

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY LOCAL PLANNING COUNCIL FOR CHILD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PLAN

I. INTRODUCTION

Contra Costa County examined its Early Childhood Education Programs five years ago to determine their strengths and weaknesses and make recommendations for change and improvement. In 1998, the Local Planning Council for Child Care and Development (LPC) commissioned and conducted a needs assessment to further update the community's knowledge of the County's early childhood education programs and the needs of its families. This plan highlights those findings and presents a plan for the implementation of the LPC's vision and recommendations.

II. VISION

The LPC believes that the early childhood education programs that are needed in Contra Costa County must be based on the following principles:

A. Principles Related to Family Friendly, Quality Programs

1. Early childhood education programs must meet the needs of two generations: the parent's situational needs and the child's needs for a developmental program.
2. Early childhood education programs must be available and affordable to all children, regardless of income, special needs, or cultural or ethnic background.
3. These programs must prepare children to enter school ready to learn.
4. These programs must provide high quality child care and education in safe, healthy and age-appropriate physical environments.
5. These programs must be geographically accessible.
6. Parents must be provided with access to information to make informed decisions about child care.
7. There must be consumer protection for all types of child care, such as: licensing and Trustline, which screens child care givers' fingerprints to determine possible criminal backgrounds.
8. These programs must meet the individual needs of children and parents and be culturally and linguistically responsive.

B. Principles Related to the Design of the Early Childhood Education Programs' Delivery System

1. Families must have a voice in planning services and in the delivery of services at all levels.
2. A diverse array of programs to meet the needs of all types of Contra Costa County families and their children must be provided on a full-time or part-time basis and be affordable to all.
3. Basic civil rights and non-discrimination protection must exist throughout the system.
4. Prevention and early intervention services must be included.
5. Family access must be stream-lined and user-friendly for all families.

C. Principles Related to Funding

1. Public funding must be available to support quality programs for all eligible families.
2. The overall level of funding must be adequate to support a strong infrastructure and support system for families and early childhood education and development programs.
3. Businesses must collaborate to: (1) supplement the cost of early childhood education programs for their employees; (2) improve the quality of early childhood education in the community; and, (3) to build capacity.

D. Principles Related to Staffing

1. Programs must employ staff who understand and respect the children and their families.
2. Staff must receive adequate and attractive salaries, health care benefits, and retirement benefits.
3. Staff needs lawful and decent working conditions.
4. Staff must be well-trained in childhood development(infant, preschool and school age) and pursue ongoing professional development, and receive effective supervision, evaluation and mentoring.

E. Principles Related to Integration of Services

1. Programs must be integrated and coordinated with other service systems to provide families the access to comprehensive services that they need. This should include, but is not limited to, health, nutrition, and social services and family support programs.
2. Early childhood education programs must deliver services to children and families such as parent education, capitalizing on the close interaction of a twice-a-day opportunity to communicate.
3. Contra Costa businesses need to be partners in supporting early childhood education programs and should be offered tax incentives to encourage their support of employees' family needs.
4. Transportation to and from early childhood education facilities and work must be available, affordable, flexible, and reliable enough to meet the needs of working families.

III. CURRENT STATUS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMS

A. Need

The number of children with parents in the work force who may need child care totals 110,850.

Following is a table taken from the 1999 California Child Care Portfolio:

Children with working parents	5 years and under	Ages 6-13	<i>Total</i>
Total number of children who may need child care in Contra Costa County	44,705	66,145	110,850

Since the 1990 census, there has been tremendous growth in Contra Costa County, especially in East County where the child population has almost tripled.

B. Supply (Contra Costa Child Care Council – 1/21/99)

The total number of licensed child care spaces in all kinds of programs is 37,680.

Number of child care centers in the county:

West County	Central County	East County	<u>Total</u>
86	201	60	347

Available child care center spaces by child care groups:

Type	West County	Central County	East County	<u>Total</u>
Infant	204	625	174	1,003
Pre-school	3,350	7,582	2,767	13,699
School Age	1,220	5,052	1,073	7,345
<u>Total</u>	4,774	13,259	4,014	22,047

Number of family child care homes:

Type	West County	Central County	East County	<u>Total</u>
Small <i>(serving up to eight children)</i>	164	459	444	1,067
Large <i>(serving up to fourteen children)</i>	145	165	92	402
<u>Total</u>	309	624	536	1,469

Available child care spaces in family child care homes:

West County	Central County	East County	<u>Total</u>
3,342	5,982	4,840	14,164

Child care available during non-traditional hours:

- In child care centers - 1%
- In family child care homes - 21%

A county-wide analysis of early childhood education needs by age indicates that there were roughly two infants and tow school-age children in need of licensed child care for every one space that is available for these age groups. At the same time, these are more spaces available for preschool age children than children of that age who need child care.

