



**Today we know:**

- There is a convergence of evidence from neuroscience, child development and economics on the importance of early childhood.
- A child's most important brain development occurs before age five.
- Early experiences affect the quality of the brain's architecture—establishing a sturdy or fragile foundation for all learning, health and behavior that follow.
- Children who begin school behind typically remain behind.
- Prevention efforts targeting early childhood are less costly and more effective than later remediation.

## Recommendations on Early Childhood Education Reform

## The Governor’s Plan to Empower Early Childhood Service Providers and Preschools



Reduce red tape, align conflicting standards, and streamline data to reduce the administrative burden for early childhood providers and better leverage dollars.



Create an accountability system for early childhood programs focused on outcomes and based on Kindergarten Readiness that gives parents clear actionable information in a letter grade on which to base their decisions about where to send their child.



Protect taxpayers by cutting off public funding to low performing early childhood programs, even pulling licensing from low-performing programs, and aligning incentive structure through the School Readiness Tax Credits to reward Kindergarten Readiness.

*We commend Governor Jindal for including early childhood education in the education reform package. The Governor is to be commended for recognizing the critical importance of high quality early childhood education and the high rate of return on investing in young children.*

### The Louisiana Partnership for Children and Families offers the following recommendations in support of the Governor’s early childhood education agenda.

#### 1



**Louisiana Partnership applauds the Governor in moving forward to create a comprehensive early childhood system in Louisiana, and recommends that the best way to implement the Governor’s entire Early Childhood Plan is through the BrightStart Advisory Council playing a pivotal role in the development of early childhood education services.**

The BrightStart Advisory Council should serve as the body of stakeholders in developing, assessing and retaining high quality early childhood education services in Louisiana.

- By designation of Governor Jindal, BrightStart is Louisiana’s Early Childhood Advisory Council.
- BrightStart is comprised of representatives from Louisiana stakeholders involved in early childhood education, including the state departments of Education, Children and Family Services, and Health and Hospitals. It also includes representatives from Higher Education, Head Start/Early Head Start, the child care provider community and parents.

#### 2



**Louisiana Partnership recommends that the best way to implement the Governor’s Early Childhood Plan is through Workforce Knowledge and Competencies being adopted and incorporated into Quality Start as well as the education and training of professionals who work with children ages 0-5.**

- Workforce Knowledge and Competencies should be adopted and incorporated into Quality Start and the education and training of professionals who work with children ages 0-5. In order to achieve strong outcomes for children based on Kindergarten Readiness, it is critical to have a competent and effective workforce of well-prepared early childhood teachers.
- Workforce Knowledge and Competencies means a set of expectations that describes what early childhood educators should know and be able to do. These should be incorporated into Quality Start and form the foundation for the education and training of professionals who work with children ages 0-5.

## 3

**Louisiana Partnership recommends that the best way to implement the Governor's Early Childhood Plan is through Quality Start being made mandatory for all early childhood programs receiving public funds, including child care centers, family child care homes, and Pre-K programs.**

Quality Start is an existing accountability system in Louisiana, but it is currently voluntary and only utilized by a few early childhood programs. Quality Start provides the best means to align conflicting program standards, streamline data and better leverage dollars, as well as to create an accountability system based on outcomes that gives parents clear actionable information.

Quality Start is Louisiana's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS) through which the state uses a set of progressively higher program standards to evaluate the quality of an early childhood program and to support program improvement. The TQRIS consists of four components:

- Tiered Program Standards with multiple rating categories that clearly and meaningfully differentiate program quality levels;
- Monitoring to evaluate program quality based on the Program Standards;
- Supports to help programs meet progressively higher standards (e.g., through training, technical assistance, financial support); and
- Program quality ratings that are publicly available and include a process for validating the system.

