



2020 Annual Year in Review



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Letter from Our President & Board Chair

Reflections on the past year are dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has upended life globally, but particularly for the children, families and educators we serve at Start Early (formerly the Ounce of Prevention Fund). This ongoing crisis has impacted people of color at significantly higher rates, illuminating the long-lasting effects of historical and institutional racism and underscoring existing injustices in communities across the country.

Our staff, partners and families have shown strength and resilience during these challenging times. Countless individuals have been working on the front lines of this crisis, and we appreciate their commitment to providing essential supports to families most impacted. In the wake of uncertainty, early childhood educators, advocates and systems leaders have acted with urgency, determination and kindness across communities, quickly responding to address our families’ immediate and long-term needs. These services have been a critical lifeline and help parents manage the stresses of the pandemic for their young children and families. The best hope for leveling the playing field is to invest in the earliest years so children can ultimately thrive.

For nearly 40 years, Start Early has been a champion for quality early learning and

care, focused on closing the opportunity gap for our youngest learners. Now, more than ever, there is an urgent need for quality early learning experiences for all families, especially those living in under-resourced communities. **Early learning and care are key building blocks to achieving a more equitable, just and productive America.**

The highlights from this past fiscal year (July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020), will demonstrate how our work and our long-standing goals for transformation have been accelerated by the crises that face our country. Start Early recommits to strengthening and deepening our role as an anti-racist organization that works in true partnership with communities to ensure the voices of families are represented, heard and valued. We are grateful for your ongoing support and hope you will continue to join us to advance better, more equitable early learning opportunities for our youngest children. We are champions for early learning, and together, we can transform lives.

All the best,

Diana Mendley Rauner, Ph.D.
President

Curt R. Bailey
Chairman

OUR MISSION

Start Early advances quality early learning for families with children, before birth through their earliest years, to close the opportunity gap.

OUR VISION

Every child has equitable opportunity to reach their full potential to thrive in school and in life.

Our Impact

By the Numbers

4,000



Facilitated peer learning and fostered innovations at **25 schools**, reaching **4,000 young children**

25,000

Provided **25,000 home visits** to over **2,100 families** from under-resourced communities

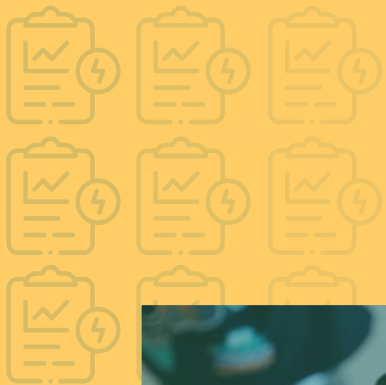
2.3M

Provided intensive policy consultation in seven states to build stronger, more equitable early childhood systems benefitting **2.3 million children**



180,000

Reached more than **180,000 children** and over **12,000 professionals** through our program, policy and research innovations across the country



2,300

Connected over **2,300 early childhood system leaders** with the knowledge they need to accelerate progress in 49 states and Washington, D.C.





Serving Children, Families & Educators

Strength & Innovation In and Out of the Classroom

Delivering quality early learning and care is critical to overcome many of the systematic racial and economic inequities that continue to exist and have been exposed by the ongoing pandemic, from access to health care and affordable housing to child care.

Start Early has always been committed to removing barriers to accessing quality learning experiences. We recognize the urgent need for change and continue to prioritize the most under-served families in the wake of crisis.

EARLY LEARNING & CARE PROGRAMS


Today, we continue to deliver home visiting and doula services for families living in the communities that are the most under-resourced in Chicago.

Through our **Healthy Parents & Babies** program, we support and coach pregnant women, young parents and children from birth through age 3. In response to the pandemic's onset in the city, the program quickly pivoted to remote services to ensure that families received such vital supports during a critical time. Healthy

Parents & Babies staff completed more than 3,000 virtual home and doula visits last fiscal year.

In addition to providing our own home visiting, doula, Early Head Start and Head Start programs, we lead the **Home Visiting & Doula Network**, formerly known as Illinois Birth to Three Institute, and the **Early Head Start & Head Start Network**, formerly known as Grantee Support Services.

Both Networks support and partner with community-based agencies and home visiting programs throughout Illinois



Last year, our home visitors and doulas provided over 25,000 home visits. Of the 2,145 families who received home visiting and/or doula services, 68% of fathers are reporting to be regularly involved with their children. Of the 1,119 pregnant women who received home visiting and/or doula services, 87% of mothers initiated breastfeeding.

to deliver comprehensive supports—including early learning, nutrition and family and health services—that address the immediate needs of families, while also helping them plan for future success.

