

Strong Start Kentucky: Investing in Quality Early Care & Education to Ensure Future Success

Executive Summary

If the only argument were economic, the case for expanding the availability of quality early care and education for Kentucky's children would be incredibly strong. Research has found that returns range from \$2 to \$17 for every dollar invested in strong preschool programs for at-risk children.

But there are other compelling reasons to make these investments: early childhood experiences are critical to strong brain development, and they contribute to a higher quality of life for children as they become adults.

This research—coupled with the personal experiences of Kentuckians—provides the foundation of evidence for Strong Start Kentucky, an initiative of the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence. Strong Start is focused on the goal of:

making voluntary, quality preschool available for every 3- and 4-year-old child in Kentucky and ensuring the highest quality care and education possible for every child beginning at birth.

This report represents the combined efforts of some 50 state leaders in early care and education who are helping define the appropriate next steps for Kentucky in the critical area of early care and education.

These state leaders focused on five critical areas in developing their recommendations: **increasing access to preschool; improving the quality of all early care and education programs; assuring child readiness; encouraging collaboration between public and community-based, or private, programs; and engaging parents and families.** They also expressed support for full funding for all-day kindergarten as a critical part of the educational foundation that Kentucky's children need and deserve.

The organizers of Strong Start Kentucky recognize that achieving their goal of quality preschool for all 3- and 4-year-old children will require an incremental approach. Therefore, their initial objective is to expand pre-k to 3- and 4-year-old children living at 200 percent of the federal poverty level (4-year-old children living at 150 percent of poverty and 3- and 4-year-old children with disabilities currently qualify for the state's preschool program).

Additional recommendations:

1. To ensure collaboration among public preschool, community-based child care programs and Head Start, establish a new community grant program to allow communities to expand preschool to children up to 200 percent of poverty.

2. Continue funding for school districts that now provide preschool services under the current state program.
3. Ensure that policies, including those that address or include funding, provide for flexibility at the individual program level.
4. Establish a common core of evidence-based program standards for quality early childhood inputs and outcomes. This is to address the differing standards now in place for public preschool, community-based and Head Start programs.
5. Require all licensed and certified early care and education programs that receive public funds to participate in the STARS quality rating system.
6. Require all classroom staff members of early care and education programs to have at least a high school diploma or GED.
7. Require all early care and education program directors to hold at least a director's credential.
8. Secure funding to improve Kentucky's staff-child ratios in early care and education programs.
9. Fully implement an assessment system that would measure a child's progress related to school readiness and that provides information to guide the work of caregivers and teachers.
10. Provide funding for research on Kentucky's early care and education programs to inform public policy decisions.
11. Increase funding for scholarships for all staff members of early care and education programs.
12. Establish student loan forgiveness programs for early childhood teachers who expand their knowledge and skills by earning specific degrees and/or certification.
13. Establish a timeline to equalize the compensation paid early childhood teachers with the same credentials, whether they teach in public, community-based or Head Start programs.
14. Increase and designate as refundable the state child and dependent care tax credit for parents who use programs with a STAR rating of 2 or above.
15. Expand, enhance and develop as needed an outreach and public awareness program to inform parents about the importance of choosing quality early care and education programs.
16. Enhance the quality of family partnerships under the STARS rating system.
17. Support partnerships between families and child care and preschool providers.
18. Ensure adequate, sustainable funding for KIDS NOW.
19. Expand the voluntary HANDS home visitation program.
20. Provide additional support for Healthy Start.

Introduction

If the only argument were purely economic, the case for expanding the availability of quality care and education in Kentucky for children beginning at birth would be incredibly strong:

- Research across the United States has found a return ranging from \$2 to \$17 for every dollar invested in quality preschool programs for at-risk children.
- The Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank has concluded that investments in quality early education yield a return that far exceeds that of investments in most public economic development projects.
- Quality pre-school programs would boost long-term economic growth significantly, according to The Brookings Institution, which estimates that gross domestic product could be 3.5 percent higher by 2080, more than \$2 trillion in today's dollars.

But there are also other compelling reasons to give more Kentucky children an opportunity to participate in quality early care and education programs:

- Research shows that early childhood experiences are critical to brain development. These early experiences help form connections, or synapses, between and among the 100 billion neurons that exist in the brain at birth. Synapses are created at an astonishing speed in the first three years of life.
- Participants in quality preschool programs are more likely to complete high school; the typical high school dropout costs society an estimated \$243,000 to \$388,000 through increased criminal activity, higher government transfer payments and reduced tax revenue.

And then there are the personal experiences of Kentucky parents and grandparents:

"I am the proud grandmother of four who all live in Larue County, Kentucky. ... My children and their spouses work in various jobs, barely seeming to make ends meet at times. They all make far too much money to qualify for Head Start but not near enough to pay for the only available private preschool in Larue County. ... I am a single grandmother working hard toward an age and financial situation to be able to retire ... but my grandchildren deserve to have quality education at whatever the cost. Therefore, retirement will be put on hold while I pay tuition so that my grandchildren can start public kindergarten ... on a level playing (learning) field with the other children. ... I know that every child caught in the middle like this does not have a grandparent who is able to help. Where do THEY turn?????"

Hopkinsville Grandmother

“I know that children at the age of three and four have a desire to learn and an amazing capacity to effortlessly absorb information that is lost all too soon. Although I was fortunate enough to be a stay-at-home parent when my children were that age, I did not have the time or training to fully take advantage of that window of opportunity. Preschool helped to provide that opportunity. We can make an investment in the future by providing quality preschool for all children.”

