

Mike Bloomberg's Early Childhood Learning Policy

Brain science shows that the most critical phase of a child's cognitive development is between birth and age 5.¹ Yet we are neglecting to invest in these foundational years. U.S. spending on child care and early childhood education is among the lowest of developed countries,² and too many of our children don't get the support they need to thrive by the time they reach kindergarten.³ While the federal government is the primary public funder of early learning, spending by states is inconsistent, creating a patchwork system of unequal outcomes.

As president, Mike will work to streamline our fractured approach to early learning, catalyzing innovation and building on the best programs and practices already in place in states around the country. He'll ensure that poor, working, and middle-class parents no longer struggle to afford child care, which in many areas exceeds the cost of college tuition.⁴ He'll guarantee pathways to education and higher wages for early childhood educators, who are among the lowest paid workers in the country.⁵ And he'll support improved quality standards across the board, putting all kids on a trajectory for success.

Neglecting our children's early education is not only morally indefensible, it's shortsighted: As Nobel Prize winner James Heckman's research shows, high-quality public programs from birth to age five generate a societal benefit of \$6.30 for every dollar spent.⁶

As president, Mike will make our children a national priority. That means investing in their education and well-being from the start. Mike will ensure every child is prepared for a life of opportunity and learning from birth and will empower moms, dads and all caregivers to keep them on the right path.

1. Create the foundations of support for infants and toddlers from birth through age 3.

The U.S. is the only industrialized nation in the world without a paid family leave policy,⁷ and roughly 80% of full-time private-sector workers can't take time off to care for a newborn infant without the risk of losing their jobs or vital income. Working families lose more than \$20 billion in wages every year because they don't get paid family leave.⁸ Women bear the brunt of the burden, often forced to choose between caring for a newborn child and leaving the workforce. Mike knows the value of paid family leave. His firm Bloomberg LP provides 26 weeks of paid parental leave for primary caregivers.

- **Guarantee 12 weeks of paid family leave** for all working Americans and provide a fair wage replacement without unfairly burdening employers. Mike believes that workers who receive generous family leave are more likely to stay in their jobs and have healthier children, boosting long-term productivity. The benefit also helps defray the costs of child care when it is most expensive.

¹ Center on the Developing Child, [The Science of Early Childhood Development \(InBrief\)](#), 2007.

² OECD, [Public spending on childcare and early education](#), February 2019.

³ U.S. Department of Education, [Early Learning: Frequently Asked Questions](#), Accessed February 2020.

⁴ ChildCare Aware, [The U.S. and the High Cost of Child Care, 2018](#), Accessed February 2020.

⁵ National Academy of Sciences, [Transforming the Financing of Early Care and Education](#), 2018.

⁶ Heckman, [FAQ for the Life-Cycle Benefits of an Influential Early Childhood Program](#), 2016.

⁷ OECD, [PF2.1. Parental Leave Systems](#), August 2019.

⁸ Center for American Progress, [The Cost of Work-Family Policy Inaction](#), September 2016.

- **Increase funding for voluntary home visits to support new parents in low-income families.** Free home visits help ease the burdens for first-time, low-income parents and have been proven to reduce maternal and infant mortality rates. The Health Resources & Services Administration’s Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program, with \$400 million in annual funding, helps support evidence-based home-visiting programs in collaboration with states and cities to provide care for children who have a higher likelihood of health risks.
- **Direct federal agencies to collaborate on new programs that address the social determinants of health.** Young children living in poverty are more than twice as likely to be at high risk of developmental delay, and only 27% of parents with report a child under 5 got screening⁹ -- recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics as part of well-child visits. Partnerships among health-care providers, educators and communities can improve the health of children,¹⁰ yet services are poorly coordinated. Mike will support collaboration among the departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development to support state- and community-level efforts to improve outcomes for children, starting with increased screening of early development and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) to identify factors that impact a child's ability to thrive and help families address children's needs and foster their strengths.
- **Incentivize public-private partnerships to expand and innovate care navigation and science-backed parenting resources.** Mike will encourage states and cities -- working closely with community centers or pediatrician offices -- to build and scale efforts to coordinate prenatal, postpartum and baby health, and disseminate science-backed resources that help positively impact parental behavior, such as ReadyRosie and Boston Basics. Programs like Playful Learning Landscapes, are models that can help neighborhoods develop public spaces that provide learning opportunities in everyday life to stimulate children when they aren’t in school.¹¹
- **Develop initiatives to target and promote the engagement of fathers.** Encourage states and cities to partner with communities and public colleges and universities to help fathers develop essential parenting skills, modeled on the Fatherhood Initiative Mike introduced as mayor of New York City. Studies suggest that children whose fathers are engaged in their upbringing have better educational outcomes, including higher IQs, and linguistic and cognitive capacities.¹²

