the State of Maryland. There are loose affiliations through professional organizations, but child care programs are generally independently owned and operated entities. To successfully incorporate private providers, the diversity in business structures, strategic priorities, and curriculum implementation models will create significant implementation challenges that will need to be addressed in order to build consistency in a mixed-delivery system.
- ▶ The costs imposed to comply with the state regulatory system for child care along with the rapidly increasing costs to attract and retain quality staff, create an environment where many programs are challenged to continue operating. In other jurisdictions, a "universal Pre-K only" approach or solution resulted in the closing of many private child care providers, severely challenging the supply of birth to 3-year-old care. There needs to be careful consideration for care across the continuum from age 0 to 5.
- ▶ To address this ECE crisis, Montgomery County needs a comprehensive approach that includes significant increases in funding for child care subsidies and tax credits so that families can afford the high costs of quality child care. If we fail to do this, our private child care providers face financial collapse and our families face a lack of options for quality ECE for their children.

What MMF learned from the gatherings and conversations summarized above, and from many more interactions with experts and stakeholders during the past year, allowed us to frame the issues and describe a way forward. For key sources, summaries of survey and focus group data, and other supporting documents, visit nonprofitmoco.org/mmf.

With this Call to Action, we urge everyone in Montgomery County to recognize the critical importance of Early Care and Education. We all have a stake – and we all have a role to play in creating a system with the capacity and commitment to serve every child from age 0 to 5.

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