Paducah Mother

“(My son’s) early education has awakened a love of learning and is nurturing the natural curiosity that all children have. His social skills are growing, and I have noticed a longer attention span and a better ability to concentrate on a task. Those things come with age, I know, but the gift of early education is priceless. We are so grateful that we can afford to send him to this school. I wish this opportunity was shared by all. Imagine what our future could hold if all of our children received this “push” in the right direction and the support they need to thrive.”

Lexington Father

This combination of science, statistics and personal stories provides the foundation of evidence for Strong Start Kentucky: Quality Pre-K for Every Child, a nonpartisan, citizen-led initiative of the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence. Working with the support of Pre-K Now, a program of the Pew Charitable Trusts, Strong Start is focused on the goal of:

making voluntary, quality preschool available for every 3- and 4-year-old child in the Commonwealth and ensuring the highest quality care and education possible for every child beginning at birth.

This report is an important part of that work, representing the combined efforts of some 50 state leaders in early care and education who are helping define the appropriate next steps for Kentucky while providing programs and services throughout the state.

Defining the Terms

Pre-kindergarten, pre-k and preschool: structured programs, usually for 3- and 4-year-old children with a quality teacher who structures age-appropriate activities and the environment with a focus on preparing children for success in school.

Child care: includes a range of services that educate and nurture young children and enable parents to work or attend school. Services may include recreational and developmental activities and meals as appropriate and are generally provided for children ages 6 weeks to 12 years.

Early care and education: the full scope of programs and services for children birth to school age.

These state leaders focused on five critical areas: increasing access to preschool; improving the quality of all early care and education programs; assuring child readiness; encouraging collaboration between public and community-based, or private programs; and engaging parents and families.

The following statements provide a framework for the recommendations included in this report:

- The Prichard Committee has advocated for young children since its 1984 “The Path to a Larger Life” recommended a new commitment to children for a healthy birth; basic health, nutrition and safety; caring and stable environments; and quality preschool programs for all 3- and 4-year-old children whose families could not afford it.
- The effectiveness of preschool is directly related to the quality of child care provided for infants and toddlers. The issue is much broader than programs for 3- and 4-year-old children. As noted by the Ounce of Prevention Fund: “Approaches to life and learning developed in children’s first months and years are the approaches children will bring to learning in preschool.”
- Quality programs are the most powerful for children from low-income families with limited opportunities for strong early development; in these cases, quality preschool provides a means to reduce achievement gaps. However, quality programs are important for every child.

It is important to note that we support full funding for all-day kindergarten as a critical part of the educational foundation that Kentucky’s children need and deserve. It also is important to clearly communicate what we mean by quality pre-kindergarten. The Strong Start Kentucky definition mirrors that of Pre-K Now, which specifies certain benchmarks.

Pre-k programs should:

- Meet quality benchmarks associated with improving children’s outcomes, such as highly trained teachers
- Provide a fun and engaging atmosphere that children look forward to and enjoy
- Encompass all aspects of children’s development—cognitive, social, emotional, physical, cultural
- Include referrals to health and other services as needed
- Help parents educate their children and encourage parents to be involved in the pre-k program

State pre-k policies should:

- Improve both the quality of pre-k programs as well as children's access to them
- Provide voluntary access to a core program for all families who want pre-k for their 3- and 4-year-olds
- Establish an ultimate goal that pre-k would be available to all children, but they may reach that target through a phased-in enrollment that serves disadvantaged children first
- Offer a core pre-k program for all children and additional services for at-risk children
- Include diverse settings – schools, community-based child care and Head Start settings – to give parents good choices, as long as quality standards are met
- Collaborate with child care providers to ensure the coverage that working parents need
- Support pre-k not as a stand-alone policy but as part of a system of services that are needed for young children's future success
- Use improvements in pre-k to strengthen the rest of the early childhood system; (birth to 3 is most critical for laying the foundation for learning)
- Do not take funding from one children's program to pay for another

Kentucky's Children

As a state with a high poverty rate (17 percent of Kentuckians have incomes at or below the federal poverty level based on 2006 data), Kentucky has a particular need to expand the availability of quality early care and education programs. The poverty rate is even higher for Kentucky's children. Of the state's children age 5 and under:

- 21 percent live in families whose income is below the federal poverty level (\$20,650 a year for a family of four)
- 46 percent live in families with income below 200 percent of poverty (\$41,300 a year)
- 11 percent live in families with income below 50 percent of poverty (\$10,325 a year)
- 63 percent of mothers with children in this age group are in the workforce

Other indicators of child well-being also reveal Kentucky's challenges. According to KIDS COUNT, the annual report of The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Kentucky children ranked 40th in the nation in overall well-being in 2004-2005, a slight improvement over the state's 42nd-place ranking of the previous year but a decline from 2000-2001 when it ranked 36th. KIDS COUNT bases its calculation on indicators that include percent of low birth-weight babies, children living in poverty and children with parents without full-time employment.

Kentucky ranks 41st on the Chance for Success Index developed for Quality Counts 2007 and based on economic and educational indicators. (Parenthetical information indicates whether Kentucky is above, below or essentially the same as the national average).