As more programs halted in-person services due to the ongoing pandemic, our Networks’ teachers, doulas and home visitors continued to offer weekly check-ins and various learning opportunities using virtual platforms.

EDUCARE LEARNING NETWORK

The 2019-2020 school year was full of unexpected challenges, but through it all, the Educare Learning Network demonstrated its strength as an effective network of 25 birth-to-age 5 schools.

Collectively, the Network’s communities rose to meet endless trials, providing critical support, resources and connection for 4,000 children and their families, school staff, each other and the broader early childhood field through this unprecedented time.



The Network also established the **Educare Governance Council** to create

clarity around its mission, help advance its work as a generative, peer-led Network and have a greater impact on the field. Undeniably, the Council has brought an energy and commitment to drive this work forward and has helped us remain focused, despite the pressing concerns of an ongoing pandemic.

Team-Driven, Targeted & Transformed Learning

A well-trained and well-supported workforce is essential to delivering equitable quality early learning and care for our youngest learners. From foundational courses to intensive fellowships, our professional development portfolio supports educators in building powerful practices that transform teaching and learning for all children.

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, we rapidly shifted in-person programs to virtual delivery for trainings in Illinois, Washington, D.C., Washington state, Oregon, California, Texas and Louisiana.

To ensure we continue to provide quality instruction and support with a virtual approach, lessons learned from this transition will be utilized to refine and enhance virtual offerings into the future.



Last year, we launched professional development programs in 38 states.

COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund

For families across our entire network of programming, including Healthy Parents & Babies and Educare Chicago, we quickly collaborated with key partners to ensure children and parents had access to immediate resources and direct relief. Through our COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund, we **provided over \$270,000 in financial and non-financial supports to 210 families**. In addition, we offered drive-by opportunities to distribute items, such as grocery gift cards, diapers, baby wipes and formula and school supplies to families.

“I am thankful for everyone and all the work that [Start Early has] done knowing how hard it can be for everyone who works there, since you all have families, children and other various things going on in your personal lives.”

— Dion Warr, Educare Chicago Parent

Professional Development Portfolio

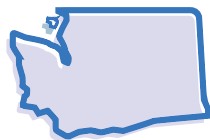
The Essential 0-5 Survey, formerly Early Education Essentials, serves as a catalyst to help teams make targeted, incremental changes to improve program outcomes. Last year, we engaged **4,000 professionals** and **9,000 parents** through this measurement system.

The Essential Fellowship, formerly Lead Learn Excel, introduces routine cycles of collaboration that strengthen early childhood teams and drive positive child outcomes. Last year, this intensive, individualized program for leaders provided **22 trainings** to **284 participants**.

The Essential Practices of Educare, formerly Educare Best Practices Training, shares best practices from the four areas most critical to the success of Educare Learning Network programs. Last year, this series of trainings provided 40 trainings to **283 participants**, impacting **6,000 young children**.

The Essentials of Home Visiting, formerly Achieve OnDemand, addressed needs and gaps unique to the field of home visiting through accessible courses and webinars. Last year, the program delivered **9,000 trainings** to over **3,000 individuals**.

Expanded Presence in Washington State



After decades of advocating for children and families, beginning in Illinois, we officially opened an office in Washington state, working with public and private partners to promote comprehensive birth-to-age 5 learning experiences for all children in the state.

Effective early 2020, the Thrive Washington Home Visiting hub was transitioned to **Start Early Washington**, where we have since supported 60 home visiting programs and served 2,800 families.

Last fiscal year, our Washington state team facilitated over **630 technical assistance sessions** and impacted **2,414 families** in over **40 programs** by leading statewide continuous quality improvement efforts on family engagement and caregiver depression. In response to the COVID-19 health crisis, the team supported home visiting programs as they quickly pivoted to virtual visits, including technical assistance and reflective practice supports.



National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement

Our nearly 40 years of expertise positioned us to be awarded the **National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement** (NCPFCE) by the Administration for Children and Families’ Office of Head Start. The NCPFCE is one of four National Centers that develop evidence-based best practices for Early Head Start and Head Start programs across the country, as part of a comprehensive Office of Head Start Training and Technical Assistance System.

These Centers will integrate the research-practice knowledge of family and community engagement, human services, early childhood, social work, mental health, parenting, leadership and family economic mobility into NCPFCE content and activities.

We will focus on creating high-quality responsive training and technical assistance, rooted in equity and cultural and linguistic responsiveness, to support staff, families and communities nationwide. Start Early’s role is effective as of November 2020.