2. Make child care more affordable by doubling annual federal spending.

Child care and early childhood education in America is significantly underfunded, with the majority of public spending coming from federal sources. At the same time, in most areas of the country, the cost of child care exceeds the costs of rent or in-state college tuition,¹³ stretching families’ budgets and forcing some parents to leave the workforce to care for their children.¹⁴

⁹ Center for Children and Families, [Georgetown University, Developmental Screening for Young Children in Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program](#), March 2018.

¹⁰ Health Management Associates, [Interagency, Cross-Sector Collaboration to Improve Care for Vulnerable Children: Lessons from Six State Initiatives](#), February 2018.

¹¹ Brookings, [Playful Learning Landscapes](#), Accessed February 2020.

¹² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, [The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children](#), 2006.

¹³ ChildCare Aware, [The U.S. and the High Cost of Child Care](#), 2018.

¹⁴ Center for American Progress, [The Child Care Crisis Is Keeping Women Out of the Workforce](#), March 2019.

- **Increase the number of low-income infants and toddlers who receive federally subsidized free early learning.** Mike will triple the number of infants and toddlers served by Early Head Start and expand the reach of Head Start. Early Head Start, which caters to low-income pregnant women and infants and toddlers under the age of 3, reaches only 11% of eligible participants, while Head Start reaches 36% of eligible children ages 3-5.¹⁵
- **Boost the percentage of families who receive childcare subsidies** through the Child Care and Development Block Grants, the largest source of federal child care funding. The block grants serve 27% fewer children than they did twenty years ago, and expanded funding is essential.¹⁶
- **Expand child-care tax credits for low- and moderate-income families** by working to pass the Promoting Affordable Childcare for Everyone Act (PACE), sponsored by Representative Stephanie Murphy, which makes the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit (CDCTC) fully refundable and indexed to inflation. The act also increases the number of pre-tax dollars parents can put into Dependent Care Flexible Spend Accounts (FSAs) to \$7,500 from \$5,000.
- **Reform the EITC and pilot a program to expand it to cover family caregiving** and other forms of unpaid or ineligible employment. Mike's plan will not only reward work and facilitate economic participation, it will ease the financial burden of parents who rely on family members to care for their children. Three-quarters of full-time employed mothers use family care at least part time, according to the Center for American Progress.¹⁷
- **Expand funding to help colleges provide campus-based child care programs**, including before- and after-school services, helping parents stay in school and creating a potential training ground for students studying early childhood education. Nearly 5 million college students are also raising children,¹⁸ but almost 60% of undergraduate student-parents are enrolled in schools that don't offer on-campus child care for students.¹⁹

3. Raise quality standards of child care providers and facilities.

There is currently no streamlined approach for tracking child care enrollment across the existing array of providers, leaving little room to evaluate the quality, quantity and effectiveness of the child care field. States also have different sets of licensing and certification requirements for early childhood educators,²⁰ and many child care facilities in the U.S. need upgrades.²¹

- **Study a cabinet-level position to elevate early childhood policy**, promote accountability and coordinate services and programs that support children and parents across different government agencies, including Education, Health and Human Services, and Labor to create a seamless

¹⁵ National Head Start Association, [National Head Start Fact Sheet 2018-2019](#), Accessed 2020.

¹⁶ First Focus on Children, [Children's Budget 2019](#), Accessed February 2020.

¹⁷ Center for American Progress, [Fact Sheet: Child Care](#), August 2012.

¹⁸ [Kirsten Gillibrand, Duckworth, Murray, Gillibrand, Casey, Durbin Introduce Legislation to Expand Campus Child Care and Help Student Parents Graduate](#), August 2017.

¹⁹ GAO, Higher Education: [More Information Could Help Student Parents Access Additional Federal Student Aid](#), August 2019.

²⁰ National Association for the Education of Young Children, [Power to the Profession, Decision Cycles 7 & 8, Discussion Draft for Task Force](#), August 2019.