- 53.7% of children from families with incomes at least 200% of poverty level (below)
- 37.2% of children with at least one parent with a postsecondary degree (below)
- 66.5% of children with at least one parent working full time and year-round (below)
- 97% of children whose parents are fluent English-speakers (above)
- 42.2% of 3- and 4-year-olds enrolled in preschool (same)
- 75.2% of eligible children enrolled in kindergarten programs (same)
- 30.8% of 4th grade public school students “proficient” in reading on NAEP—the National Assessment of Educational Progress (same)
- 22.5% of 8th grade public school students “proficient” in mathematics on NAEP (below)
- 69.7% of public high school students who graduate with a diploma (same)
- 43.5% of young adults (18-24) enrolled in postsecondary education or with a degree (below)
- 28.7% of adults (25-64) with a 2- or 4-year postsecondary degree (below)
- 43.7% of adults (25-64) with incomes at or above national median (below)
- 67.4% of adults (25-64) in labor force working full time and year-round (same)

Low-income children can fall behind early and remain behind their peers in learning unless they have the benefit of effective interventions. As noted by the National Center for Children in Poverty:

- Before entering kindergarten, the average cognitive scores of preschool-age children in the highest socioeconomic group are 60 percent above the average scores of children in the lowest socioeconomic group.
- At 4 years of age, children who live below the poverty line are 18 months below what is normal for their age group; that gap is still present by age 10. The gap is even larger for children living in the poorest families.
- By the time children from middle-income families with well-educated parents are in the third grade, they know about 12,000 words. Third-grade children from low-income families with under-educated parents who don’t talk to them very much have vocabularies of about 4,000 words.

Pre-K in Kentucky

Kentucky became a national leader when it included provisions for preschool in the 1990 Kentucky Education Reform Act. The public program, with voluntary participation, is available in every county and is open to 4-year-old children whose family incomes do not exceed 150 percent of the federal poverty level (or \$30,975 for a family of four) and 3- and 4-year-old children who have a disability. Some school districts make the program available to children from higher-income families as space permits with the district covering the cost or families paying tuition.

Research by the University of Kentucky found that the Kentucky Preschool Program “has a positive effect on children’s development during preschool, their readiness for kindergarten, and their social and academic progress through the fifth grade.” Children who participate in the program make significant progress in all areas and are rated by their teachers as being as ready for kindergarten as their peers from higher-income families, according to the 1999 report, “Cumulative Findings of the Kentucky Preschool Evaluation Project.”

The 2006 state Department of Education report (based on the 2005-06 school year) on Kentucky’s preschool program noted the following:

- 24,587 3- and 4-year-old children served; of these children
 - 13,430 have a disability
 - About 3,000 do not meet income/disability guidelines
- Budget allocations per child including state and federal dollars were:
 - \$3,304 for financially at-risk children
 - \$3,469 for children with a speech/language disability
 - \$4,626 for children with a developmental disability
 - \$6,278 for children with a severe disability

Total state funding for preschool remained flat from 2003-2005, leading to the lowest per-child funding in the history of the program. A per-year increase of \$23.5 million in the 2006-08 budget lifted preschool funding to \$75.1 million annually and raised eligibility for 4-year-old children from 130% to 150% of the poverty level.

The federal Head Start program also serves Kentucky preschoolers up to 100 percent of poverty and their families. The latest statistics reveal:

- Nearly 16,500 Head Start children and their families in all 120 counties are served by Kentucky’s 33 Head Start and Early Head Start programs.
- Head Start funding in Kentucky totals nearly \$110 million; more than 1,100 classrooms are located in more than 450 centers.

The combined state and federal programs serve about 37 percent of Kentucky’s 3- and 4-year-old children.

Kentucky meets most national benchmarks for quality standards in its public preschool program. The following checklist was developed by the National Institute for Early Education Research as a way to assess state performance in preschool:

Policy	KY Requirement	Benchmark
Early learning standards	Comprehensive	Comprehensive
Teacher degree	Bachelor's degree	Bachelor's degree
Teacher specialized	IECE-birth to entry into primary with general ed, special ed training	Specializing in pre-k
Assistant teacher degree	High School Diploma	Child Development Associate degree or equivalent
Teacher in-service	4 days/year for certified 18 hours/year for CDA or Associate degree	At least 15 hours/year
Maximum class size 3-year-olds 4-year-olds 20 20	20
Staff-child ratios 3-year-olds 4-year-olds 1:10 1:10	1:10 or better
Screening/referral and support services	Vision, hearing, health, developmental, support services	Vision, hearing, health, at least 1 support service
Meals	Breakfast or lunch	At least one a day
Monitoring	Other monitoring (below benchmark)	Site visits

KIDS NOW and Early Care and Education

“School readiness is not a 4- to 5-year-old issue. It’s a prenatal to 5-year-old issue.”

That, in essence, is the key message of KIDS NOW, a comprehensive program enacted in 2000 to provide health and education services to children and their families. The program is financed with 25 percent of the money that Kentucky receives under the tobacco settlement agreement. The program’s elements, and their impact, include:

- A folic acid campaign – The number of babies born with neural tube defect has been reduced by 28 percent.
- Universal newborn hearing screening – 99 percent of Kentucky newborns have their hearing screened before leaving the hospital with follow-up within three months and enrollment in any needed intervention services within six months.
- An oral health initiative – More than 1,400 health department providers have been trained in KIDS SMILE and approximately 80,000 oral health screenings and fluoride varnish applications have been provided to young children.
- HANDS voluntary home visitation program – Approximately 11,000 first-time families participate annually, from the time of the pregnancy diagnoses until the baby’s second birthday. Among the families, there has been a 50 percent reduction in premature births; a 32 percent reduction in low birth weight, a 50 percent reduction in birth defects and a 75 percent reduction in infant mortality and fewer substantiated reports of child abuse and neglect.
- An early childhood mental health program – 88 percent of the children who were identified as at risk of expulsion from child care programs remained in those programs; 87 percent of participating families report that their children are better at handling daily life and at getting along with others.
- Scholarships – More than 1,200 scholars participate annually in programs related to child care and education. More than 850 Commonwealth Child Care Credentials have been rewarded or renewed; 509 Director Credentials have been awarded; and 764 Trainer Credentials have been awarded or renewed.

A key element of KIDS NOW is the voluntary STARS quality rating system for both licensed child care centers and certified family child care homes. The system, with four levels, sets performance requirements in areas ranging from staff-child ratios to curriculum to staff training and benefits. (A list of STARS requirements is included in the appendix.)