Driving Research-Based Policy Change

Policies for Effective, Equitable & Interconnected Systems

Our advisory and advocacy efforts focus on promoting and enhancing the policies and systems that support increasing access and quality of early learning and care programs. Last year, our state-focused teams in **Illinois** and **Washington state** continued to work diligently to ensure that funding, legislation and federal and state initiatives prioritized early childhood programs. We also provided **advocacy and technical assistance support to an additional 21 states.**

In **Illinois**, our team successfully advocated for sizable budget increases for core state funding streams, including a proposed funding increase for home visiting services and a \$7 million increase for Early Intervention services. In addition, as a thought partner to the City of Chicago, we provided guidance on a number

of key **early childhood infrastructure investment options**, including the city's Early Childhood Construction Grant.

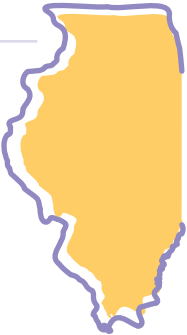
Nationwide, we closely monitored the evolving global pandemic at federal, state and local levels and continuously developed and advocated for **policy recommendations** that supported families and early learning programs affected by the health crisis. Our findings were used to develop four sets of guidance on how states can distribute funds from the original federal stimulus package across the sector in a way that maximizes impact and allows the state to emerge from this crisis stronger than before. We also played a key role in **developing guidance for continuing home visiting services and re-opening child care programs.**



Focus on Infants & Toddlers

Last year, Start Early authored and published a robust policy brief on the federal **Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships** (EHS-CCP) grant program, where we reported on lessons learned from implementation of EHS-CCP grants across states. Our research found that states with EHS-CCP grants successfully raised the bar for what quality infant and toddler child care could and should be. We have since engaged hundreds of individuals across public, private and philanthropic communities to learn about and support this initiative.

We also convened and led a coalition of more than 100 stakeholders to create Illinois' **Prenatal to Three (PN3) Agenda**, a statewide plan for increasing services and supports to infants and toddlers by 50,000 children by 2023 and 100,000 children by 2025. The coalition is co-led by Start Early and the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development. In addition, our team provided technical assistance to Arkansas and Wisconsin in building and launching similar agendas.



Advocacy at the Federal Level

Throughout the year, Start Early and the Educare Learning Network signed onto nearly **30 advocacy letters** of external partner organizations (of which, 19 were COVID-19-related) and submitted **seven sets of original public comments** to the federal government.

Through extensive policy, government relations and communications expertise, our partner **First Five Years Fund (FFYF)** works with federal policymakers to garner support for investments and policies that



increase access to high-quality early learning and care. FFYF's advocacy in Washington,

D.C. last fiscal year contributed to significant achievements for the field, including sustained or increased funding for all federal early childhood programs. The budget also included a more than \$1 billion increase in additional funding for early child care and education programs and \$550 million increase for the Child Care Development Block Grant program.



Connecting & Partnering with Communities

Meeting Students' Changing Needs Through Collaboration

During this unprecedented year, we boldly reimagined our early learning programs and systems. We remained dedicated to collaborating with communities to best respond to the changing needs of children, families and practitioners.

Through the **Partnership for Pre-K Improvement** initiative, we continued to deliver consultation to state systems leaders in Oregon, Tennessee and Washington state, which included rapid response support to help states adapt to the programmatic and financial implications of the COVID-19 crisis.

Our services also contributed to key policy and implementation wins in each state, including a major expansion of high-quality pre-K in Oregon. The initiative's unique approach fosters partnerships across program, advocacy and research organizations in support of a common vision for pre-K systems improvement.



Commitment to Exchange, Collaborate & Build

Since our founding as a public-private partnership, we have believed we have greater impact when we come together—across sectors, disciplines and communities. Thus, we gathered more than 40 local, state and national partners to establish a shared vision for the design of an online community that would function as a space for meaningful connections with peers and experts and offer the ability to capture, curate and share knowledge in real time.



When the pandemic emerged last spring, we recognized that the need for real-time connection and collaboration across the field was even more urgent. We launched the **Early Childhood Connector** (ECConnector) platform months ahead of schedule to help early childhood partners navigate the implications of the global health crisis.

The ECConnector quickly brought together early childhood partners in a meaningful and open online community to connect with each other, share ideas and best practices and elevate work happening at local, state and national levels in response to the health crisis and

re-exposed inequities. Within months of the platform's launch, the ECConnector had more than 1,000 users.

“The ECConnector has given me a space for self-care: a place to share my thoughts, process my opinions and connect with peers across the nation. Through this community, we can elevate voices that need to be heard – now, more than ever. As a united community, we are a strong force.”