²¹ Roll Call, Linda K. Smith and Sarah Tracey, [Child Care Is Infrastructure. We Should Treat It That Way](#), March 2019.

continuum of parental and child support from early childhood through the transition into primary school.

- **Extend competitive grants to build systems that can collect data** across family-based and licensed-care facilities, pre-k programs and kindergarten. Fewer than half of states utilize child-level data to analyze the relationships among early learning, social services, and children's health.²² Mike believes access to accurate and comprehensive data will help determine whether services are equitable, cost-effective and responsive to family needs.
- **Provide support and incentives for states to develop a reliable rating system** for early-childhood providers, through federal funding, to better guarantee quality and provide reliable information for parents. Mike will encourage states to create consistent standards for quality and tie funding in part to the attainment of high-quality standards, giving adequate supports for those who want to improve.
- **Pilot a new grant program that rewards states for modeling Department of Defense-styled programs**, where the government matches dollar for dollar into the program if quality requirements are met. Such a system creates more slots in quality early childhood centers, including those available to infants. The military-styled system also provides more stability for educators because the system guarantees pay increases as workers complete further levels of training or education.
- **Subsidize efforts by child care centers near military facilities to get national certification** to raise the standards of child care. America's on-base child care facilities are some of the best in the country, but have insufficient capacity and inadequate hours. The military will only subsidize child care at outside facilities that have national certification, which many providers cannot afford to procure. Only 11% of America's child care centers are accredited by the National Association for the Education of the Young Child or the National Association for Family Child Care.²³
- **Upgrade infrastructure of child care centers and family-based settings** to ensure safe and healthy learning environments. Mike will pilot an Innovation Fund to support state efforts to rehabilitate and build safe and modern early childhood education centers. He'll also encourage states to issue tax-free municipal bonds to help close the funding gap, modeled on Rhode Island's planned issuance and Massachusetts's sale that raised more than \$100 million to support facility development.²⁴
- **Fund start-up grants for states to create shared provider networks**²⁵ that pool back-office functions, including finance administration, accounting, operations and human resources. Most child care programs in the U.S. are small and don't generate enough revenue to support skilled administration. Shared provider networks can strengthen back-office capacity, create more child care slots and improve quality so providers can focus on children and families.
- **Direct more funds to bolstering Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships**, which lets Early Head Start grantees partner with local providers to help them meet quality standards and offer

²² Child Trends, [2018 State of State Early Childhood Data Systems](#), September 2018.

²³ New America, [The New America Care Report](#), September 2016.

²⁴LISC Rhode Island Child Care & Early Learning Facilities Fund, [General Obligation Bond Issuance](#), January 2020.

²⁵ Louise Stoney and Susan Blank, [Delivering Quality: Strengthening the Business Side of Early Care and Education](#), July 2011.

valuable wraparound services, including developmental screening and access to home visits. They also offer more training, coaching and professional development opportunities for teachers.

4. Professionalize and adequately pay the child care and early-learning workforce.

Salaries for child care employees are among the lowest in the U.S. and many preschool teachers don't make a living wage²⁶, burdening workers and perpetuating the weaknesses of American child care. The typical entry-level education for a child care worker is a high school diploma, and less than 20% of infant and toddler teachers hold a bachelor's degree.²⁷ But pathways to professional development and higher education are limited.

- **Support the creation of nationally recognized credentials for early-childhood professionals.** This will help to attract and retain skilled providers and boost the quality of care and developmental outcomes in children. Mike will also incentivize states to improve ECE credentialing pathways and curricula at public colleges and universities.
- **Promote professional development** through Mike's Apprenticeship Degrees initiative. These programs will improve the quality of care while allowing continued participation in the workforce. Apprenticeships in the field could be modeled on California's Early Educator Apprenticeship Program²⁸ or Bank Street's proposal for a residency program.²⁹
- **Create a refundable federal tax credit for early childhood teachers**, modeled on part of Louisiana's School Readiness initiative, and linked to completion of a nationally recognized credential.³⁰ The program has successfully driven professional development and increased retention of quality workers.
- **Raise the federal minimum wage** in stages to \$15/hour. The median pay for a child care worker is \$11.17/hour.³¹ Caregivers for infants and toddlers have earnings in the bottom 3% of all workers, while preschool teachers rank in the 19th percentile.³² Nearly half of the workforce lives in families that depend on public assistance.³³ Mike will also ensure funding to help child care providers pay staff and adjust eligibility requirements at means-tested programs like Head Start so low-income parents remain eligible.
- **Fund programs to start child care businesses in the neediest areas** as part of Mike's \$70 billion initiative in his Greenwood plan to turn around the country's 100 most disadvantaged communities. More than half of Americans live in neighborhoods with too few licensed child care options, with rural and Latino families impacted the most.³⁴

²⁶ Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley, [From Unlivable Wages to Just Pay for Early Educators](#), 2019.

