



# Early Childhood @EDC

Improving health, education, and economic opportunities for  
young children and the people who care for them

# Why Focus on Early Childhood?

Early childhood—from prenatal care to age eight—is the foundation for all that follows across a person’s life span. During this brief, critical window, all children need:

- safe and healthy environments that allow them to develop, learn, and reach their full potential;
- shelter, nutrition, and health care that strengthen their growing bodies and minds; and
- relationships with knowledgeable, caring adults who help them explore and actively engage in their own learning, social-emotional development, and growth.

A commitment to early childhood is a commitment to a healthy, vibrant world. By attending to programs, systems, and policies designed to meet children’s needs, and supporting the full range of caregivers who nourish and nurture young children—parents, teachers, home visitors, community leaders, and health care providers—we secure strong, productive, equitable futures for all.

## What Are Our Principles?

Five principles guide EDC’s early childhood work with partners across the globe.

**1. Start early with the end in mind.** Early childhood is a pivotal period to provide support and intervene early to promote children’s good physical and mental health, build their resilience, and establish and support safe, stable, and nurturing relationships and environments. It also is a time for fueling intellectual curiosity and growth. As early as infancy, young children begin to form and test hypotheses for how the world around them works, develop language facility, and explore social relationships. EDC has a long, strong history of building the early childhood workforce’s capacity to foster children’s early resilience and potential to learn, and help children and families establish positive health, behavior, and learning patterns on which they can build as they encounter opportunities and challenges.



**2. Gather and use evidence thoughtfully.** For decades, we have added to the evolving evidence base on effective early childhood interventions, and we have used that evidence in ways that respond to community needs, harness community assets, and strengthen systems so that children and families receive the services they need swiftly, efficiently, and cost-effectively. EDC’s research provides a strategic base for our work, as well as for the work of others; experimentation and evaluation are essential to the development of cost-effective, high-impact prevention and intervention programs and policies for children, families, and communities. We design and conduct rigorous studies and evaluations that contribute to deeper understandings of what works in early childhood, and collaborate with policymakers and practitioners to use our findings to improve services for children, families, and communities.





**3. Identify and address disparities to assure every child succeeds.** Every child has the potential to flourish, and yet far too many children and families live in stressful environments, including poverty, and lack the food, health care, and support they need to thrive. These disparities harm children’s immediate and long-term physical health, mental well-being, and ability to learn. Researchers have found that the effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences, such as poverty, violence, and neglect, can last for a lifetime. With our interventions and leadership of national and international systemic change efforts, EDC is on the front lines of protecting children and addressing opportunity gaps and environmental factors that cause lasting harm. Much of our early childhood research focuses on surfacing and sharing new strategies to level the playing field for children in high-need communities.



**4. Recognize that everyone benefits from investments in early childhood.** Early childhood prevention and intervention programs and practices are extremely cost-effective when considered longitudinally. Interventions that focus on child development also promote multigenerational learning, community well-being, social and civic development, and economic growth. Children’s needs intersect with the needs of parents, siblings, caregivers, and communities, and this provides windows to engage and strengthen each of these groups. To realize these benefits, investments in early childhood must focus on identifying and meeting the urgent and emergent needs of children and families, strengthening the workforce and communities, and identifying and sharing strategies to scale and spread effective programs.



**5. Understand that we all must step up and stand up for all children.** We are responsible for the well-being of all our children—not some, not a few, but all. That means that we have important roles to play in informing and influencing decisions that affect all families’ ability to access high-quality early childhood services and supports. To live this principle in our work, EDC collaborates with other leading organizations and forms partnerships with families, communities, and the full circle of early childhood care and concern to maximize the effectiveness of our collective efforts.



# What Does it Take to Improve the Quality of Services?

Only collaborative, concerted efforts can create and sustain quality environments, experiences, and relationships for young children. It is key to support, engage, and elicit commitments from those at all levels of complex, sometimes fragmented early childhood systems. Drawing from years of experience, EDC uses a multi-tier approach to improve quality:

- Working with practitioners and policymakers to translate research into practice, make better-informed choices about early childhood prevention and intervention strategies, and increase the chances of success
- Working with funders and investors to support cost-effective, high-quality policy implementation across the domains of health, development, and education—

tailoring solutions to meet clients where they are, and integrating technology when appropriate

- Working with teachers, home visitors, health and mental health care providers, and administrators to guide them in using evidence-based approaches, in working effectively and efficiently, and in learning, growing, and communicating as part of a professional community
- Working with families and communities to support them in their vital roles as children's caregivers and champions, to engage them as partners, to help them understand and access resources, and to ensure children succeed to their fullest potential

## How Does Our Work Make a Difference?

### START EARLY, ADDRESS DISPARITIES: PREVENTING HARM AND PROMOTING WELL-BEING

Around the world, EDC improves the quality of services for children and families who are on the margins due to poverty, language minority status, mobility, ethnic or political identity, health status, situations of crisis or conflict, or other reasons. In 2017, we are leading a portfolio of projects that move our principles into action, feature the use of strategic partnerships, and use a Whole Child approach to foster positive child, family, and community outcomes, school and life readiness, and optimal health, mental health, and safety.

