Policy Framework

Trust for Learning (the Trust) believes that we can collectively create a publicly-funded, seamless early learning system that supports the unique and unlimited potential of every child. In pursuit of this goal, we advocate with our partners for policy solutions that are rooted in equity and grounded in the science of child development. The Trust engages in policy efforts at multiple levels —local, state, and federal — to strengthen systems, improve program quality, and expand early childhood programs aligned with the principles of ideal learning environments. While many policies — from tax law to paid family leave — impact the lives of young children, this document outlines the Trust's priorities in three key areas of early care and education policy that guide our grantmaking and internal work.

Equitable Access

A guiding premise of our work is that every child has a right to high-quality early learning experiences—what we call ideal learning environments—regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, sexual orientation, family resources, and/or family income. To this end, we support policies that:

- **establish sustainable, universal funding** for quality early learning programs and services;
- **create a more seamless system** of early childhood education services for children and families from birth through age eight;
- **track and eliminate racial and economic disparities** (racial, economic, geographic, disability status, etc.) in access to high-quality early learning opportunities;
- **disrupt systemic inequities** that impose barriers for vulnerable populations;
- **encourage socioeconomic and racial integration** in early childhood settings;
- **promote full inclusion** of children with disabilities;
- **expand multilingual learning** opportunities for young children, especially emerging bilinguals; and
- **facilitate meaningful participation of all children** through individualized and appropriate support;

In 2017, Trust for Learning co-founded the nation's first ideal learning district in New Haven, CT which aims to provide a sustainable system of high-quality early learning for all 15,000 New Haven children from birth to age 8. This multi-year initiative is working to build community-wide, equitable infrastructure to serve all children and families.

Program Quality

High-quality early childhood programs are fundamental to lifelong learning and development. The Trust seeks to promote consistently high-quality learning experiences for all children that are aligned with the [principles of ideal learning](#) through policies that:

- **support implementation of comprehensive, whole-child learning approaches,** rather than piecemeal interventions;
- **establish multiple, meaningful, and reliable measures of quality** at the classroom, program, and system levels;
- **Identify and embed equity indicators that assess children's experiences** within local, state, and federal quality monitoring and accountability systems;
- **adopt assessments of child growth and development that reflect a holistic view** of learning;
- **promote regular developmental screenings and referral practices** to ensure that children are connected to early intervention and supportive services if needed;
- **eliminate harsh and exclusionary discipline practices** that disproportionately impact children of color and children with disabilities;
- **incorporate comprehensive family, health, and wraparound services** to improve accessibility and strengthen family engagement.
- **encourage culturally and linguistically responsive supports** for children and families; and
- **disaggregate and analyze child outcome data** by race, disability, gender, and home language to inform policy, program improvement, and ensure equity for all children.

In 2019, Trust for Learning partnered with the Council for Chief State School Officers to [support teams of state policymakers](#) deepen their knowledge of high-quality pre-kindergarten programs through site visits to exemplary ideal learning programs. These visits generated peer learning and discussion on a variety of policy topics including quality measurement, cultural responsiveness, and teacher preparation.

Supported Workforce

High-quality educators are paramount to create thriving, sustainable ideal learning environments. However, there is a nationwide shortage of well-trained, well-compensated educators, particularly in under-resourced communities. We seek to address this gap through policies that:

- **provide fair compensation** for infant, toddler, and preschool educators that is on par with K-12 educators;
- **support innovative teacher preparation models** (e.g. blended learning, apprenticeships, and teacher residency programs) that reduce barriers to entry and participation;
- **expand cost-effective, high-quality credentialing pathways** for early childhood teachers and leaders;
- **promote articulation** between education, training, and professional learning opportunities that educators experience.
- **align state licensure requirements** with ideal learning educator development training competencies;
- **support ongoing coaching and mentorship models** to strengthen responsive, nurturing, educator practice; and
- **ensure center, school, and district leaders are knowledgeable** about ideal learning and how it benefits children's growth and development.

For example, Trust for Learning's 2020 SEED fund supports innovative, cost-effective pathways for low-income educators and educators of color to pursue high-quality training, credentials, and degrees. These kinds of pilots can help to inform policies that reduce barriers to entry and promote articulation between educator development experiences.

We recognize that these policies are multi-faceted and do not operate in isolation from one another, and that policymaking is dynamic and constantly changing. To bring about transformative change, the Trust works across multiple levels, systems, and programs with a diverse range of partners. Our efforts include national expert convenings, networks of practice and advocacy, targeted state and local grants, innovative research projects, and our place-based initiative, the New Haven Children's Ideal Learning District. Together, we can make ideal learning environments real for every child. **To learn more about Trust for Learning's policy work, please contact Chrisanne Gayl at chrisanne@trustforlearning.org.**