²⁷ Brookings, [Realizing the Promise of High Quality Early Childhood Education](#), March 2017.

²⁸ SEIU Early Educator Training Center, [Early Educator Apprenticeship](#), Accessed February 2020.

²⁹ Bank Street College of Education, [Investing in the Birth-to-Three Workforce](#), January 2020.

³⁰ Louisiana Department of Revenue, [School Readiness Tax Credits](#), Accessed February 2020.

³¹ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, [Occupational Outlook Handbook, Childcare Workers](#), 2018.

³² Brookings, [Realizing the Promise of High Quality Early Childhood Education](#), March 2017.

³³ National Association for the Education of Young Children, [Power to the Profession, Decision Cycles 7 & 8, Discussion Draft for Task Force](#), August 2019.

³⁴ Center for American Progress, [America's Child Care Deserts in 2018](#), December 2018.

- Child care providers can benefit from the incentive for businesses to locate and employ people in distressed communities, through a place-based EITC that lowers costs for employers.

5. Provide access to full-day pre-school for all 3- and 4-year-olds and ensure every child is ready to thrive in kindergarten.

America ranks 30th for preschool enrollment among OECD nations³⁵, with only 56% of 3-5-year-olds enrolled in full-day preschool.³⁶ High-quality preschool programs are out of reach for more than two thirds of children in poverty.³⁷ The National Institute for Early Education Research estimates that if pre-k growth rates are maintained, it will take almost two decades to enroll half of all 4-year-olds and almost a century to get 50% of 3-year-olds in preschool programs.³⁸

- **Provide grants to states to help promote language learning programs and early education services** modeled on programs like *FirstStepNYC* and Bloomberg Philanthropies-funded *Providence Talks* to promote learning and family support services to narrow the school readiness gap. Less than half of children from low-income households are prepared for school by age 5, compared with 75% of those from moderate- or high-income homes.³⁹ Top-quality early learning programs for low-income children can raise IQ scores by up to 10 points.⁴⁰ Programs receiving grants under Mike's plan will have to meet criteria, including evidence of successful local implementation.
- **Restore matching funds for states to reach the goal of universal access to affordable pre-K for all three- and-four-year-olds.** Reward states that show progress toward increasing enrollment of low and moderate-income students in quality full-day pre-school and making it free for low-income families. Just three states' preschool programs met all 10 new quality standards benchmarks and 12 programs met fewer than half. Six states do not operate their own preschool programs, according to the National Institute of Early Education Research.
- **Offer grants to states that close the salary and benefits gap between pre-K and kindergarten teachers** in low-income areas to help attract and retain good teachers. The median wage for pre-K teachers is under \$14/hour, while the average Head Start teacher with a bachelor's degree makes just \$33,373/year.⁴¹ The annual turnover rate for lead teachers in Head Start is 25%, compared with 8% among K-3 teachers.⁴²

³⁵ The Hechinger Report, [Why Oklahoma's Public Preschools Are Some of the Best in the Country](#), February 2016.

³⁶ National Center for Education Statistics, [Preschool and Kindergarten Enrollment](#), February 2019.

³⁷ U.S. Department of Education, [Early Learning: Frequently Asked Questions](#), Accessed February 2020.

³⁸ The National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers, [The State of Preschool, 2018](#), Accessed February 2020.

³⁹ Brookings, [Starting School at a Disadvantage: The School Readiness of Poor Children](#), March 2012.

⁴⁰ Rand, [Informing Investments in Preschool Quality and Access in Cincinnati](#), Accessed February 2020.

⁴¹ National Head Start Association, [2017 National Head Start Profile](#), Accessed February 2020.

⁴² Brookings, [Realizing the Promise of High Quality Early Childhood Education](#), March 2017.