



# Trying Together 2023–2027 Public Policy Agenda Overview

**A well-financed child care system plays an essential role in providing educational opportunities for children and in supporting economic stability and growth for families. Research shows that the most rapid period of a child’s brain development occurs in the first five years, yet the way early care and education is funded does not align with what we know about early childhood development. Unlike K-12 education, birth-five opportunities are not considered a “public good.” Public policies and investments have historically reflected this sentiment which has led to educational and economic disparities, disproportionately impacting Black and Brown communities.**

The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed the fragility of and inequities in the early care and education system drawing attention to the struggle of early learning programs to hire and retain staff which impacts families ability to access child care.

- Based on the Start Strong PA survey from March 2022, nearly 1,000 Pennsylvania early learning programs reported that more than 32,000 children were on waiting lists because of staff recruitment and retention issues.<sup>1</sup>
- Early childhood educators make less than \$12.50 an hour (under \$26,000 annually) and many are leaving the field for higher paying jobs, resulting in programs with long wait lists of children and empty classrooms.<sup>2</sup> Nationally, data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that the number of child care teachers is down 100,000 individuals from pre-pandemic levels.<sup>3</sup>
- A lack of early childhood educators leaves working families without access to child care. A 2022 National Women’s Law Center report showed that nationally, more than 1.1 million fewer women were in the labor force in early 2022 than in February of 2020. Many women cite lack of child care as a top reason for not returning to the workforce, with a disproportionate impact on Black and Brown women.<sup>4</sup>
- According to a 2021 report from the Early Learning Investment Commission (ELIC) and the PA Chamber of Commerce, it is estimated that Pennsylvania suffers a \$3.47 billion dollar impact annually due to child care issues.<sup>5</sup>

While early care and education received historic funding in several COVID-19 relief packages, the funding expires in September 2024 and Pennsylvania will have a \$1.5 billion shortfall for child care funds.<sup>6</sup> The 2023–2027 Trying Together public policy agenda advocates for increased public investment and offers pathways for a more just and equitable early care and education system where children, families, educators, and communities can thrive.

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## Invest significantly in and strengthen the early care and education system.

- Advocate for investments to increase access, affordability, and quality.
- Explore financial models for public funding.
- Provide ongoing recommendations for regulations and standards to ensure equity and quality.

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## Elevate the early care and education profession.

- Advocate for increased compensation reflective of care and education work.
- Strengthen the pipeline for workforce recruitment, retention, and career advancement.
- Center the expertise and voice of early care and education professionals.

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## Focus on equitable and developmentally appropriate care and education.

- Prevent and reduce the use of harmful, exclusionary discipline practices.
- Ensure access to early intervention and mental health services.
- Promote anti-racist, culturally- and linguistically-responsive, equitable, and inclusive early childhood environments.
- Advance developmentally appropriate practice in learning and teaching.
- Elevate the critical role of play in children’s development and learning.

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## Build connections and leverage partnerships to support the health and wellness of families.

- Strengthen resources to support perinatal health.
- Advance Paid Family Medical Leave.
- Promote fatherhood initiatives and resources.
- Support the economic stability of families through access to child care subsidies and food and nutritional programs.
- Enhance connections between housing and child care providers to bolster families access to care.
- Collaborate with healthcare providers to connect families with resources to strengthen children’s physical health and development.
- Address and eliminate lead exposure in children.

1 Start Strong PA. (2022). Child Care Crisis Survey, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c2e545d0dbda3cf1389658c/t/62555e4f80bf746c5c1d33c1/1649761871824/Survey+Results+2022+Pennsylvania.pdf>

2 Children First and Start Strong PA (2023). The Cost of Working in Early Childhood Education. Report forthcoming.

3 Goldstein, Dana. (2022). Why You Can’t Find Child Care: 100,000 Workers Are Missing. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/13/us/child-care-worker-shortage.html>

4 Tucker, Jasmine and Vogtman, Julie. (2022). Resilient but not Recovered. National Women’s Law Center. <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/FINAL-NWLC-Resilient-But-Not-Recovered-3.29.22.pdf>

5 Pennsylvania Early Learning Investment Commission and PA Chamber of Commerce. (2021). The Impact of Childcare on Business and the Workforce. <https://paearlylearning.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/PA-Impact-on-Child-Care-and-Workforce.-2021-Report.pdf>

6 Owens, Victoria and Smith, Linda. (2022). States Face a \$48 Billion Child Care Funding Cliff. The Bipartisan Policy Center. <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/states-face-a-48-billion-child-care-funding-cliff/>



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