



Birth to Eight Collaborative Early Childhood Mayoral Recommendations

These attached Mayoral Recommendations were created by the Birth to Eight Collaborative based on the goals developed by the Collaborative, the work we have engaged in together over the past five years and what we have learned during the pandemic. Draft recommendations were discussed at a collaborative wide meeting in April, updated with the convening feedback in May, and distributed to the membership for comment and sign on in June. The final recommendations were then shared in July with the campaigns of all six candidates for Mayor of the City of Boston. As of July 29, 2021, the five candidates have endorsed the recommendations.

They are:

John Barros, Former Chief of Economic Development, City of Boston

Andrea Campbell, Boston City Council, District 4

Annissa Essaibi George, Boston City Council, At-Large

Kim Janey, Acting Mayor, City of Boston

Michelle Wu, Boston City Council, At-Large

For more information on the recommendations or to learn more about the Birth to Eight Collaborative, please contact Kristin McSwain, Executive Director of the Boston Opportunity Agenda.

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OUR VISION

Make Boston the leader in serving and prioritizing young children and families by creating a 21st century early childhood ecosystem.

Boston requires a mayor who will take an active role in achieving this vision and driving our city's early childhood leadership. We offer these recommendations to guide the next mayor in prioritizing resources and attention on efforts that will ensure Boston's thriving future.

All Boston children, particularly those traditionally most marginalized, need access to high quality early education and care. When young children are in high quality programs, they are more likely to succeed in school, graduate, have a job, own a home, maintain relationships, have better health outcomes and ensure a better start for the next generation. Dr. James Heckman, a Nobel Laureate economist at the University of Chicago, has calculated the economic returns to society for investment in children's early development. For every \$1 invested in high quality early childhood programs, society gains \$13 back over time, due to lower dropout rates, less poverty and crime, and better health. High quality early education and care matters for all children across the city. But for children in families struggling with poverty and instability, high quality early education and care can mitigate stressful effects by fostering resilience through strong relationships and the development of social and learning capacities.

RECOMMENDATION I

Establish and fund with its own line item and budget a cabinet-level Early Childhood Office for the City of Boston to coordinate resources, cross-sector collaboration, and the implementation of the recommendations outlined here.

The early childhood sector is diverse and complex. Much of the early childhood policy and programming is driven by the state and federal government through funding and programs like Head Start. In recent years, Boston has complemented these resources with its own investments in Universal Pre-K (UPK) and in strengthening family childcare options. The complexities of early care and learning call for careful and consistent attention to various systems and components: family supports and engagement, childcare, developmental screening and early intervention, preventative health care, workforce development, etc. To ensure successful transitions, identify—and address—gaps in learning pathways, and provide appropriate and equitable high-quality support to families that is clear, transparent and easy to navigate requires leadership and collaboration.

We call on Boston's next mayor to:

- Provide city leadership in collaboration with the Birth to Eight Collaborative and other stakeholders to identify and resource gaps between and among what early childhood providers, nonprofit family service organizations, private industry and local government provide to produce high-quality early childhood services for our youngest Bostonians.
- Build and maintain critical infrastructure for families linking early childhood to the K–12 system. This includes the mapping and coordination of family services, family engagement, Ages & Stages Questionnaire screening, out of school time, etc.
- Ensure UPK is an integrated part of the Early Childhood Office.
- Advocate for increased and aligned resources across the multiple sectors that touch and are touched by early childhood as well as across city-, state- and federal-level policy in strong collaboration with early childhood providers and other key stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Increase the supply of high-quality early childhood seats, particularly for infants and toddlers, and scale up investments in the infrastructure supporting the existing supply of family childcare providers.

Early education is essential infrastructure for a healthy economy. COVID-19 revealed to the entire country what the early education and care field has known for years: Childcare is the backbone of our economy. According to the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation, the heavy loss of women in the workforce over this past year, including those who have stopped seeking employment, is due to the drop in childcare capacity in the Commonwealth. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce found 50 percent of employees who are unlikely to return to the workplace cite the lack of childcare as the primary barrier. In 2017, there was a documented childcare shortage in Boston of 35%. The pandemic made it worse. Childcare centers in Boston have lost 7% of their seats and Family Child Care has lost 22%, with variability across neighborhoods. COVID has accelerated the loss of Family Child Care and reversed a period of growth for centers.

We call on Boston's next mayor to:

- Expand the City of Boston Childcare Entrepreneur Fund, which strengthens family childcare by providing mini grants and training for providers.
- In partnership with the United Way's Shared Services initiative and the City of Boston small business development initiatives, expand ongoing training, technical assistance, peer support and mentorship that support these small business leaders.
- Convene experts and stakeholders to explore issues that prevent the creating and sustaining of family childcare in Boston housing developments and implement solutions that expand the number of providers in public housing where many families need high-quality care.

Further, Boston's next mayor should invest in entrepreneurship and new care facility startups to sustain and scale the supply of early childhood services in Boston. Boston is a hub of entrepreneurship in biotechnology, education, health and tech. These fields have cultivated networks for funding, mentorship, innovation and peer support that can be duplicated.

- Incentivize the stabilization of current facilities and the start-up of new facilities by providing similar supports for early education and childcare. The up-front costs of starting a new early childhood facility can be prohibitive for those who

have worked in the field and may not have the financial resources. Meanwhile, maintaining aging buildings and facilities hinders current centers.

- Connect early care organizations to Boston’s economic development and small business supports, including wage supports, rent relief, etc.

It is also paramount that the next mayor expand UPK as a part of a vibrant early childhood ecosystem that incorporates real-time family choice and ensures high-quality care for our most marginalized children and families. Decades of research underscore that only high-quality early childhood services produce individual and societal level outcomes that benefit all. Boston has made significant investments in creating a UPK program focused on expanding high-quality preschool programs, but much work remains.

