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# Hartford Blueprint for Young Children

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**Delivering  
the Promise  
of Success**

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**Mayor Eddie A. Perez's Blueprint Team**

Supported with grants from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, the Early Childhood Partners Project of the Connecticut Department of Public Health, with additional in-kind contributions from the Mayor's Office, City of Hartford, the Hartford Public Schools, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, and the Connecticut Commission on Children.

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# The Project

On June 9, 2004, Hartford Mayor Eddie Perez asked the Hartford Public Schools, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, and the Connecticut Commission on Children to chart a new course for the city to strengthen early childhood policy and services. In launching the effort, he gave this charge:



“In order to develop a citywide system that promotes the healthy growth and development of all Hartford's young children and their families, I ask that you consider, in collaboration with my office, drafting an early childhood blueprint for the City of Hartford that would address the basic building blocks – taking into account and building on those already in place – that would constitute a *Passport to Success*.”

## Blueprint Team

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### **Funding**

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# Background

For Hartford's children, birth to eight, to have the best start in life and an opportunity to succeed, particularly in school, there is an economic and social imperative that we strengthen and deepen the city's focus and action during a child's early years. A wealth of research clearly demonstrates the importance of early brain development, the effectiveness of best practices in child rearing, and the cost-effectiveness of school readiness. All this presents a compelling rationale to concentrate on children's early years. To perform better in school and in life we cannot wait until children enter kindergarten to promote their health, safety, and learning.

Historically, Hartford has been committed to providing quality services for its young children. Some 50 years ago, the Hartford Public Schools boasted "lower kindergarten," a formal pre-kindergarten program to help young children get a head start on elementary school. During this same period, Hartford opened one of Connecticut's few municipally run early care centers, high quality services that continue today at nine locations under the aegis of the city's Department of Health & Human Services.



The nurturing of young children begins at birth. It happens within families. It happens in formal, high quality early care and education settings. It happens in how we deliver community-based services. Hartford is a city where significant numbers of its youngest children, birth to eight years old, are being prepared for success in school.

- Nearly two-thirds of Hartford children who are enrolled in early care and education centers attend high quality *accredited*\* programs. This is nearly three times above the state average.<sup>i</sup> Hartford is among the top three American cities of its size in the number of early childhood programs accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.<sup>ii</sup>
- In Hartford, children moving up to kindergarten from 14 early care and education programs affiliated with the Brighter Futures Childcare Enhancement Project showed significant gains on every measure of school readiness compared to national standards, and also scored above the national average.<sup>iii</sup>
- In Hartford, the screening rate to identify lead poisoning in young children is one of the highest in Connecticut, 73.8%.<sup>iv</sup>
- In the late 1990s, Hartford demonstrated it could provide better health care to young children by increasing the number of children who received annual well-child visits by 30% over an 18-month period.<sup>v</sup>
- In the past three years, the Hartford Public Schools has more than doubled its preschool enrollment.
- In 2003, families with young children who received parent education and support at seven Brighter Futures Family Centers improved their parenting practices and increased their social supports.<sup>vi</sup>

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\* Accreditation is a measure of quality pre-kindergarten education. NAEYC, along with the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), are recognized organizations that accredit programs.

## Background (continued)

Still, positive outcomes for many young children and their families in Hartford remain a challenge.

- Over a third of Hartford families with children live in poverty. For families with children under five years old, 40% live in poverty.<sup>vii</sup>
- Nearly half the city's children continue to arrive at kindergarten having had little or no organized pre-school experience.<sup>viii</sup>
- Among Hartford families with children, single women head an extraordinarily high number of these families; several thousand children live in families where a grandparent is the sole responsible caregiver.<sup>ix</sup>
- Despite recent progress in student performance, academic success – measured by state achievement tests – remains a serious concern. Only 17% of the city's 4<sup>th</sup> graders achieve reading mastery on state tests.<sup>x</sup>
- Access to prenatal care, and infant health outcomes in Hartford are among the worst in Connecticut.<sup>xi</sup>
- In the last four years, state services reductions have eliminated \$10 million in subsidies in Hartford to low income families, funds that once supported early care and education services in centers and in the home.<sup>xii</sup>

### Findings

The Blueprint Team and consultants examined the city's early childhood landscape, and found:

**A Non-System.** Hartford's public/private "system" of early childhood policies and services, in fact, is a complicated and uncoordinated collection of programs. There is insufficient focus and information upon which to help track children, and to measure overall progress.