More than 670 child care facilities and more than 127 family child care homes that serve more than 33,000 children are current participants in the STARS for KIDS NOW quality rating system, and the number has been slowly increasing in recent years.

However, most early care and child care programs do not participate in the rating system. There are several reasons for this lack of participation, but child care providers cite cost as a leading deterrent. Moving up on the STARS rating continuum requires centers to spend more money to hire more staff members, offer them better benefits and training opportunities and make other improvements. That would force centers to increase their fees, and affordability is already a major issue for many Kentucky parents. And the younger the child, the more expensive the child care.

Although costs vary across the state, the Kentucky Child Care Network included the following estimates in its 2004 Kentucky Child Care Profile:

	Birth-3	3-5 Years	5+ Years
% of Married Income Spent on Child Care	11%	9%	8%
% of Single Parent Income Spent on Child Care	34%	30%	27%
Average Weekly Cost* for Regulated Child Care	\$103.06	\$90.74	\$82.00
Median Family Income:\$49,851 for married couple; \$15,713 for single mother			

* Kentucky child care providers report the actual cost of providing quality child care is much greater.

Child care is provided in about 2,100 licensed child care facilities and about 930 certified and licensed (Type II or certified) family care homes with the capacity to serve nearly 176,000 children according to the Kentucky Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies and the state Division of Regulated Child Care. (A county-by-county capacity list, as of July 2007 is included in the appendix.) The number of facilities changes monthly. Assistance is provided to families whose incomes are 150 percent of the federal poverty level or less. Currently, 43,000 children receive that assistance during a single month.

Quality child care is critical to a child’s early education. It is important to note that a majority of Kentucky’s 3- and 4-year-old children do not currently participate in a public program. Thousands of these children are in community-based child care settings that are providing or will be responsible for their child care and preschool learning experiences. In addition, many parents of children who do attend publicly funded, part-day preschool programs need child care for the rest of the day.

“CED (the national Committee on Economic Development) recognizes that many families need not only early learning opportunities for their children but also child care arrangements that match parents’ work schedules. ...Linking pre-k to child care is thus key to meeting the dual goals of improving school readiness for children and supporting working parents. Helping existing providers qualify to offer pre-kindergarten along with more extended services is an important strategy for meeting both goals.”

“Bridging Gaps: Linking Pre-Kindergarten and Child Care”
 The Committee for Economic Development
 October 2002

Recommendations

Strong Start Kentucky **recommends making voluntary, quality preschool available for every 3- and 4-year-old child in the Commonwealth and ensuring the highest quality care and education possible for every child beginning at birth.**

Recognizing that achieving this goal will require an incremental approach, we propose expanding pre-k to 3- and 4-year-old children living at 200 percent of the poverty level as the initial phase of this campaign and make the following recommendations.

Funding Strategies & Collaboration

We believe that collaboration among public preschool, community-based child care programs and Head Start is essential to expanding the availability of voluntary, quality preschool for all children. Kentucky law currently provides for collaborative models, but these strategies have not been fully embraced throughout the state.

Collaborative efforts must support working families who need services beyond school hours, 52 weeks a year. A diverse pre-k delivery system will be more cost effective by using existing community-based programs. The collaboration should balance both the economic realities of community-based child care programs and the need for quality and availability within the community.

In addition, many young children are transported each day from home to child care to a half-day preschool program at school and back. This is costly and less than ideal care for young children. With the recent change in 4-year-old income eligibility from 130 percent to 150 percent of poverty for the state preschool program, community-based child care providers are reporting the need to close classrooms because more children are taking advantage of the free preschool program at their local schools. School leaders want to increase availability of preschool, but they want to assure that expanded pre-k programs are of high quality.

Kentucky needs high quality child care for its youngest children as well as more opportunities for preschool. Efforts to expand early care and education programs must assure that they strengthen both preschool and child care services. Therefore, we recommend strong financial incentives to ensure collaboration.

- 1. Establish a new community grant program, to be administered by the Early Childhood Development Authority, to allow communities to expand preschool to children up to 200 percent of poverty.** Communities could apply for these funds for the purpose of providing high quality preschool to more children in ways that meet the unique needs of the community.
 - a) Applications for these funds would be required to demonstrate collaboration among all eligible providers in the community, including school districts, Head Start and community-based child care programs that have demonstrated quality (for example centers might be required to have a three or four STARS for KIDS NOW quality rating or NAEYC accreditation, meet NIEER benchmarks or other quality indicators).
 - b) Grants could be used to serve 3- and 4-year-old children who currently qualify for preschool services and children living in families with income up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level.
 - c) These preschool programs would be required to comply with state preschool regulations with regard to issues such as teacher certification, student/teacher ratios, using state curriculum guidelines, providing for children with disabilities, etc. Initially, some teachers may need to be grandfathered depending on the availability of early childhood trained teachers.
 - d) Grants would provide funds at the same per pupil allocation as the preschool program. Adequate funding for both the grant program and the existing program would be required to ensure quality.

- 2. Continue funding through the Kentucky Department of Education budget for school districts that are now providing preschool services to 3- and 4-year-old children with disabilities and 4-year-old children whose family income is less than 150 percent of the federal poverty level.** The new grant program provides communities the opportunity to expand preschool for more children, using a collaborative model. It also should be noted that current law allows school districts to collaborate with community-based programs, so existing funds may also be used for collaborative models. Funds from all sources could be blended in collaborative programs.

- 3. Ensure that policies, including those that address/include funding, provide for flexibility at the individual program level.** Common goals could be achieved with different strategies. Ensure that policies are designed to maximize collaboration and participation by public preschool, community-based child care and Head Start programs to provide planning opportunities at the local level.

