

call to action:

Early Care and Education

Executive Summary



How We Selected Early Care and Education

In choosing an issue on which to work, **Montgomery Moving Forward (MMF)** considers matters that are critically important to Montgomery County that relate to economic well-being. In particular, we seek out issues – like Early Care and Education – that are ripe for systems change, affect a large number of people, and have a disproportional impact on families who are economically disadvantaged.

There are 67,000 children under age 5 in Montgomery County. Today's infants, toddlers, and preschoolers are tomorrow's workers, taxpayers, and parents. The potential long-term return for investing in high-quality Early Care and Education for our children is threefold: decreased costs to government; increased educational achievement (and therefore greater earning power); and increased opportunity in adulthood.

At the same time, this issue has a direct impact on today's employers and employees because working parents with young children need access to affordable, high-quality Early Care and Education in order to be productive employees.

The decision to embrace Early Care and Education (ECE) was the result of a six-month community engagement process that gathered input from more than 500 residents and leaders in Montgomery County. ECE emerged as a top concern for nearly everyone we consulted.

what we did:

Convening, Learning, and Listening

In late 2016 through 2017, MMF convened a variety of Early Care and Education events and conversations, large and small, reaching more than 1,700 participants from across sectors. These gatherings allowed MMF to engage in a sustained conversation with a broad range of community leaders and national experts. We gained a deeper, more nuanced understanding of Early Care and Education in Montgomery County – including challenges and needs specific to our community. What we learned helped shape this Call to Action.

Some Facts to Guide You

1 year of child care for a young child costs more than in-state tuition at a public university, and full-time child care for two children exceeds 20% of income for the majority of families in Montgomery County.

\$4 billion

Annual cost to U.S. businesses from absenteeism and lost productivity due to parents dealing with child care crises.

13%

PER YEAR
RETURN ON
INVESTMENT

High-quality zero-to-5 programs for disadvantaged children can deliver a 13% per year return on investment, according to recent research by Nobel Laureate economist James L. Heckman. These gains are realized through better outcomes in education, health, social behaviors, and employment.

51% of children entering public kindergarten in Montgomery County are NOT kindergarten ready. Achievement gaps start early, and students who enter school behind their peers are unlikely to catch up.

78% of new jobs of the future will require postsecondary education. Many jobs already go unfilled due to the mismatch between openings and ready workers, and this skills gap is growing.

Our Recommendations

Goals

We envision a coordinated, comprehensive Early Care and Education system that will support two important goals:

- 1** attracting and retaining a talented workforce of today by supporting families with young children; and
- 2** ensuring the skilled workforce of tomorrow by addressing the growing opportunity gap.

In support of these big goals, our community must work toward three key outcomes:

1

Every family with young children will have access to affordable, high-quality Early Care and Education.

2

Every child in the county will be ready for kindergarten and future school success.

3

Employers will be able to attract and retain skilled, productive workers today and into the future.



Action Steps

These Action Steps provide strategic direction for achieving the key outcomes.

1 Break Down Silos and Boldly Reform the Early Care and Education System

The current system in Montgomery County does not meet the needs of families and employers. To be effective, the system must be coordinated across all providers and entities that have a role in Early Care and Education. We need shared measurements and accountability. The goal is a more robust, more cohesive system that serves the needs of all children.

2 Improve Early Care and Education Access for ALL Families

Accessing Early Care and Education is a daunting challenge for many families. We must find ways to remove common barriers, including the high cost of care, lack of options for parents who work nights and weekends, and neighborhoods where there aren't enough providers to meet demand. In addition, we must support and expand programs for bilingual children and families, and for children with developmental delays and disabilities.

3 Educate and Engage Our Entire Community

We need to find creative ways to involve all people and places that touch the lives of parents and young children across the county. We need a public awareness campaign that promotes high-quality Early Care and Education as a community priority. In particular, we must identify critical messages that will resonate with business leaders, policymakers, and parents.

4 Facilitate Strategic Financing for Early Care and Education

Our community does not have enough funding for high-quality Early Care and Education, and this isn't a problem that can be solved with a single funding source. Government, business, and philanthropy all have roles to play, and a successful financing solution must include a coordinated set of public and private resources. To help find solutions, we should look at best practices and innovative financing used by other communities.

5 Strengthen the Early Care and Education Workforce and Infrastructure

One of the central challenges in creating an equitable, high-quality system of Early Care and Education is making child care affordable while also providing fair compensation, training, and viable career paths for the teacher-caregivers who nurture young minds. We also need to advocate for changes to address barriers that impact providers, including state regulations and requirements that drive skilled, qualified educators out of the field.

6 Support and Deepen Family Engagement

We must give parents resources, education, and strategies to help nurture the development of their young children. We need to reach parents where they work, learn, live, and play. It's also essential that we add and expand proven family support programs, with a focus on reaching low-income families and communities where most families do not access the formal care system.



The Role of Montgomery Moving Forward

As seen in many other communities that are working on improving their Early Care and Education systems, tackling this complicated issue requires sustained cross-sector cooperation around a shared vision. This makes the topic an especially good fit for our Collective Impact approach, which is a way of working that allows an entire community to work toward a shared vision. Going forward, MMF remains deeply committed to serving in a convening and facilitating role around improving Early Care and Education in Montgomery County.

For more information, visit:

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