**Little Cohesion, Leadership.** No cohesive system exists, led by public officials, to guide early childhood policymaking, and make financial investments. Day-to-day, no entity is accountable for overall activities affecting young children.

**Fragmented Spending And Programs.** Over \$106 million is spent annually on early childhood programs and services for Hartford children, birth

to eight. Municipal government and the schools have direct control over an estimated \$37 million. Funding comes from 44 sources, and goes through 532 discrete budget line items or contracts; 98 public and private agencies serve Hartford children, operating 305 distinct programs.

**Outcomes Needing Improvement.** Most outcomes for young children and their families -- especially in health care, school performance, and literacy – severely lag state and national benchmarks.

**Quality Services, Under-funded.** Many quality services exist, and often use "best practices". Most are under-financed. More early care and education spaces are needed; health services are poorly uncoordinated; and family support needs far outstrip Hartford's ability to deliver.

### A Demographically Changing City:

- The population decline of the 1990s has reversed; small growth is projected.
- Hartford is a young city, the median age much younger than the state's average.
- Poverty remains *the* dominant problem for most families with young children.
- Family structures in many cases are not strong enough to support young children.

City institutions – schools, municipal government, community organizations, business – can do more. To make the entire city a vibrant community, positive early childhood experiences must happen for *every* young child in Hartford. Hartford's future depends on healthy and successful young children. To achieve this, we must work together to nurture young children and strengthen each family's capacity to take the lead in child rearing.

Today, this promise may be beyond reach for too many Hartford children, but with increased public will, with political leadership, and with a long-term commitment, the community can make a difference.

Hartford can make good on its promise to young children...one child at a time, repeated 18,600 times.

# A Passport to Success for Hartford's Young Children

## ***Vision for Hartford:***

A city that nurtures every child and creates an environment where young children are healthy, safe, and find early success in school and life.

This “Passport to Success” is a **Blueprint** over five years to unite diverse programs and services in the City of Hartford and meld them into a cohesive coordinated, family-centered system that focuses public policymaking and financial investment to improve the lives of young children, ages birth to eight. It will bring direction and a comprehensive approach to early childhood policy in Hartford. The **Blueprint** identifies the following action steps:

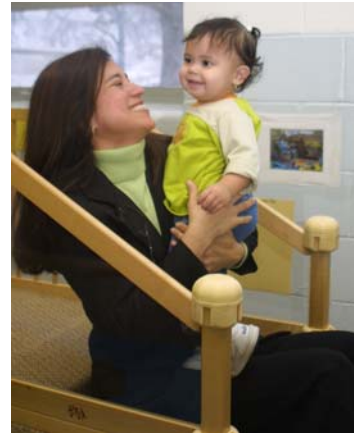
- 1. Articulate six building blocks** to form a comprehensive framework to advocate and deliver services to young children and their families. The building blocks work together, forming a continuum of critical components to early success of young children and their families.
- 2. Create a Mayor’s Cabinet and an Office For Young Children** in the Office of the Mayor (in cooperation with the school system). The Cabinet will advise the Mayor in setting policy on all matters affecting young children, and the Office will coordinate and implement early childhood policy and the **Blueprint** to form a cohesive strategy with a single goal.
- 3. Consolidate a variety of existing city government and school services for young children**, and provide high-level capacity to coordinate ongoing efforts of over 305 different public and private programs.
- 4. Establish targets for 26 short and long-term strategic actions** over five years to implement the building blocks. The **Blueprint** assigns responsibility for each building block, and recommends building an information system to enable the city to set goals for childhood outcomes, and to measure the results.
- 5. Build and strengthen practices that engage parents, families and other adults.** This means inviting parents to help govern programs, build parental capacity to participate, and build their skills to make their own families stronger.