Program Standards to Improve Quality

High standards are critical for program quality, and Kentucky parents should be assured of quality whatever program they choose for their children. Kentucky currently has a variety of program standards for early care and education through state licensing, the voluntary STARS for KIDS NOW quality rating system and Head Start requirements. The following recommendation is made in an effort to ensure consistency.

- 4. Establish a common core of evidence-based program standards for quality early childhood inputs and outcomes in Kentucky.** To ensure alignment among early care and education programs, a comparison of standards in child care, public preschool and Head Start should be conducted to identify those standards that are common to all programs and those that are unique to a particular program.

The following recommendations focus on improving the quality of early care and education programs whether they are provided through public schools, Head Start or community-based programs.

- 5. Require all licensed and certified early care and education programs that receive public funds to participate in the STARS quality rating system.** Provide financial assistance and technical support to enable programs to participate in the STARS system; specify a schedule for program improvement as reflected in their upward movement in the STARS system for programs serving state-funded children.
- 6. Require all classroom staff members of early care and education programs to have at least a high school diploma or GED.** The rule would apply immediately to newly hired staff members. Current staff members would have two years from the time of the enactment of the new rule to obtain the credential.
- 7. Require all early care and education program directors to hold at least a director's credential.** The rule would apply immediately to newly hired directors. Current directors would have two years from the time of the enactment of the new rule to obtain the credential. The credential, now required only under STARS Level 4, reflects a director's knowledge and competencies in regulations and laws, ethics, programming for families and children, supervision and staff development, health and safety, financial management and marketing, and community collaboration/resources management.
- 8. Secure funding to improve Kentucky's staff-child ratios in early care and education programs.**

Child Readiness

Kentucky's Early Childhood Standards represent what children from birth to age 4 should know and be able to do. The following recommendation addresses the need to determine how well Kentucky's children are being prepared for kindergarten as well as the quality of the programs in which they participate.

- 9. Fully implement an assessment system that would measure a child's progress related to school readiness as defined through Kentucky's Early Childhood Standards and that provides information to guide the work of caregivers and teachers.** The assessment system would guide improvements in the early care and education program in which the child participated. The assessments could not be used to deny a child access to kindergarten. Extend this assessment system for voluntary use by kindergarten and early elementary schools to guide teachers. Data from these assessments should be available to help identify where system supports are needed.
- 10. Provide funding for research on Kentucky's early care and education programs to inform public policy decisions.**

The effective delivery of quality preschool and child care services to Kentucky's children—whether the program is public, community based or Head Start—depends on the availability of qualified teachers and staff members. It is essential that as enrollment increases with expansion of quality preschool programs, Kentucky's postsecondary institutions graduate enough early childhood certified teachers to meet the state's needs. The state must develop policies to expand its postsecondary capacity and to encourage more people to enter the field of early childhood education.

- 11. Increase funding for scholarships for all staff members of early care and education programs, including public preschool, Head Start and community-based programs.** Provide incentives for postsecondary education institutions that increase the number of graduates who are certified early childhood education teachers.
- 12. Establish student loan forgiveness programs for early childhood teachers who expand their knowledge and skills by earning specific degrees and/or certification.** The amount of the benefit would reflect the level achieved and on the length and type of service performed by the teacher.
- 13. To address the challenges of staff turnover in community-based programs, establish a timeline to equalize the compensation paid early childhood teachers with the same credentials whether they teach in public, community-based or Head Start programs.** One possible approach would be an education-based supplemental salary program, similar to the Child Care WAGES[®] Project in

North Carolina, to encourage all child care workers to improve their knowledge and skills. The program provides education-based supplements to low-paid teachers, directors and family child care providers. Another possible approach would be to provide subsidies for community-based programs to pay for more highly trained staff members.

Providing financial support for working families who need early care and education for their children while encouraging their use of higher-quality programs is the goal of the following recommendation.

- 14. Increase and designate as refundable the state child and dependent care tax credit for parents who use programs with a STAR rating of 2 or above.** A tiered system should be developed to base the amount of the refund on the quality level of the program.

Parental Involvement

Program quality will improve if parents demand it. But too often, parents have limited access to information about what constitutes quality and little time to pursue that information on their own. It is critical that parents be as well informed as possible and that they are respected and engaged as the lead partners in the early care and education of their children.

- 15. Expand, enhance and develop as needed an outreach and public awareness program to inform parents about the importance of choosing quality early care and education programs.** This work could build on that already under way through the KIDS NOW program. Other efforts could include the use of child care staff to more effectively share information with parents and training for child care staff on community resources for family education, recreation, health care and other basic needs.
- 16. Enhance the quality of family partnerships under the STARS rating system.** The system includes requirements for parental involvement, but these efforts, which are frequently more social in nature, should be more substantive in addressing a child's learning needs.
- 17. Support partnerships between families and child care and preschool providers** by offering joint training in Kentucky's Early Childhood Standards, research-based programs like the DIALOGIC reading program developed for Head Start and other ways to support families and high quality programs.

We support the KIDS NOW program in its entirety and believe it is critical to improving the health and well being of Kentucky's youngest residents. In addition to the elements noted earlier (increased funding for scholarships and the STARS for KIDS NOW Quality Rating System), we make the following recommendations.

- 18. Ensure adequate, sustainable funding for KIDS NOW.** The tobacco settlement funds that currently finance the program are decreasing and will eventually be depleted. An ongoing source of funding is essential.

- 19. Expand the voluntary HANDS home visitation program to serve families with children up to 3 years of age,** regardless of the number of children in the family. Implement a program to make additional attempts to visit parents who initially decline the service.

- 20. Provide additional support for Healthy Start,** a program that focuses on providing accurate health, safety and nutrition information to child care providers and families.