This over-supply of preschool spaces is in sharp contrast to the tremendous unmet need for infant/toddler and school-age child care. The desperate shortage of licensable space for all types of early childhood education programs is hampered by bureaucratic issues, such as: local planning ordinances, the costs of acquisition and renovation, and licensing regulations.

C. Affordability/Cost

Average Monthly Cost according to the 1999 Regional Market Rate:

➤ **Licensed Child Care Centers**

Full time under 2 years **\$748.67**

Full time 2 – 5 years **\$552.78**

Full time 6+ years **\$437.11**

➤ **Licensed Family Child Care Homes**

Full time under 2 years **\$548.77**

Full time 2-5 years **\$500.56**

Full time 6+ years **\$419.51**

The following table from the LPC’s Needs Assessment Study, shows the number of Contra Costa children eligible for subsidy and receiving subsidy.

Eligible for Subsidy		Receiving Subsidy
Infants/Toddlers	9,981	553
Preschool	5,688	4,767
School-age	28,846	636
<i>Total</i>	44,515	5,956

With the advent of Welfare Reform, these figures have increased, but fewer than 25% of children eligible for subsidized child care have been able to receive it.

IV. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMS QUALITY

Quality early childhood education is important for all children. This includes children from all income levels, children at risk of neglect or abuse, children with special needs, children from non-traditional families, and children from all cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The maintenance and movement towards high quality early childhood education programs is of the utmost importance to the children and families who are served.

Components of high quality early childhood education programs are to provide:

1. A safe, healthy and age appropriate environment.
2. Programs that are culturally and linguistically responsive to the families it serves.
3. All parents want warm, nurturing and high quality educational care for their children. In order for this to occur, they must be involved in their child’s program and be recognized as the key person in their own child’s development.
4. Staff and child care givers who are well-trained and well-compensated, not only in pay and benefits, but also in positive working conditions.

Related to these positive working conditions is the leadership knowledge, skills and behaviors exhibited among directors of early childhood education programs. **Pipa (1997)** identified three findings that were apparent in the directors of high quality early childhood education programs. These directors' exhibit their knowledge, skills and behaviors by (1) being visible in the classroom; (2) providing information, resources and feedback to their teachers about issues that improve the children's instructional program; and, (3) garnering family support and seeking resources for their centers.¹

A University of North Carolina study, "**The Abecedarian Project**" recently identified the long-term benefits of quality early childhood education programs. This study tracked fifty-seven (57) infants from low-income families who received full-time, high quality education in a child care setting from infancy through age five. These infants were compared throughout their lives with infants who did not attend the program. The infants who received the high quality child care, grew up to consistently score higher on achievement test, delayed child-bearing for about two years, and at age twenty-one, were more likely to be enrolled in college and working at a skilled job.

This Abecedarian study identified a number of policy implications that apply to early childhood education programs in Contra Costa County. These include:

- (1) The importance of high quality early childhood education is now clear. The Abecedarian study provides scientific evidence that early childhood education significantly improves the scholastic success and educational attainments of poor children.
- (2) Quality child care requires sufficient well-trained staff to ensure that every child receives the kind of appropriate, individualized attention provided by the Abecedarian study.
- (3) More and more of America's children will need out of home child care. This is especially true for poor children. We must not lose this opportunity to provide them the quality, early learning experiences that will increase their chances for later success.
- (4) Welfare Reform means that more children living in poverty and whose parents are working, will need early childhood education programs. The education stimulus value of these early child care giving years must not be wasted.²

¹Ronald Pipa, Ed.D., Dissertation, The Leadership Knowledge, Skills, and Behaviors of Directors of Quality, State Funded Child Care Centers in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1997, Executive Summary

²University of North Carolina, Abecedarian Project Age 21 Follow-up, from the World Wide Web, www.fpg.unc.edu/~abc/

V. MAJOR AREAS OF CONCERN

In its analysis of the early childhood education delivery system in Contra Costa County, the Local Planning Council has identified five major areas of concern:

1. Staffing Crisis

- a. Probably the greatest single threat to the provision of quality early childhood education in Contra Costa County today is the inability of early childhood education programs to find and retain qualified staff.
- b. The basic cause of the staffing crisis is the inadequate compensation in both wages and benefits.
- c. In this era of low unemployment, early childhood education programs find themselves unable to compete with other industries, including the public school systems. When class size reduction was implemented a couple years ago, many early childhood education programs lost qualified staff to the public elementary schools where teachers receive higher salaries and benefits not found in most early childhood education programs. Low salaries have made the field of early childhood so unattractive to potential teachers that there has also been a concurrent drop in community college early childhood education classes.

2. Shortage of Licensed Care of Infants/Toddlers and School-Age Children

The shortage of licensed Infant/Toddler and School-Age child care is caused by many factors, including; the high staffing cost associated with infant/toddler child care; lack of qualified staff; lack of available facilities or the resources to adapt or improve existing buildings; barriers posed by local planning, zoning, and business requirements; lack of appropriate training and ongoing support for child care givers who choose to serve these populations.