# Passport to Success (continued)

## Goals:

The *Blueprint* establishes the following long-term goals:

- Expand and maintain universal screening of *all* Hartford newborns and their families, accompanied by support by home visiting to a child's fifth birthday.
- Provide *every* Hartford family with young children access on a neighborhood level to quality family support, including family literacy, training in child development, and parent education.
- Provide universal, voluntary access to full-time, quality childcare and early education for *every* Hartford infant, toddler, and pre-school youngster.
- Assure each child experiences a smooth transition from pre-school to elementary school, building an effective, formal connection among parents, pre-school provider, and the child's kindergarten teacher.
- Assure educational excellence, high performance, and a positive school environment for all Hartford children in early grades (K-3), with prime focus to achieve proficiency in reading and mathematics.
- Assure that every Hartford family with young children has health care -- universal and timely access to care, and that families are able to use comprehensive well-child and allied health care services.





# Core of the Blueprint: Six Building Blocks

At the core of the *Blueprint* are the six building blocks, constituting a comprehensive continuum that addresses early childhood needs of children birth to eight years old, and those of their families. The complete plan outlines 26 strategic actions to implement the building blocks, and a five-year timetable.

## ***1. Newborn Screening & Home Visiting For Families***

Screen and assess newborns and their families, and provide home visits, as appropriate, to promote a positive bond of caregiver and child, especially for families at risk. Improving knowledge and skills in child development for families from the beginning gives them tools to increase participation in the child's physical, educational, and emotional growth. Home visits and support from paraprofessionals using "best practice" models produce measurable benefits in parental attitudes towards children, improve parent-child interaction, significantly reduce child abuse and neglect, and increase readiness for school.

## ***2. Neighborhood-Based Family Supports and Development***

Parents and the family are a child's first and foremost teachers. Children need effective and nurturing families capable of offering comfort, joy, physical and emotional support. While individual circumstances differ, all parents benefit from support, information, and skill building in child rearing. The essence of family support is to nurture and avoid costly crisis responses, which often are ineffective.

## ***3. Childcare And Early Childhood Education***

Quality early childhood experiences are fundamental to the social, emotional, cognitive and physical development of every child. Affordable, dependable, quality early childhood care and education are an integral part of family life in the 21st century. Structured childcare and early education opportunities provide children with experiences that set the stage for later school success.

## ***4. Transition From Pre-school To Kindergarten***

Effective transition from pre-school to kindergarten is a critical pathway in a young child's development. Effective kindergarten transition means sharing pre-school experience information at the right time, in a uniform way, with the family and the child's kindergarten teacher. It emphasizes continuous communication among the family, the school, and early childhood providers during this important time in a child's educational life.

## ***5. Educational Excellence and School Success In Early Grades***

Early competence in reading and mathematics creates the strongest foundation for a student's long-term academic achievement. Mastering reading at an early age is the greatest predictor of success in subsequent school years. Along with focus on early reading success, schools must create and sustain positive and safe environments, with a culture that enables better teaching and makes schools a secure place in which children can learn.

## ***6. Universal Access And Use Of Primary Health Care***

Access and regular and effective use of comprehensive health services promotes the healthy growth and development of young children. Promoting well-child care for infants through regular visits to a health care provider, and early identification of health concerns helps insure a child's health and early success in school. Important components are: insurance coverage to guarantee access; providing comprehensive well-child care, not simply treating disease; and making the family an active partner with the health care provider.

# The Building Blocks (continued)

## 1: Newborn And Home Visiting For Families

- Expand and sustain a permanent system at Hartford Hospital and Saint Francis Hospital and Medical Center to screen and refer all families with newborns, as appropriate, for home visiting support.
- Expand neighborhood-based home visiting services for all families with newborns, maintaining relationships with each child and family through child's fifth birthday. Use the Nurturing Families model supported by the Children's Trust Fund.
- Provide public financing through Medicaid S-CHIP and other initiatives to fully fund Hartford's Nurturing Families Network to pay for coordinated screening and home visiting services for all pregnant and post-partum mothers and families.