- The UPK program must be integrated into an Early Childhood Office at City Hall. This transition will help families differentiate between the UPK program, which is citywide, and the BPS Early Learning program, which represents the public schools’ involvement in the UPK program.
- Establish a public facing dashboard that lays out goals for the UPK system expansion and tracks the implementation of K1 and K2 classrooms at BPS and UPK community classrooms.
- Utilize the UPK Advisory Committee to consider critical expansion issues. Providers and policy makers must work together to further the commitment to a mixed delivery system that maximizes all of Boston’s early childhood capacity and that supports an important segment of the local economy.
- Continue and expand Birth to Eight data collections and make use of Analyze Boston, the city’s open data portal, to ensure transparency. Real-time and consistent data regarding family needs and choice are critical to making informed decisions to strengthen and support a UPK program that works for all.
- Finally, outstanding questions remain among parents and other caregivers regarding UPK. Will it grow to provide subsidized pre-kindergarten for all four-year-olds in Boston regardless of the setting or will it remain focused on increasing quality solely in neighborhoods where there are not enough seats available through BPS or the childcare market? An Early Childhood Office can take the lead in answering this and other outstanding questions.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Address the critical need in early childhood for a stable, justly compensated, well trained workforce, and build a citywide set of pathways to positions in early childhood – health center liaisons, early childhood practitioners, family engagement coordinators, etc. – utilizing the rich assets that Boston has in place.

While policy and reimbursement rates happen at the state and federal level, in addition to advocacy on this issue, the city can contribute locally to the development of the early childhood workforce. Boston has a wealth of leadership and development programs that engage a diverse set of parents representing the cultural and linguistic diversity of Boston. These parents and the programs that engage them could form a foundation for pathway development.

We call on Boston’s next mayor to:

- With the Office of Workforce Development, MassHire, institutions of higher education and others, the City should build employment pathways including those from parent leadership and development programs to full-time positions across the early childhood ecosystem. These pathways could include early childhood roles but also family engagement, health care liaisons and other similarly situated positions.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Prioritize and elevate the importance of positive family engagement across all City agencies and neighborhoods by implementing and tracking family engagement outcomes across agencies and data systems.

Parents and caregivers are a child’s first teacher and strongest advocate. In order to welcome and fully engage parents, programs across the city must utilize culturally relevant family engagement strategies that: 1) build strong relationships; 2) empower parents/caregivers; and 3) incorporate family voice to improve program quality and child outcomes. The importance of this

can't be diminished, which is why strong family engagement is called out in the UPK system's definition of quality.

We call on the next administration to:

- Utilize the common framework and equity-based, culturally and linguistically relevant family engagement tools piloted by the Birth to Eight Collaborative to measure parent engagement at the neighborhood level.
- Include family engagement metrics across relevant City agencies using the data captured for continuous improvement and transparent community reporting

RECOMMENDATION 5

Develop an early childhood data ecosystem. Data integration across sectors will facilitate a shared citywide knowledge base to inform practice and policy, as well parents' decision making.

To help children and families, individual agencies and service providers need to engage in strategic and systematic data collection to answer key questions about the state of early childhood on a recurring basis.

We call on the next administration to:

- Standardize and coordinate data collection, sociodemographic variables and neighborhood definitions across relevant City agencies and service providers to allow for analysis of information across sectors.
- Use the data to create an interactive citywide map of early childhood and other family support programs with the availability of space, cost, quality and scholarships.

Utilize data, both qualitative and quantitative across City agencies, EEC and other relevant partners to drive policy and programmatic interventions. In order to serve children and families in an efficient and effective way, the City of Boston must be able to identify challenges and opportunities based on robust data.

- Expand civic research partnerships that bring together state and local agencies, community-based organizations, health-care providers, research organizations, and colleges and universities to collaborate and share data to build synergistic partnerships that amplify their effectiveness. These partnerships must be pursued and developed in ways that provide data security and respect the data privacy of children and families.
- Utilize the open data portal to provide transparent data in a digestible way. The general public, especially families, need to have access to this data to gain a basic understanding about young children, childcare programs and related services.

Future Mayor, we urge you to adopt all of the above recommendations and prioritize attention toward early childhood issues for the good of our children, parents, early education and care workforce and entire regional economy.

Birth to Eight Collaborative Members

Cheryl Gomes - ABCD Head Start & Children's Services, Infant and Toddler Coordinator

Danielle Grow - ABCD Head Start and Children's Services, Program Director

Ayesha Cammaerts - Boston Children's Hospital, Office of Community Health, Senior Manager of Community Programs

Carole Charnow - Boston Children's Museum, President & CEO

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Janet MacDougall - Catholic Charities, Divisional Director of Child Care Services

Kelly Pellagrini - Charlestown Nursery School, Co-Founder and Co-Director

Michael Yogman, M.D. - Chair Child Mental Health Task Force of Mass Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Paulette Tattersall - Children's Vision Massachusetts, Co-Chair

Gloria DeVine - East Boston Family Engagement Network, Family Engagement Director

Justin Pasquariello - East Boston Social Centers, Executive Director

Audrey Gallo - Education Development Center (EDC) & REL Northeast and Island (REL-NEI), Research Associate and Co-Lead of REL-NEI, Early Childhood Workforce Development Research Alliance

Lauren Cook - Ellis Early Learning Center, CEO

Sue Covitz - Families First, Executive Director

Matthew LiPuma - Family Nurturing Center of Massachusetts, Executive Director

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Mayoral Candidate Endorsements

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Andrea Campbell, Boston City Council, District 4
Michelle Wu, Boston City Council, At-Large