



About the AASA Early Learning Cohort Early Childhood and Learning Toolkit

What is the AASA Early Learning Cohort?

Early Childhood Matters Most! This is the vision statement for the AASA Early Learning Cohort, a group of professionals committed to establishing an organic ecosystem of individuals and organizations committed to making a positive difference for young children everywhere. Since 2017, this group of Superintendents, Central Office Administrators, Building Principals, Teachers, and Educational Leaders from around the United States have assembled with one single goal in mind: improve the way schools understand and interact with young children and their families.

How To Use This Resource

The AASA created this resource to be the “go-to source” for leaders to enact meaningful change to support and prepare their districts for success in early childhood education, which is the cornerstone on which all other success is built. Using the toolkit as a gateway to exploring and defining ways to improve district or organization practices for children from birth through age eight is imperative to the success for all students. The AASA Early Learning Cohort and its thought partners, throughout the course of the work to design this resource, have outlined seven essential strategies for any Superintendent to learn about, implement and monitor to assist any district or organization in making positive differences for young children.



Every child has a right to his fifth year of life, his fourth year, his third year. He has a right to live each year with joy and self-fulfillment. No one should ever claim the power to make a child mortgage his today for the sake of tomorrow.

- Jimmy Hymes,
NAEYC (2009, p.334)



Strategy #1 - Promote Equity from the Start



Strategy #2 - Improve Alignment and Transitions



Strategy #3 - Establish Partnerships with ECE Community



Strategy #4 - Engage Families and Communities Early



Strategy #5 - Support Strong Executive Function and Social Emotional Learning



Strategy #6 - Provide Ongoing Professional Development for Early Educators



Strategy #7 - Self-Assessment Tools for ECE

Why This Work Matters?

The AASA has released the work of The Learning 2025: National Commission on Student-Centered, Equity Focused Education that focuses on two key areas that impact Early Childhood Education: Access to Early Learning and Whole Learner Focused. Having a working knowledge of Early Childhood Education is an imperative that each current and future Superintendent **MUST** demonstrate to be successful in the districts and communities they lead. A redefinition of understanding that schools in education are P-20 institutions and not just K-12 school districts follows the works of many partner organizations like the Buffett Early Childhood Institute and Education Development Center and the National P-3 Center. Friends at the Office of Head Start (OHS) are considered the leaders in the field of Early Childhood Education and in December of 2019, the AASA entered into a Memorandum of Understanding to build sustainable partnership to continue to explore deep and lasting bonds between the AASA and OHS.



Learning 2025: National Commission Report



As Nobel Prize winning economist James Heckman has explained, investment in young children is most likely to be effective if it is made earlier (Regenstein, 2019, p. 11).



Heckman himself shares how educational equity is often seen as a social movement, but in all actuality, it is actually an economic investment (Heckman, 2011).



Policies should fund, incentivize, and/or require curricula and training that match the science of early learning (Weiland, p. 190).



Key Action Strategy #1 - Promote Equity from the Start

Two featured national resources that support equity building are First Book: www.firstbook.org and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). On Dec. 13, 2021, the NAEYC released their 4th Edition of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) in Early Childhood Programs. This is a MUST have for any educational leader who is serious about transforming their program, organization or agency into a program that is equity driven and focused. This resource can be found here: <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/books/dap-fourth-edition>



Key Action Strategy #2 - Improve Alignment and Transitions

The latest best practices can be found in the newly published toolkit from Education Counsel and New America on Effective and Supportive Transitions for Children, Families, and Educators in Fall 2021 and Beyond: https://d1y8sb8igg2f8e.cloudfront.net/documents/Toolkit_for_Effective_and_Supportive_Transitions_for_Children_Families.pdf



Key Action Strategy #3 - Establish Partnerships with ECE Community

Three examples that demonstrate key elements of cultivating and sustaining partnerships lie with fellow thought leaders and AASA Early Learning Cohort partners. The Buffett Early Childhood Institute out of Omaha, Nebraska, the First 10 initiative at Education Development Center (EDC), and the Waterford Research Institute out of Salt Lake City, UT, have provided shining examples of what occurs when there are meaningful and well-intended partnerships that cultivate.



Key Action Strategy #4 - Engage Families and Communities Early

The Office of Head Start's [Parent, Family and Community Engagement Framework](#) can support school systems in determining how family and community engagement. In December of 2014, President Obama and the White House convened an Early Childhood Education Summit, and the result was a 46-page recommendation report entitled The Economics of Early Childhood Investments. It stated:



Existing research suggests expanding early learning initiatives would provide benefits to society of roughly \$8.60 for every \$1 spent, about half of which comes from increased earnings for children when they grow up (Council of Economic Advisors, 2014, p. 3).



Key Action Strategy #5 - Support Strong Executive Function and SEL

Two important bodies of work in these areas include researcher Ellen Galinsky's *Mind in the Making*, *Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs*, and a nationwide commission dedicated to promoting Social Emotional Health called The National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development (The Aspen Institute) released *From a Nation at Risk to a Nation at Hope* in 2019. This resource can be located here: <http://nationathope.org/report-from-the-nation-download/>



Key Action Strategy #6 - Provide On-Going Professional Development for Early Educators

Gracie Branch, Associate Executive Director of the NAESP, and Kristie Kauerz, Director of the National P-3 Center, collaborated to update NAESP's guide for school principals. Each of their organizations also hosts intensive, on-going professional learning programs for school and district leaders. NAESP offers their Course 101 and 102 of the Pre-K through 3 Leadership Academy (please see this resource in the digital edition of this toolkit or you may find the weblink here: <https://www.naesp.org/programs/professional-learning/pre-k-3-leadership-academy/>). Foundations, Inc. is a national nonprofit organization serving children, educators and families since 1992. They offer many programs and professional development not only to educators but to families as well. More information can be found in the online version of this toolkit or at: <https://foundationsinc.org/>



Key Action Strategy #7 - Self Assessment Tools for ECE Organizations

The Early Learning Program Assessment Tool © (ELPAT ©) is designed for school districts to be used by School Superintendents or Central Office Administrators who wish to evaluate and ensure that they are implementing programs based on successful, research-based practices. For more information visit the following weblink to learn more about the ELPAT ©: <https://www.standardforsuccess.com/software/analysis-program-assessment-software/early-learning-program-assessment-software/>

The National P-3 Center has also developed a resource, the District P-3 Audit Tool, for districts interested in understanding their organizational infrastructure and supports for P-3. Please see the following website for more information beyond what is loaded into this toolkit: <https://nationalp-3center.org/>.

Looking Ahead

Early Childhood Matters Most! These seven strategies are a start to the process for districts and organizations to begin exploring how to best promote healthy child development and support all children and families, right from the start. High quality early childhood education is essential for school readiness and academic success. Together, we can elevate early childhood education to the level which all children and families deserve and promote thriving learning communities. If you have any questions about this toolkit, please reach out to any of the contributors listed in the toolkit, or editor and organizer of the toolkit, Edward Manuszak.