

Building Blocks for an Early Learning Community



With a growing understanding of the importance of early childhood, leaders in many communities are looking for concrete ideas about how to improve the lives of young children and their families. They are looking for information and guidance about:

- Where to put their resources and energy
- How to implement effective programs and services
- How to reshape systems to get to more equitable outcomes
- What policy changes will make a difference in families' lives and support early learning

We call communities that are engaged in this work Early Learning Communities.

The vision of an Early Learning Community is one where all young children get a great start, setting the foundation for lifelong success and well-being. While communities vary greatly by history, culture, demographics, and geography, all Early Learning Communities stand on four key “building blocks”—that is, community characteristics and actions that promote healthy development and well-being for all young children, which are described on the next page.

The Early Learning Community (ELC) **Action Guide and Assessment Tool**

supports local leaders—from mayors and executive directors to parents and service providers—through a process of assessing how well their community is currently supporting early learning and healthy development, and developing an action plan to make improvements in one or more areas. When parents and early childhood leaders from early care and education, health care, and family support services come together to identify actions they can take at the program, neighborhood, or system level to strengthen their communities and support healthy child development, they can make their community a place where all children thrive.

Outcomes

Early Learning Communities align their efforts toward three broad sets of outcomes for young children and their families related to early development:

- All new and expectant parents and young children are healthy.
- All children are ready to thrive in school.
- All children live in strong, positive, and nurturing families and communities.

Guiding Values of an Early Learning Community

Equity

Ensuring all means all

Parent Voice

Parents leading the way to success

Accountability

Keeping a focus on results

Building Blocks of an Early Learning Community

Community leadership, commitment, and public will to make early childhood a priority

Neighborhoods where families can thrive



Quality services that work for all young children and their families

Policies that support and are responsive to families

Building Block 1:

Community leadership, commitment, and public will to make early childhood a priority

Goal 1.1: Local leaders work together across systems with a focus on early childhood

Goal 1.2: The community invests in young children and families

Goal 1.3: Community members support and understand the importance of early childhood health, learning, and well-being

Goal 1.4: Families feel a strong sense of community and receive informal supports from their social networks

Goal 1.5: Community resources for children and families are well known, accessible, and easy to use

Building Block 2:

Quality services that work for all young children and their families

Goal 2.1: Families have access to high-quality, basic services that proactively promote healthy development, early learning, family strengths, and early relational health

Goal 2.2: All children receive routine screening, identification, referral, and linkage for risks and needs

Goal 2.3: Children and families have timely access to the continuum of more intensive and specific services when needed

Goal 2.4: Families and parents are actively engaged as partners and valued experts on their children, families, and communities

Goal 2.5: Supports are in place for the well-being of the early childhood workforce

Goal 2.6: Leaders use data to drive change

Building Block 3:

Neighborhoods where families can thrive

Goal 3.1: The built environment promotes safety and healthy development

Goal 3.2: Families can access services as well as economic and employment opportunities

Goal 3.3: Residents feel a sense of belonging and hope within their neighborhoods and connection to the broader community

Building Block 4:

Policies that support and are responsive to families

Goal 4.1: Government and workplace policies support families in raising children

Goal 4.2: Policies that govern child and family services are equitable and responsive to families

Goal 4.3: Land use and community development policies are designed with consideration for how they affect young children and families

About the Early Learning Nation Collective

These resources to support Early Learning Communities have been developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy as part of the Early Learning Nation (ELN) Collective, a network of local leaders and national partners collaborating to promote thriving communities for young children, prenatal to age 8, and families.

Learn more at eln-collective.org.