###

Appendix

STARS Level 1 Requirements

- Ratios:**
- Meeting current licensing or certification standards
 - Type II - 12 maximum number children in care
 - Caregiver to child ratios posted prominently
- Curriculum:**
- Meeting current licensing or certification standards for curriculum
 - Complete STARS for KIDS NOW Overview, including environment rating scale (ERS) information
 - Type I: Program activities plan posted in every classroom (*lesson plan*)
 - Type II/ Certified: Program activities plan posted in home (*lesson plan*)
 - Type I: Daily schedule posted in every classroom
 - Type II/Certified: Daily schedule posted in home
 - Type I: Center's current license posted in a public area
 - Type II/Certified: current license or certificate posted in home
 - At least one family involvement activity
 - Type I: Agree to complete a curriculum assessment using appropriate environment rating scale (ERS) at each applicable age level within 12 months. (*No minimum score*)
 - Type II/ Certified: Agree to complete a curriculum assessment using family child care environment rating scale (ERS) within 12 months (*No minimum score*)
 - Second year: Written improvement plan based on assessment findings in place
- Training:**
- Meeting current licensing or certification standards for training
 - Type I/ Type II: Create and implement individual staff development plans for all staff annually
 - Certified: Provider creates and implements a written training plan annually
 - Introduction to the KY Early Childhood Development Scholarship Program

Personnel

- Type I:**
- All staff receive “In-House” STARS for KIDS NOW Overview covering: licensing regulations, STARS for KIDS NOW standards, ERS, KY Early Childhood Development Scholarship program

Type II/Certified

- Business Practices:**
- Have written program policies that include: fees, holidays, vacation, late fees, illness, hours of operation, who may pick up a child and a plan for how information is shared daily with parents

Regulatory

- Compliance:**
- Current license or certification in good standing. No current adverse action

STARS LEVEL 1 REQUIREMENTS

- Ratios:**
- Meeting current licensing or certification standards
 - Type II - 12 maximum number children in care
 - Caregiver to child ratios posted prominently
- Curriculum:**
- Meeting current licensing or certification standards for curriculum
 - Complete STARS for KIDS NOW Overview, including environment rating scale (ERS) information
 - Type I: Program activities plan posted in every classroom (*lesson plan*)
 - Type II/ Certified: Program activities plan posted in home (*lesson plan*)
 - Type I: Daily schedule posted in every classroom
 - Type II/Certified: Daily schedule posted in home
 - Type I: Center's current license posted in a public area
 - Type II/Certified: current license or certificate posted in home
 - At least one family involvement activity
 - Type I: Agree to complete a curriculum assessment using appropriate environment rating scale (ERS) at each applicable age level within 12 months. (*No minimum score*)
 - Type II/ Certified: Agree to complete a curriculum assessment using family child care environment rating scale (ERS) within 12 months (*No minimum score*)
 - Second year: Written improvement plan based on assessment findings in place
- Training:**
- Meeting current licensing or certification standards for training
 - Type I/ Type II: Create and implement individual staff development plans for all staff annually
 - Certified: Provider creates and implements a written training plan annually
 - Introduction to the KY Early Childhood Development Scholarship Program
- Type I:
Personnel**
- All staff receive "In-House" STARS for KIDS NOW Overview covering: licensing regulations, STARS for KIDS NOW standards, ERS, KY Early Childhood Development Scholarship program
- Type II/
Certified:
Business
Practices**
- Have written program policies that include: fees, holidays, vacation, late fees, illness, hours of operation, who may pick up a child and a plan for how information is shared daily with parents
- Regulatory
Compliance**
- Current license or certification in good standing. No current adverse action.