### Center of Excellence for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

(<https://go.edc.org/IECMHC>) helps states and tribal nations ensure children's success by increasing access to Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC). This evidence-based approach improves child behavior and development by partnering mental health professionals with early childhood providers, home visitors, and families. To support and sustain IECMHC, EDC provides a toolbox of resources for policymakers, administrators, and providers, and is providing training and technical support to 12 state pilot sites and two tribal pilot sites. Our evaluation will produce findings on best practices in IECMHC and how IECMHC positively impacts key childhood markers for success.



### Children's Safety Network

(<https://go.edc.org/csn>) has supported state health departments in using data and effective strategies to create injury- and violence-free environments for over 25 years. Through CSN, EDC provides training, technical assistance, needs assessment, evaluation, policy development support, and online resources and webinars on child maltreatment prevention, traffic safety, and bullying prevention. We also lead a **Child Safety Collaborative Innovation and Improvement Network** that helps multiple states and jurisdictions establish, expand, and improve the implementation of evidence-based child safety interventions and make major reductions in fatal and serious injuries. Likewise, EDC is providing **Essentials for Childhood Training and Technical Assistance** to five funded states and up to 45 self supported states. The CDC guidance for Essentials for Childhood uses systems and policy change to promote safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments for children.

**EDC's Home Visiting Team** is strengthening services for children and families in high-poverty communities and making sure they have the resources they need to raise children who are physically, socially, and emotionally healthy and ready to learn. Our **Home Visiting Collaborative Innovation and Improvement Network (HV CoIIN)**, which helps home visitors to improve the mental and physical wellness of children and families, has exceeded its targets

to enhance services. For example, almost 100 percent of HV CoIIN home visitors are now trained in infant feeding and lactation—a key area of need in high-poverty communities. Our **Home Visiting Improvement Action Center Team** provides site visits, webinars, communities of practice, and resources to federally funded Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting grantees in 50 states, the District of Columbia, and five U.S. territories, benefiting approximately 145,500 parents and children in 825 counties.

### Enhancing Services and Linkages for Children Affected by HIV and AIDS

**(ELIKIA)** program (<https://go.edc.org/ELKIA>) engages EDC in a collaboration with U.S. Agency for International Development and other partners to improve the health, well-being, and economic security of more than 47,000 orphans and vulnerable children and 16,000 vulnerable households in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The program meets short-term needs and builds longer-term resilience of children and adolescents affected by AIDS, while strengthening social welfare systems to provide a coordinated continuum of care. Working with our partners—Catholic Relief Services, the Palladium Group, and CARITAS DR—we are building the capacity of early childhood systems and programs at the community level to address the challenges children are facing in this health-fragile and conflict-prone environment.



**National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness** (<https://go.edc.org/NatlCtr>) provides high-quality training and materials to advance the development of comprehensive, coordinated health and wellness services in early childhood settings. With American Academy of Pediatrics, EDC has created an online resource hub of evidence- and practice-based resources to help staff and families improve child health, mental health, school readiness, and safety. The reach of the National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness is significant: staff and leaders who work with over one million children in Head Start programs in 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. territories, and American Indian, Alaskan Native, and Migrant/ Seasonal communities. The Center also supports agencies charged with the well-being of 12 million children from low-income families served by child care programs subsidized by the Child Care Development Fund.

#### **GATHER AND USE EVIDENCE: ADVANCING KNOWLEDGE TO IMPROVE SERVICES**

Since 1981, EDC's **Center for Children and Technology** (<http://cct.edc.org>) has led research to deepen understanding of the roles that media and technologies can play in improving the quality and equity of early learning. We collaborate with many partners who are as committed to young children's healthy development as we are, including PBS, Sesame Workshop, WGBH, and WNET.

For example, since 2006, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and PBS, as part of the U.S. Department of Education's Ready to Learn initiative, have relied on our research and evaluation to develop media-rich literacy, math, and science learning resources for young children and their families, with the goal of improving school readiness among preschoolers in high-need communities. These resources also feature guidance and support for early childhood teachers.

**EDC's Early Childhood Partnership Research Team** (<https://go.edc.org/ECPartners>) has, over 15 years, produced reports, briefs, and articles that share insights into the impact of partnerships on the accessibility and quality of services for infants and children from low-income families. We have found that partnership predicts improved classroom quality, as well as some improvements in school readiness outcomes. We also have found that, although full collaboration among state-level child care, Head Start, and prekindergarten leaders has been shown to maximize resources and contribute to high-quality care, few states have achieved a "full collaboration" level of interaction. This research has been of great interest to policymakers and practitioners, who see the potential of partnerships to improve the accessibility of high-quality early childhood services and who seek strategies to support partnerships.