3. Lack of Subsidy Funding for Low Income Working Families

In recent years, there has been tremendous growth in the child care subsidy programs. However, virtually all the expansion has been targeted to support Welfare Reform efforts. There have been little or no new child care resources available to serve those low-income families who have struggled to stay off welfare. County-wide, thousands of eligible families are on waiting lists, hoping for assistance to help them pay for child care. The Child Care Council alone receives an average of 280 requests for financial assistance each month. Given the average cost of center based infant care in Contra Costa County, a single mother with one infant, earning minimum wage would pay over 70% of her gross income on early childhood education.

When assistance for early childhood education programs is not available to families who need it, they are often forced to give up their jobs or to place their children in unsafe child care.

As families move from welfare to work and eventually lose access to CalWORKs child care assistance, they will join the thousands of working poor families waiting for assistance, or they will be forced back on welfare.

4. **Quality of Child Care**

The new brain development research has underscored like never before the importance of the first few years of a child's life. We now know that it is during this critical period in a child's life that the stage is set for future learning, cognitive, social and emotional development. Early childhood education programs play a critical role in the development of the young children in their care. While high quality child care has a dramatically positive influence on a child's life, poor quality child care can have equally dramatic negative impact on a child. Concerns about the quality of early childhood education in Contra Costa County identified by the Local Planning Council include:

- a. A strong need for linguistically and culturally appropriate child care. Again, this is negatively affected by the larger staff recruitment problem, i.e.: qualified bilingual and culturally appropriate staff are in high demand by the elementary schools who pay better salaries and provide more generous benefits.
- b. Limited support, such as training, technical assistance, consultation, or safety protections are available to child care givers, exempt from licensure and the families who utilize this kind of child care. This is a particular concern in light of data from the Department of Employment and Human Services, which indicates that over 60% of the CalWORKs participants use exempt child care.
- c. Lack of training opportunities, especially training in serving infants, toddlers, school-age children, and children with special needs, particularly those with challenging behaviors and emotional needs. Cost and time constraints often hinder a child care giver's ability to participate in existing training opportunities. Other training issues which have been identified, are the lack of relevance of some formal training and lack of support from early childhood education program directors, when teachers try to implement new ways of providing child care.
- d. The need for ongoing technical assistance and support to complement and complete training efforts. One-time training activities do not have the same degree of success as those training efforts which are followed up with ongoing technical assistance and support.

5. **Lack of Integrated Services**

- a. Early childhood education programs offer a unique forum for prevention services, early identification and intervention, and parent education and support services. Parents develop a partnership with their child care giver and the importance of this partnership is illustrated in the results of a parent survey in Napa County, California, in 1994, reported by Kristie A Brandt, Director of Maternal Child Health, Napa County Health and Human Services Agency. One Thousand (1,000) parents were asked: “Other than friends and family, where do you get child development and parenting information?” The number one answer to this question by over 85% was their child care provider.
- b. Early childhood education programs need to be viewed, not just as a service for children, but as an opportunity to reach tens of thousands of parents daily. The realization of the pivotal role played by early childhood educators in the lives of both children and their families, suggests that the early childhood education setting can play a crucial part in delivering family support services. In addition, efforts should be made to link early childhood education providers with health and mental health services and community outreach programs promoting nutrition, child development, and parent education.

VI. RECOMMENDATION TO IMPROVE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SERVICES

1. Implement and initiative which provides financial incentives to early childhood education workers to support both professional development and retention in the field.
2. Develop and implement strategies to build the supply of quality infant/toddler and school-age child care in the following ways:
 - a. Equip the existing early childhood education community to serve these children through training, ongoing technical assistance and support, and facility and equipment loans and grants.
 - b. Recruit, train and provide ongoing technical assistance to new early childhood education providers to offer quality child care to these age groups.
 - c. Advocate for quality after-school programs to meet the needs of children and families and improve coordination of existing available resources.
3. Advocate the State and Federal Governments to make financial assistance to low-income families a priority to help them pay for quality early childhood education programs and allocate the necessary resources to serve all families who qualify and need assistance.

4. Improve the quality of early childhood education in Contra Costa County in the following ways.
 - a. Expand and enhance training opportunities to reflect the need for linguistically and culturally appropriate child care, the special skills required to serve infants, toddlers, and school-age children and children with special needs, as well as, children's health, mental health, nutrition and safety issues.
 - b. Insure that training opportunities are affordable, convenient for early childhood education workers and reflect the realities of early childhood education today.
 - c. Identify resources to enable early childhood education centers and homes to become accredited.
 - d. Expand the ongoing technical assistance and support available to early childhood education providers.
 - e. Insure that basic safety precautions are in place for all types of licensed and publicly subsidized exempt child care.
5. Position early childhood education programs as a viable delivery mechanism for early identification and intervention services, parent education and parent services through training and ongoing consultation to providers.
6. Build linkages between early childhood education programs and other family support services.