STARS for KIDS NOW CHILD CARE QUALITY RATING SYSTEM STANDARDS

07/01/2006

LICENSED TYPE I CENTERS

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4																																																																											
Ratios	1. Current Licensing standards <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Age</td> <td>Ratio</td> <td>Group Size</td> </tr> <tr> <td>0-1</td> <td>1:5</td> <td>10</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1-2</td> <td>1:6</td> <td>12</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2-3</td> <td>1:10</td> <td>20</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3-4</td> <td>1:12</td> <td>24</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4-5</td> <td>1:14</td> <td>28</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5-7</td> <td>1:15</td> <td>30</td> </tr> <tr> <td>7 and older (<i>before and after school</i>)</td> <td>1:25</td> <td>30</td> </tr> <tr> <td>full day care -</td> <td>1:20</td> <td>30</td> </tr> </table> 2. Staff to child ratios posted prominently in each classroom	Age	Ratio	Group Size	0-1	1:5	10	1-2	1:6	12	2-3	1:10	20	3-4	1:12	24	4-5	1:14	28	5-7	1:15	30	7 and older (<i>before and after school</i>)	1:25	30	full day care -	1:20	30	1. Current Licensing standards <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Age</td> <td>Ratio</td> <td>Group Size</td> </tr> <tr> <td>0-1</td> <td>1:5</td> <td>10</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1-2</td> <td>1:6</td> <td>12</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2-3</td> <td>1:10</td> <td>20</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3-4</td> <td>1:12</td> <td>24</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4-5</td> <td>1:14</td> <td>28</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5-7</td> <td>1:15</td> <td>30</td> </tr> <tr> <td>7 and older (<i>before and after school</i>)</td> <td>1:25</td> <td>30</td> </tr> <tr> <td>full day care -</td> <td>1:20</td> <td>30</td> </tr> </table> 2. Staff to child ratios posted prominently in each classroom	Age	Ratio	Group Size	0-1	1:5	10	1-2	1:6	12	2-3	1:10	20	3-4	1:12	24	4-5	1:14	28	5-7	1:15	30	7 and older (<i>before and after school</i>)	1:25	30	full day care -	1:20	30	<table border="0"> <tr> <td>1. Age</td> <td>Ratio</td> <td>Group Size</td> </tr> <tr> <td>0 - 1</td> <td>1:4</td> <td>8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1 - 2</td> <td>1:5</td> <td>10</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2 - 3</td> <td>1:8</td> <td>16</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3 - 4</td> <td>1:11</td> <td>22</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4 - 6</td> <td>1:12</td> <td>24</td> </tr> <tr> <td>6 -12</td> <td>1:14</td> <td>28</td> </tr> </table> 2. Required staff to child ratios posted prominently in each classroom	1. Age	Ratio	Group Size	0 - 1	1:4	8	1 - 2	1:5	10	2 - 3	1:8	16	3 - 4	1:11	22	4 - 6	1:12	24	6 -12	1:14	28	1. Staff/Child ratios consistent with National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recommendations (<i>Ratios vary according to group size</i>) 2. Required child to caregiver ratios posted prominently in each classroom
Age	Ratio	Group Size																																																																													
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Curriculum	3. Current licensing standards 4. Complete STARS for KIDS NOW Overview including Environment Rating Scales (ERS) information 5. Plan of program activities posted 6. Daily schedule posted 7. At least one family involvement activity annually 8. Agree to complete ERS at each applicable age level within 12 months, no minimum score 9. 2 nd year: written ERS improvement plan	Requirements 3-7 in Level 1 plus: 3. One more family involvement activity annually (<i>total of 2</i>) 4. A written plan for family involvement 5. Has completed all applicable Environment Rating Scales (ERS), average score of 3 6. Develop annual written ERS improvement plan with assistance, if requested, from Cabinet or its designee 7. Maintain a minimum average ERS score of 4 by 4 th year and beyond	Level 2 requirements plus: 3. One more family involvement activity annually (<i>total of 3</i>) 4. Documented family feedback procedure used annually 5. Average program score of 4.5 on applicable ERS	Level 3 requirements plus: 3. One additional family involvement activity annually (<i>total of 4</i>) 4. Average program score of 6 on ERS 5. Accreditation by Early Childhood Authority approved accrediting organization																																																																											
Training	10. Current Licensing standards 11. Create and implement individual staff development plans for all staff annually 12. Introduction to the KY Early Childhood Development Scholarship program	Level 1 requirements plus: 8. Center offers staff opportunity to participate in KY Early Childhood Development Scholarship Program, if eligible 9. Staff: 3 additional clock hours training annually for a total of 15 clock hours <u>or</u> Commonwealth Child Care Credential <u>or</u> CDA <u>or</u> Montessori Certificate <u>or</u> A.A., B.A. or higher in Early Childhood or related degree 10. Director: 6 additional clock hours training annually as per licensing standards for a total of 18 clock hours <u>or</u> CDA <u>or</u> KY Director's Credential <u>or</u> Montessori Certificate <u>or</u> A.A. or higher in Early Childhood/related degree	Level 2 requirements plus: 6. Staff: 50% of teaching staff have Commonwealth Child Care Credential or higher; <u>and</u> 50% of staff working with children have current CPR/First Aid training 7. Director: additional 12 clock hours training annually for a total of 24 clock hours <u>and</u> CDA <u>or</u> KY Director's Credential <u>or</u> Montessori Certificate <u>or</u> A.A. (or higher) in Early Childhood or a related degree 8. For 75% of program hours, director or person on-site responsible for daily supervision of program and staff must have CDA or higher.	Level 3 requirements plus: 6. Staff: Minimum of one CDA or higher in each classroom during all hours of operation 7. Director: Meets state approved national accrediting organization standards <u>and</u> an has additional 12 clock hours of annual training for a total of 24 clock hours <u>and</u> KY Director's Credential																																																																											
Regulatory Compliance	Current license in good standing	Current license in good standing	Current license in good standing	Current license in good standing																																																																											
Personnel	All staff receive In-House STARS for KIDS NOW Overview covering: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> licensing regulations STARS for KIDS NOW standards Environment Rating Scales KY Early Childhood Development Scholarship program 	Level 1 plus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> written standardized staff evaluations annually 	Level 2 plus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> minimum of 6 paid holidays/year minimum of 1 week paid leave time after 1 year 	Level 3 plus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> health insurance available; program pays no less than 50% single plan for full-time employees 																																																																											

