EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ORLEANS PARISH EARLY CARE + EDUCATION WORKFORCE TASK FORCE PLAYBOOK

INTRODUCTION

With the passage of the early childhood education millage in April 2022, New Orleans joined the ranks of fewer than 50 municipalities in the country to dedicate voter-approved funding to early care and education and is now one of the only cities to use local investment to focus specifically on infants and toddlers, the age group least served by existing publicly-funded early childhood programs. The millage is expected to generate up to $21M annually which will fund at least 1,000 seats for young children enrolled in the New Orleans Early Education Network (NOEEN) City Seats program. With matching funds from the Louisiana Early Childhood Education Fund, Orleans Parish could see a dollar-for-dollar match, an additional $21M investment, which would expand access to care for up to 2,000 children under age five by the fall of 2023.

We are at the beginning of an incredible period of growth for the early care and education sector in New Orleans. Yet, despite the increase in demand, attention, and municipal funding for early childhood, attrition rates for early childhood educators in Louisiana are at a crisis level, and Orleans Parish early educators earn, on average, less than $25,000 annually. We have both an exodus of educators and a lack of incentives for new educators to join the profession at a time when we are poised to significantly increase the number of children we are able to serve, and this inevitably has a significant impact on the early care and education ecosystem as we look toward expanding the number of seats available to children and families.

As the Orleans Parish Ready Start Network, Agenda for Children convened the Orleans Parish Early Care & Education Workforce Task Force on behalf of the New Orleans Early Education Network (NOEEN) to bring together community leaders and organizations currently working to improve early care and education and the local workforce to identify and prioritize strategies to address this immediate workforce shortage as quickly as possible.

In order to prepare the Orleans Parish early childhood workforce to meet the demand for an increase of at least 600 and up to 1,600 new early childhood seats – which could necessitate between 500-800 new educators – the Task Force has outlined short-term strategies to meet the most pressing needs of the sector by or before Summer 2023 as well as long-term strategies to implement additional systemic changes or supports that will benefit the long-term health and sustainability of the sector. The strategies fall into three main areas of focus:

Over 30 community partners comprised the Task Force, which convened eight times in Fall 2022 and Spring 2023. This executive summary of the official Playbook is a summary of the Task Force's recommended strategies and includes associated definitions and recommendations for strengthening the early care and education workforce in Orleans Parish. For more information, read the entire Playbook here.

AGENDA FOR CHILDREN

NOEEN NEW ORLEANS EARLY EDUCATION NETWORK

TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

PREPARATION + PATHWAYS

1. Clearly define the various roles in the early care and education sector and the paths between them by creating an Early Educator Pathways Tool.
2. Better leverage existing funding streams to expand educator preparation opportunities for high school students.
3. Better leverage existing funding streams and identify new funding streams to expand educator preparation opportunities for those not currently working in the sector.
4. Remove barriers to continuing education and professional development.
5. Increase mentorship opportunities for early childhood educators currently in the sector.
6. Remove barriers to credit matriculation in higher education by developing stackable credentials.
7. Introduce an accessible Bachelor's degree program focused on working teachers into the local ecosystem.

RETENTION + RECRUITMENT

1. Develop retention and recruitment strategies specific to various communities of interest.
2. Distribute $3M+ of earmarked funding to current educators through retention bonuses and pilots.
3. Improve the public perception of the early care and education sector through a media campaign.
4. Create a "one-stop shop" for interested applicants to apply for early educator positions.
5. Advocate for policies that provide sustainable and increased funding to increase educator salaries and benefits.
6. Increase infrastructure for leadership and middle management support and supervision.
7. Create infrastructure for paid fellowships, internships, and apprenticeships, inclusive of two-generation strategies.
8. Embed internships or observations in early care and education programs into child- or pediatric-focused professional training programs, such as medical or dental schools.

COMPENSATION (PAY + BENEFITS)

1. Distribute $3M+ of earmarked funding to current educators through retention bonuses and pilots.
2. Map the local benefits landscape and prioritize a hierarchy of benefits for local educators.
3. Fully leverage School Readiness Tax Credits among early childhood educators and directors as a mechanism to increase salaries.
4. Identify sustainable infrastructure for offering shared services for most in-demand benefits.
5. Advocate for local policies that provide sustainable and increased funding to increase educator salaries and benefits.
6. Advocate for state and federal policies that provide sustainable and increased funding to increase educator salaries and benefits.
7. Increase awareness and education on the value of benefits to the sector.

To maintain accountability and to move forward the work outlined in this document, the Task Force recommends that NOEEN create a new working group, to be known as the Workforce Task Force, to monitor progress on outlined work and to share out at NOEEN Steering Committee meetings at least through the end of Spring 2024.

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