

# 2021 ISSUE BRIEF

## **Early Care Matters. Quality Matters. Families Matter.**

90% of brain growth happens before kindergarten.<sup>i</sup> Research demonstrates that positive early childhood experiences – especially within high-quality early learning and child care programs– are linked to increased school readiness, as well as lifelong benefits such as higher earnings, improved health, lower participation in social service programs, and lower chances of involvement with the criminal justice system.<sup>ii</sup>

Early Matters is working together to make Chattanooga-Hamilton County the best place in the nation for a child to be born and raised by promoting equitable access to early childhood programs and services through equity-focused systems building and advocacy efforts.

## **ISSUE RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Issue: Trauma-Informed Community**

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and the impact of traumatic stress on a child include the lack of access to quality health and mental health services. Trauma-informed communities foster positive relationships among residents, police, fire, 311 staff, youth and family development, and family-serving agencies.<sup>iii</sup> Working together, our community has the potential to be a resource for resilience and healing.

#### **➤ Recommendations**

- Implement mandatory cultural competence and ACEs/resiliency training for child-facing employees from child care educators to public service employees and more.
- Contribute to equity-focused systems building by integrating diversity, inclusion, and equality into service provisions.
- Expand high-quality health, mental health, and nutrition services to prevent ACEs.
- Integrate trainings system-wide that provide information about the impact of family trauma on children.
- Support systems work that address trauma through prevention and intervention strategies.
- Increase funding for comprehensive mental health services for children who are uninsured to new or current providers who are at capacity.

## **CURRENT CHALLENGES:**

- A high ACEs score, and not just poverty alone, is now a strong predictor of poor life outcomes.<sup>xii</sup>
- 40% of children who receive sexual assault exams in Hamilton County are ages birth-5.<sup>xiii</sup>
- One-fifth of the 21,300 children under 5-years-old in our area live in poverty.<sup>ix</sup>
- Every \$1 we invest in high-quality early childhood programs yields a \$7.50 return on investment.<sup>xi</sup>
- The lost revenue to Chattanooga-Hamilton County businesses due to child care problems for parents of young children is \$15 million per year.
- Tennessee only invests \$0.16 of every dollar in all early childhood services and the rest is federally funded.
- Only 40% of Chattanooga-Hamilton County children entering Kindergarten test proficient on the district's kindergarten readiness screener.
- Despite the benefits, only 1 in 4 of Chattanooga-Hamilton County's youngest residents are currently enrolled in an early learning program.
- For 15,940 children in Chattanooga-Hamilton County, all available parents work full-time,<sup>x</sup> meaning they need reliable child care.

# 2021 ISSUE BRIEF

## **Issue: High Cost of Child Care**

Child care is not affordable and equitable for all residents. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), child care is considered affordable if it costs families no more than 7% of their income. Yet, the cost of care in Tennessee for a household with both an infant and pre-k child is 82% of the median income of a single parent.<sup>iv</sup>

While some experiencing poverty may qualify for subsidies like the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), these high costs make child care unaffordable for many of Chattanooga-Hamilton County's hard-working families.

Our community continues to work across sectors for the benefit of children, families, and child care. Recent examples include public-private partnerships such as the Quality Matters Fund, offering capital improvement grants to child care businesses, and Child Care WAGE\$, which provides salary supplements to early childhood educators who pursue postsecondary education. While these are instrumental in improving quality, they are not sufficient for reducing the cost of care.

### **➤ Recommendations**

- To lower tuition costs for families, provide subsidies to child care providers who offer bi-lingual services or are located in under-resourced neighborhoods.
- Implement business tax benefits for employee child care subsidies.
- Continue public-private partnership investments in early childhood systems. (e.g. Chattanooga Early Learning Scholarship Program)
- Work in collaboration with the child care industry on any expanded preK project, so as not to undermine an already fragile child care infrastructure.

## **Issue: Talent Pipeline**

High-quality education requires high-quality professionals that are compensated fairly for their training and expertise. The high cost of child care does not equate to well-paid child care educators. The average annual salary for a child care educator in Chattanooga-Hamilton County is just over \$21,000, without benefits.<sup>v</sup> The starting salary for the majority of public school teachers in Tennessee, who play equally critical roles in developing young minds, however, is close to double that with benefits. Incentivizing, recruiting, and retaining high-quality child care and early childhood education professionals is critical given the vitally important role they play in children's future success.

By investing in the talent pipeline, we provide stability to the early education profession, which is critical for families to remain in the workforce. As we secure and support high-quality educators, we increase opportunities for all children to be productive members of the future workforce, regardless of their circumstances.