**STARS for KIDS NOW CHILD CARE QUALITY RATING SYSTEM STANDARDS
LICENSED TYPE II FAMILY CHILD CARE HOMES**

07/01/2006

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Ratios	1. Current Licensing standards; 12 maximum number children in care Age Ratio 0-1 1:5 1-2 1:6 2-3 1:10 3 and older 1:12 2. Caregiver to child ratios posted prominently.	1. Current Licensing standards; 12 maximum number children in care Age Ratio 0-1 1:5 1-2 1:6 2-3 1:10 3 and older 1:12 2. Caregiver to child ratios posted prominently.	1. Age Ratio 0 - 1 1:4 1 - 2 1:5 2 - 3 1:8 3 and older 1:12 2. Required caregiver to child ratios posted prominently.	1. Age Ratio 0 - 1 1:4 1 - 2 1:5 2 - 3 1:8 3 and older 1:12 2. Required caregiver to child ratios posted prominently.
Curriculum	3. Current licensing standards 4. Complete STARS for KIDS NOW Overview 5. Plan of program activities posted 6. Daily schedule posted 7. At least one family involvement activity annually 8. Agree to complete a curriculum assessment using family child care ERS within 12 months (<i>No minimum score</i>) 9. Second year: written improvement plan based on assessment findings in place	Level 1 requirements plus : 3. An additional family involvement activity annually (<i>minimum of 2</i>) 4. A written plan for family involvement 5. Completed family child care ERS with an average program score of 3 6. Develop annual written ERS improvement plan with assistance, if requested, from Cabinet or its designee 7. Maintain minimum average ERS score of 4 beyond 4 th year 8. Reads to children daily	Level 2 requirements plus : 3. An additional family involvement activity annually (<i>minimum of 3</i>) 4. An average program score of 4.5 on family child care ERS 5. Must score at least 5 on family child care ERS items related to use of TV. Provider limits use of TV to programs and video games regarded as good for children (<i>no more than 2 hrs/day</i>). Activities are provided as an alternative while TV is on.	Level 3 requirements plus : 3. An additional family involvement activity annually (minimum of 4) 4. An average program score of 5.5 on family child care ERS 5. Accreditation by state approved national accrediting organization
Training	10. Current licensing standards 11. Create and implement written individual training plans for director and staff annually 12. Introduction to the KY Early Childhood Development Scholarship program	Level 1 requirements plus : 9. Home offers staff opportunity to participate in KY ECD Scholarship Program, if eligible 10. Director and Staff : 3 additional clock hours training for a total of 15 clock hours or Commonwealth Child Care Credential or CDA or Director's Credential or Montessori Certificate or A.A., B.A. (or higher) in Early Childhood/related degree	Level 2 requirements plus : 6. Staff have a total of 18 clock hours training annually or Commonwealth Child Care Credential (<i>or higher</i>) 7. Director has total of 21 clock hours training or Commonwealth Child Care Credential (<i>or higher</i>) 8. By 4 th year in STARS, director must have CDA or higher	Level 3 requirements plus : 6. Staff have a total of 21 clock hours training annually or Commonwealth Child Care Credential or higher 7. Director has received Director's Credential and CDA, AA (or higher) in Early Childhood or (related) degree
Business Practices	13. Written program policies including: fees, holidays, vacation, late fees, illness, hours of operation, who may pick up a child, a plan for how info is shared daily with parents 14. Written parent/provider agreement	Level 1 requirements plus : 11. Maintain a financial program/ record-keeping system	Level 2 requirements plus : 9. Provide families with written daily report for children age 2 and under 10. Parents provided with handbook that contains program's policies	Level 3 requirements plus : 8. Be a member of an early childhood professional organization
Regulatory Compliance	Current license in good standing	Current license in good standing	Current license in good standing	Current license in good standing

**STARS for KIDS NOW CHILD CARE QUALITY RATING SYSTEM STANDARDS
CERTIFIED FAMILY CHILD CARE HOMES**

07/01/2006

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Ratios	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Current Certification Standards Post rules regarding allowable capacity restrictions according to ages of children in care 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Current Certification Standards Post rules regarding allowable capacity restrictions according to ages of children in care 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> If caring for 6 or fewer children, no more than 3 infants unless an assistant is present. If caring for more than 6 children, no more than 3 under the age of 24 months unless an assistant is present. <i>(Includes own and related children.)</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Level 3 restrictions, and maximum capacity of 9. <i>(May care for up to 3 own or related children in addition to 6 unrelated children.)</i>
Curriculum	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Current certification standards Complete STARS for KIDS NOW Overview Plan of program activities posted Daily schedule posted At least one family involvement activity annually Agree to complete a curriculum assessment using family child care ERS within 12 months <i>(No minimum score)</i> Second year: written improvement plan based on assessment findings in place 	<p>Level 1 requirements plus:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> An additional family involvement activity annually (minimum of 2) A written family involvement plan Completed family child care ERS with an average program score of 3 Develop annual written ERS improvement plan with assistance, if requested, from Cabinet or its designee Maintain minimum average ERS score of 4 beyond 4th year Reads to children daily 	<p>Level 2 requirements plus:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> An additional family involvement activity annually <i>(minimum of 3)</i> An average program score of 4.5 on family child care ERS Must score at least 5 on family child care ERS items related to use of TV. Provider limits use of TV to programs and video games regarded as good for children <i>(no more than 2 hrs/day)</i>. Activities are provided as an alternative while TV is on. 	<p>Level 3 requirements plus:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> An additional family involvement activity annually <i>(minimum of 4)</i> An average program score of 5.5 on family child care ERS Accreditation by state approved national accrediting organization
Training	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Current certification standards Provider creates and implements a written training plan Introduction to KY Early Childhood Scholarship program <i>(part of STARS Overview)</i> 	<p>Level 1 requirements plus:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> At least 1 staff on duty has current CPR/First Aid training 3 additional clock hours of training annually for a total of 9 clock hours or Commonwealth Child Care Credential, CDA, Director's Credential, Montessori Certificate, AA or higher in Early Childhood or a related degree 	<p>Level 2 requirements plus:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Basic Orientation training for assistants 3 annual training hours for assistants Provider has a total of 18 clock hours of training annually or Commonwealth Child Care Credential or higher. By 4th year in STARS, provider must have CDA or higher. 	<p>Level 3 requirements plus:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Provider has received Director's Credential and CDA, AA or higher in Early Childhood or a related degree
Business Practices	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Written program policies including: fees, holidays, vacation, late fees, illness, hours of operation, who may pick up a child, and a plan for how information is shared daily with parents Written parent/provider agreement 	<p>Level 1 requirements plus:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain a financial program/record-keeping system 	<p>Level 2 requirements plus:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Provide families with written daily report for children age 2 and under Parents provided with handbook that contains program's policies 	<p>Level 3 requirements plus:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Be a member of an early childhood professional organization
Regulatory Compliance	Current certification in good standing	Current certification in good standing	Current certification in good standing	Current certification in good standing