**EDC's Interactive Audio Instruction (IAI) Studies** (<https://go.edc.org/IAI-ECD>) are providing evidence of the impact of our IAI programs on young children. For 40 years, EDC has used IAI over radio, digital media, mobile phones, and tablets to deliver highly effective distance education, community support, and teacher training programs for underserved populations in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. IAI participants consistently outperform better-resourced, non-participating comparison groups, and the IAI medium contributes significantly to closing early childhood access and achievement gaps in marginalized communities. One longitudinal study in Zanzibar showed that young children from the most disadvantaged communities who participated in our programs maintained an academic advantage six years after the intervention. We apply findings from these studies to further refine our package of instructional programs and training for early childhood providers, and work with governments to customize the package to respond to cultural norms and meet their needs and priorities.

**Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast & Islands at EDC** (<https://go.edc.org/REL>) helps states and districts use data to address important education issues, improve student outcomes, and inform practice and policymaking nationwide. We are facilitating an Early Childhood Workforce Development Research Alliance that is gathering evidence to refine programs and policies to increase early childhood teachers' degree attainment, credentials, and compensation, and strengthen professional development. We also are leading a Universal PreK Research Partnership that is examining challenges, successes, and lessons learned from expanding access to preK programs to 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds. Institute of Education Sciences has disseminated four of our reports that provide new insights into patterns of classroom quality in early childhood programs, programs' use of data, and kindergarten entry assessments.

## **INVEST AND STAND UP: SUPPORTING THE WORKFORCE AND ALL CAREGIVERS**

### **Enhancing Home-School Connections**

is a key goal for EDC, and we work to achieve this goal by helping the workforce support families as children's first teachers. Through *Literacy and Academic Success for English Learners through Science* (<https://go.edc.org/LASERS>), we are providing 100 preK, kindergarten, and first grade teachers with professional development, and helping them engage 2,000 families—40 percent of whom are English learners—in fostering children's early literacy and science learning, setting the stage for later school success. In *Games for Young Mathematicians* (<http://ym.edc.org>), we are guiding Head Start teachers of 600 children in using games to weave math into daily learning and build children's persistence with challenging activities. We also are helping teachers support families in enhancing children's early math learning through games and stories, and are studying the benefits to school readiness skills.

### **Center for Early Learning Professionals**

(<http://center-elp.org/>) is a strong example of EDC's decades of work to support early childhood professionals. Since 2014, the Center has provided over 51,000 hours of intensive professional development to 2,100 early childhood staff from 802 center-based and family child care homes in Rhode Island. Working with practitioners from programs that serve children from birth to age five, we provide free resources and support in English and Spanish that help them develop new skills and better serve children and families. Courses cover topics such as early literacy and STEM learning; family engagement; health, mental health, wellness, and safety; and continuous quality improvement. The Center's courses are based on the credit-bearing Excellence in Teaching professional development program that EDC has used for 20 years to support early childhood teachers and supervisors.



**EDC's Rwanda Early Childhood Caregiver Professional Development and Certification Program** (<https://go.edc.org/Rwanda>) was the country's first program to provide a nationally recognized training or certification for early childhood caregivers. The initiative advanced two strategic missions: offering opportunities for youth employment (with an emphasis on girls), and developing a qualified and affordable workforce for early childhood centers. EDC blended the power of youth development with early childhood to train young women to promote the school readiness of young children. The evaluation showed that EDC's training helped caregivers develop a solid knowledge base about early childhood development and reaffirmed the importance of holistic, play-based methods.

As managing partner of **Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes** (<http://ceelo.org/>), EDC is helping leaders in all 50 State Education Agencies strengthen systems to close opportunity gaps and ensure all children can access high-quality early childhood programs. We are fostering leadership development, supporting strategic

planning, and building capacity to collaborate effectively at the state, local, and private-sector levels to support children's optimal development and learning from birth to age eight. Through CEELO, we develop and disseminate a wide range of research-based resources to guide decision-making, provide technical assistance, and convene leaders from all 50 states to sustain improvement-focused communities of practice.

**PromotePrevent** (<https://go.edc.org/PromPrev>), an online hub of EDC's innovative health-related resources, provides clear, easy-to-use guidance on evidence-based approaches to fostering social and emotional learning. The hub features a free toolkit for educators and community partners, Promoting Social and Emotional Learning in Early Childhood, and offers effective strategies to prevent and stop bullying in early childhood including using activities to help children develop social skills to prevent and stop bullying, taking advantage of teachable moments, and developing action plans for intervention.

## How Can We Help You Make a Difference?

Federal and state agencies, private philanthropies, non-governmental organizations, and ministries of education have turned to EDC as a partner in change. We invite you to reach out to us and explore how we can work together to make a difference for young children and their families. Our early childhood partners include:

A.L. Mailman Family Foundation  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
Corporation for Public Broadcasting  
Department for International  
Development  
Hartford Foundation for Public Giving  
Health Resources and Services  
Administration

Heising-Simons Foundation  
IBM  
MasterCard Foundation  
National Science Foundation  
Office of Child Care  
Office of Head Start  
PNC Bank  
PBS

Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
Services Administration  
United States Agency for International  
Development  
UNICEF  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
U.S. Department of Education  
World Bank



### Education Development Center, Inc.

EDC designs, implements, and evaluates programs to improve education, health, and economic opportunity worldwide. Collaborating with both public and private partners, we strive for a world where all people are empowered to live healthy, productive lives.