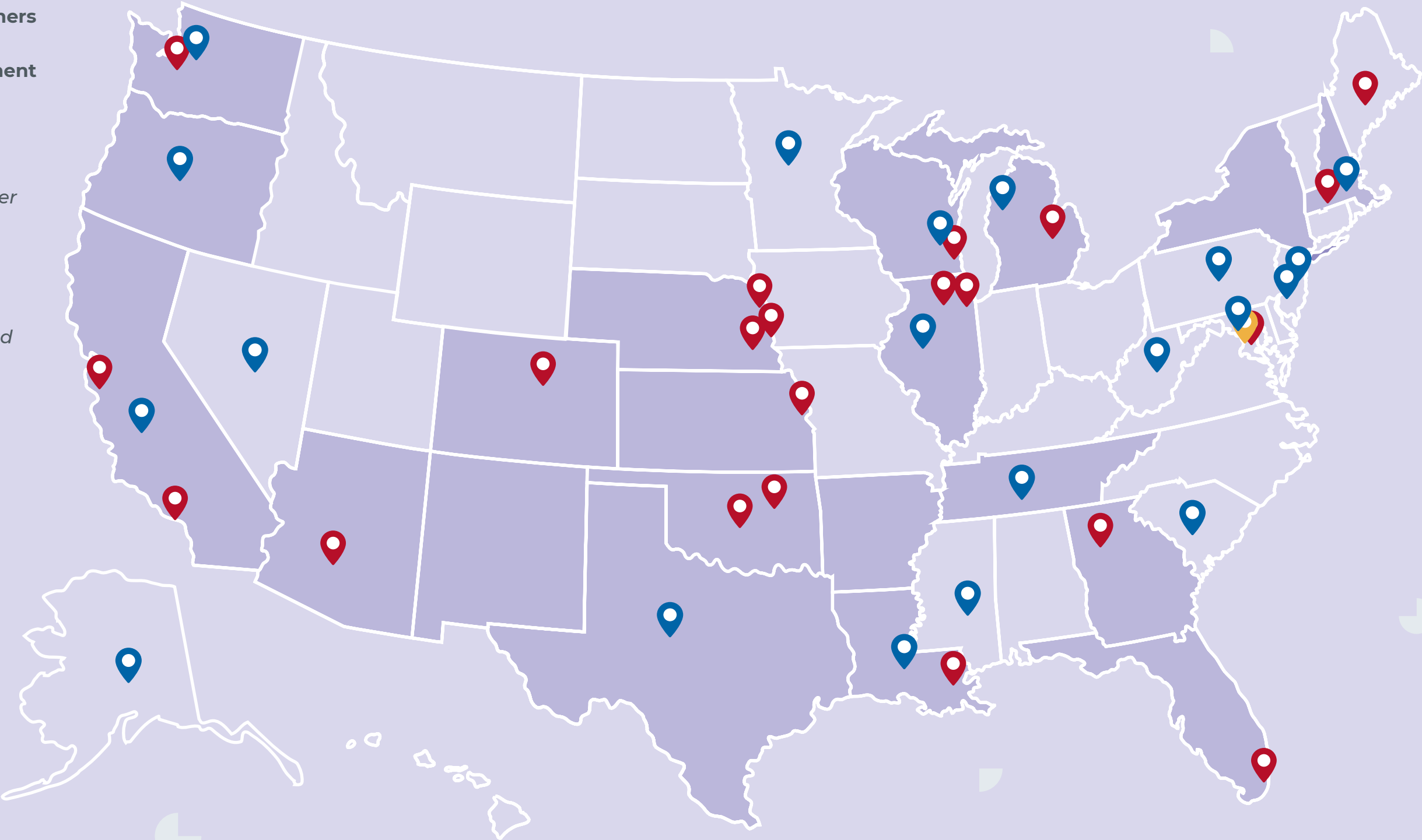
— Kresta Horn, Director of Child Development at Wirtzie's Preschool and Child Care, Arizona

As we continue to build on the initial success of the ECConnector, we are excited about the potential it has to accelerate knowledge sharing and spread promising practices across early childhood networks to improve outcomes for families.



Where We Work National

-  **Policy & Program Partners**
-  **Professional Development**
-  **Educare Schools**
-  **First Five Years Fund**
We work with our partner organization First Five Years Fund to advocate for increased federal investments in early childhood programs and child care.



The data on this map reflects our program, policy and professional development implementations from July 1, 2019 - June 30, 2020.



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Helen & Sam Zell, Zell Family Foundation +

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Hobson/Lucas Family Foundation	ITW +	Foundation, +
Howard Ellsworth Jessen	Malott Family Foundation	Denise & Dave Bunning
The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation	Northern Trust +	Ken & Kathy Tallering +
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