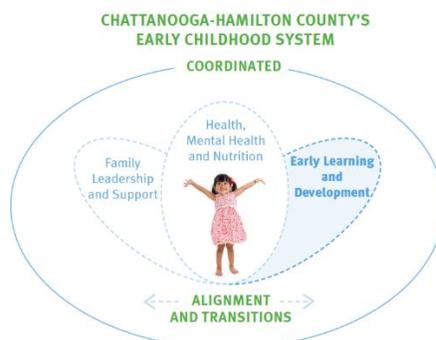
# 2021 ISSUE BRIEF

## ➤ Recommendations

- Maintain and expand the work of the Office of Early Learning, specifically its capacity-building training for directors and connections to resources for providers who serve under-resourced communities.
- Create an insurance pool for small child care employers to access.
- Bolster scholarship programs for early educators, prioritizing educators who may experience more significant barriers to higher education, such as teachers in rural communities or those that experience high rates of poverty.
- Support child care providers in recruiting teachers that are culturally representative.
- Implement an additional wage subsidy beyond Childcare WAGES\$ for those employees who further their education and work for the same program long term.

## Common Early Childhood Education Definitions

- **Adverse Childhood Experiences** – traumatic events occurring before age 18. ACEs include physical and emotional abuse and neglect as well as caregiver mental illness, substance use, divorce, incarceration, and domestic violence. Other associated conditions, such as living in under-resourced or racially segregated neighborhoods, frequently moving, and experiencing food insecurity also cause traumatic stress. ACEs are linked to chronic health problems, mental illness, and substance misuse in adulthood. ACEs can also negatively impact education and job opportunities. ACEs are costly – the economic and social costs to families, communities, and society totals hundreds of billions of dollars each year. However, ACEs can be prevented.<sup>vi</sup>
- **Early Childhood Education / Early Learning** – early care and education for children from birth to kindergarten entry.
- **Educational Equity** – Intentional supports, resources, and policies designed to meet the individual needs of each learner and eliminate disparities in outcomes, ultimately ensuring that all students have the opportunity to unlock their full potential.
- **Equity-Focused Systems Building** – In early childhood, systems-building is a way of increasing the efficiency of the complex environment of supports for young children and their families by streamlining the experience of service provision by individual programs.



# 2021 ISSUE BRIEF

- **Home Visitation** - a service provided within the home of families with their young children. (Parents, prenatal, and birth to 3 years of age). Home visitation provides support for parents to better understand their child's development skills through daily home activities.
- **Child Mental Health** – different from adult mental health and more multifaceted because of the unique developmental milestones that children experience, child mental health is Child mental health, the complete well-being and optimal development of a child in the emotional, behavioral, social, and cognitive domains.
- **Quality Child Care** – Early Matters considers “high-quality” child care programs to be those receiving 3/3 stars using the quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) scale.
- **Trauma-Informed Community** – all sectors—education, juvenile justice, faith, housing, health care and business—working together around the common goal of mitigating the effects of trauma, while preventing gaps in services for clients.<sup>vii</sup>
- **Universal PreK** – Universal pre-K refers to state government-funded preschool programs, free to those who attend it.<sup>viii</sup> Preschool is generally for children ages 4-5 years-old, or the year before a child enters kindergarten. Prior programs are referred to as early childhood education or early learning.
- **Voluntary PreK** – a Tennessee initiative providing an opportunity to develop school readiness skills in children, free to their families. This program is currently operated in 42 Hamilton County Schools classrooms and priority is given to four year olds who are at-risk.

## SOURCES

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<sup>i</sup> First Things First. (2019, September 16). Brain Development. <https://www.firstthingsfirst.org/early-childhood-matters/brain-development/>

<sup>ii</sup> Barnett, S., Belfield, C., et al (2005). The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age Forty. National Institute of Early Education Research. Retrieved from [https://nieer.org/wpcontent/uploads/2014/09/specialsummary\\_rev2011\\_02\\_2.pdf](https://nieer.org/wpcontent/uploads/2014/09/specialsummary_rev2011_02_2.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.qovloop.com/community/blog/6-principles-for-building-trauma-informed-communities/>

<sup>iv</sup> TN CCR&R. (2020, October). 2020 State Fact Sheet Tennessee (2020, October). ChildCareAware.org.

<sup>v</sup> Financing Quality Early Care and Education- An Analysis for the City of Chattanooga, TN. (2019, December). The Institute for Child Success (ICS).

<sup>vi</sup> CDC <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/fastfact.html>

<sup>vii</sup> [ACEs Connection](#).

<sup>viii</sup> Education Commission of the States. How States Fund Pre-K. February 2018.

<sup>ix</sup> US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year dataset, 2014-2018.

<sup>x</sup> Tennesseans for Quality Early Education. (2020, February). Want to Grow Tennessee's Economy? Fix the Child Care Crisis. [https://www.tqee.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/TQEE\\_Chattanooga\\_Final.pdf](https://www.tqee.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/TQEE_Chattanooga_Final.pdf).

<sup>xi</sup> Solomon, C. (2019, May 10). The Heckman Equation. <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/13-roitoolbox>

<sup>xii</sup> Science Direct <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0190740916303449>

<sup>xiii</sup> Client statistics from the Children's Advocacy Center of Hamilton County and does not include data from Erlanger or a PCPs.