



Child Care Directors Association of Greater Seattle

Mission: To provide support, education, networking and advocacy opportunities for all child care professionals in Greater Seattle. CDAGS values diversity and is committed to the process of undoing institutional racism. Together, we strive to create a welcoming environment where individuals feel seen, heard, recognized and valued.

Seattle Preschool Implementation Plan Recommendations

As preschool providers who have made it our careers to support the learning and growth of children, CDAGS is excited that the Mayor and City Council have made a commitment to join in the important work we do by proposing the Seattle Preschool Action Plan. We believe that this plan includes many of the elements that would provide more Seattle children access to high quality early learning. We also feel that it has the potential of raising the level of academic opportunity for low-income students upon entering elementary school. However, it also includes several requirements we believe will create substantial roadblocks to achieving the City's stated goals.

In addition, we urge the Mayor and City Council to broaden the vision of the early learning field to include birth to three. By solely focusing on the success of 3- and 4- year olds, the Mayor and City Council leave serious gaps in the current early learning field that could harm the very children they are trying to serve.

Below are four recommendations on critical items the CDAGS membership believes must be addressed in order for the City of Seattle to support children and families adequately and to succeed in the implementation of a universal Seattle Preschool Program:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHING COMMUNITY: Preserve the cultural diversity of the current preschool workforce. Provide and support an alternate path to teacher certification that recognizes demonstrated quality practice and years in the field. Remove the 4 year timeline for degree attainment for current teachers.

The Seattle Preschool Action Plan calls for teacher qualifications based solely on the level of higher education that a teacher has attained and does not take into account years of experience or demonstrated quality teaching practices into consideration. Degrees in Early Childhood Education have only been widely available to preschool educators in the last few years; therefore, the majority of the current preschool workforce does not meet these requirements. At the same time, many teachers in the early learning field have demonstrated professional, high quality teaching practices through Early Achievers, NAEYC accreditation, CDA programs and other accepted professional standards.

The early learning field in the city of Seattle has long been a professional entry point for women and men who wish to make a difference for children, but have not necessarily had access to traditional education pathways, including immigrants, English language learners

and communities affected by poverty. Financial, family and work obligations will keep many of these quality educators from completing a 4-year degree, leaving them unable to participate in the Preschool Plan which could so benefit from their expertise.

In order to preserve the diversity of the current preschool workforce and to ensure that quality educators are recognized for their expertise, we recommend that the implementation plan include an alternate path to certification that includes years of experience with demonstrated quality teaching practices.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CURRICULA: Allow for a wide diversity of quality curricula. Align the curriculum recommendations in the Seattle Preschool Implementation Plan with the State Early Achievers Program.

The current plan restricts participants to limited curriculum choices. This restriction is unnecessary and adds considerable hurdles to the expansion and success of the City's proposed Preschool Program. The diversity of quality, research-based practices and curriculum in the current preschool field of Seattle serves parents well. Some examples excluded from the curriculum recommendations are Montessori, Waldorf, and Reggio. Excluded curriculum make up 50% of centers in Seattle, according to our annual survey. Many programs will choose to not participate in the Seattle Preschool program because they have made considerable financial investments in their curriculum and their families have come to rely on their educational philosophies.

The State Early Achievers already has a process that allows for diversity in provider curricula by requiring programs to demonstrate alignment with kindergarten readiness assessments. We recommend that the City include the same process for curriculum alignment that the Early Achievers currently uses in its Preschool Implementation Plan.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCING IMPACT: Preserve funding for children birth through five in the Comprehensive Child Care Program. Increase the reach of the CCCP to more early learning providers and expand the income guidelines for families in need.

The City's Comprehensive Child Care Program provides access to high quality early learning programs for children of all ages from low-income families. Funding for this program benefits children from birth through five, and will also apply to families who are not yet able to participate in the new City Preschool Program. Implementation of the Preschool Action Plan must not reduce services for low-income families by diverting funding to the new program.

We recommend a return to the funding level in the 2013 budget and increasing the number of child care programs contracted. In addition, we recommend that the City Council expand the income eligibility to 350% of the federal poverty rate. By increasing City contracted programs and expanding the income eligibility requirements, more low-income families would have access to high-quality early learning opportunities from birth to five, creating a solid foundation on which the City will grow its Preschool Program.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACCESSIBILITY: Keep tuition rates affordable for families and help providers keep their doors open in the face of a \$15 minimum wage requirement. Provide wage assistance to City of Seattle contracted providers.

The current preschool workforce is among the lowest paid professional class in the City of Seattle. Based on CDAGS' 2014 survey of its members, 25% of child care centers reported that they have no current employees earning over \$15 per hour. The majority of early learning provider's budgets are dedicated to payroll costs, which can be up to 85-90% of a program's budget. The \$15/hour wage mandate will result in steep increases in child care tuition rates across the city. It will also shutter the doors of many providers in low-income areas that depend on State and City subsidies to meet their bottom line.

We recommend that the City create a wage ladder based on Washington State's model that would provide funding to City contracted sites. This would allow providers to increase wages while keeping tuition rates affordable and keep programs open.

We believe the Mayor and the City Council have the opportunity to create a comprehensive early learning system that works to close the opportunity gap that begins for many children at birth. The Seattle Preschool Plan is a great start to prepare the children of Seattle for success in school and in life. CDAGS hopes that the City will not limit its vision to only 3- and 4- year olds and will provide a plan that supports the early learning providers that are already doing the work. In doing so, the City of Seattle will create a strong, sustainable, and high-quality early learning system that will be the standard for the rest of the country.

Sincerely,
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Signed on behalf of the Board of the Child Care Directors Association of Greater Seattle