Quality Start was launched in October, 2007, making Louisiana the 15th state in the nation with a TQRIS. However, it currently applies only to child care centers and Head Start/Early Head Start programs and is completely voluntary. By expanding its reach and making it mandatory over time for providers who receive public funds, Quality Start can provide a uniform set of standards for all publicly funded programs and a mechanism through which data can be collected, programs can be monitored and improved, and dollars can be leveraged

## 4

**Louisiana Partnership recommends that the best way to implement the Governor's Early Childhood Plan is through Early Learning and Development Standards being adopted for all early childhood programs and incorporated into Quality Start to insure high quality and consistent standards across all programs.**

Early Learning and Development Standards means a set of expectations, guidelines, or developmental milestones that:

- Describe what all children from birth to kindergarten entry should know and be able to do, as well as their disposition toward learning;
- Are appropriate for each age group (e.g., infants, toddlers, and preschoolers), for English learners, and for children with disabilities or developmental delays;
- Cover all essential domains of School Readiness; and
- Are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate.

## 5

**Louisiana Partnership raises the following issues about the plan to use letter grades for early childhood programs and recommends that BrightStart study the best way to assist parents in making decisions about where to send their child.**

- The processes to measure the progress of young children (birth - 5) are very different than the methods used for school age children.
- Participation and attendance in early childhood programs are not mandatory.
- Because Louisiana has Class A and Class B child care licensure, letter grades could be confusing.
- There is no licensure for early childhood programs that provide care for 6 or fewer children.

## 6

**Louisiana Partnership recommends that the best way to define Kindergarten Readiness under the Governor's Early Childhood Plan is through including all the essential domains of school readiness.**

- Kindergarten Readiness should be defined to include all the essential domains of school readiness including language and literacy development, cognition and general knowledge (including early mathematics and early scientific development), approaches toward learning, physical well-being and motor development (including adaptive skills), and social and emotional development.

(over)

## 7

**Louisiana Partnership recommends that the best way to implement the Governor’s Early Childhood Plan – and to ensure more high performing early childhood programs are available to parents – is through current and additional incentives and support.**

Current and additional incentives and supports should be implemented to ensure that early childhood programs can meet the defined standards, improve their program quality, and provide better outcomes for the children they serve. These should include:

- Technical Assistance and financial supports for early childhood programs participating in Quality Start to improve program quality and children’s outcomes.
- Professional Development to improve the effectiveness of early childhood educators.
- Continued Mental Health Consultation for programs participating in Quality Start to support the healthy development of young children and the education and training of early childhood educators in the knowledge and application of developmentally appropriate practices in classroom settings.
- Continued School Readiness Tax Credits aligned with Quality Start that reward existing quality as well as assist early childhood programs in continuing to improve program quality and children’s outcomes.
- Infrastructure to build efficient early childhood programs through a shared services approach, as a strategy that focuses on lowering costs, improving financial stability and increasing quality.

## 8

**Louisiana Partnership applauds the Governor in his efforts to protect parents and children from low-performing early childhood programs and recommends a process be created to provide motivated, low-performing programs the opportunity to reach the required standards.**

Louisiana should create and implement a process with specific time frames, incentives and supports through which motivated, low-performing programs can attain the required standards.

- Louisiana should ensure that parents have access to high quality early childhood programs, especially for children ages 0 to 3.
- There are over 40,000 publicly funded Pre-K slots in Louisiana for the 62,000 four-year-olds in the state. By contrast, there are fewer than 20,000 publicly funded slots for the 188,000 infants and toddlers in Louisiana (children up to age 3). This is true even though 61% of Louisiana mothers with infants are in the labor force, and 49% of families with infants and toddlers are low income.

## 9

**Louisiana Partnership recommends that any rebate created for individual or corporate donations made to nonprofits that provide tuition assistance to students include early childhood programs.**



*Louisiana Partnership for Children and Families is a not-for-profit advocacy organization. The Partnership unites voices to improve the well-being of children and their families through public policy advocacy, communications and the promotion of evidence-based programs. The Partnership works to educate the public and the state’s policymakers about the importance of early childhood, and why BrightStart, the state’s initiative to build a comprehensive system for children, is so critical.*