## 2: Neighborhood-Based Family Support And Development

- Maintain, for every family in Hartford with a young child, nearby, culturally-appropriate places to obtain comprehensive education and training in positive practices that promote the healthy development of young children.
- Combine Hartford's two major independent family support systems (Brighter Futures Initiative Family Centers and Family Resource Centers) into a single *Family Support Network*, using common outcomes, consistent service philosophies, core services, and unified structure to maximize organizational efficiency.
- Institute a neighborhood-based parent education and training program available to every family in Hartford, with companion focus on family literacy.
- Provide long-term financial support for Hartford Family Support Network through public/private partnerships. Seek full and adequate state funding for Family Resource Centers, with public-private funding for the Brighter Futures Family Centers by a partnership of state, city, and private sources.

## 3: Childcare And Early Childhood Education

- Provide every pre-school child in Hartford, ages three and four years old, the opportunity to enroll in a quality, full-time early childhood education program.
- Expand availability of *licensed* infant and toddler childcare for Hartford residents in programs that meet national quality standards.
- Assure every center-based early care and education program in Hartford meets the quality standards as defined by nationally recognized accrediting organizations.
- Strengthen and unify efforts to assure adequate training, improved qualifications and adequate compensation for Hartford's childcare and early education program staffs, including creating a training "institute" to coordinate early care training activities.
- Improve quality of family childcare services, both formal and informal providers of care.
- Ensure sufficient state school readiness and other public financing to enable Hartford to reach early care and education enrollment targets.



# The Building Blocks (continued)

## 4: Transition From Pre-school To Kindergarten

- Institute a uniform, citywide pre-K/Kindergarten transition system to assess pre-school experiences, and provide timely information to families and kindergarten teachers to respond to each child's needs as the child enters kindergarten.
- Establish and maintain comprehensive community and parent-centered engagement strategy that involves them in planning, implementation of pre-K/Kindergarten transition programs.
- Develop agreement among center-based early childhood education providers and Hartford Public Schools to use common set of measures to assess each preschool child's status as the child nears kindergarten.
- Investigate the feasibility of a citywide individualized "pre-enrollment exchange" program for every entering kindergartner, enabling home visits for personal exchanges between family and kindergarten teacher prior to start of school.

## 5: Educational Excellence And School Success In The Early Grades

- Implement fully state laws requiring systematic, focused programs in elementary grades to improve reading and literacy of youngsters, Kindergarten through third grade.
- Improve comprehensive elementary school teacher staff development program to increase proficiency in reading and math instruction.
- Create and implement classroom organizational models in Kindergarten through third grades that assure environments that promote social, behavioral development of young children.
- Articulate and advance comprehensive community schools, embracing models that provide maximum array of services for young children.

## 6: Universal Access And Use Of Primary Health Care

- Create a comprehensive system that reaches every family with a young child (outreach), organizes care at the places where families obtain health services (care coordination), and helps families to manage the care (case management), thus providing children a "Medical Home."
- Consolidate and unify into a single delivery network, hospital and community-based primary care providers, creating a multi-site, single primary care model in Hartford.
- Advocate changes in the HUSKY Program to remove barriers that deny children uninterrupted access to health services.
- Assure key preventive and behavioral health services are in place to address issues affecting children, including early prenatal care services to every pregnant woman in Hartford.
- Create a comprehensive system to link school-based clinics with hospital and community-based primary care centers in Hartford.

# A Structure To Lead

The *Blueprint* Team recommends the Mayor's Office, in cooperation with the superintendent of schools, establish a cohesive management structure at the highest level of city government to unify and consolidate all policymaking, planning, coordination, and implementation on early childhood issues. Establish:

## **A Mayor's Cabinet For Young Children An Office For Young Children within the Mayor's Office**

**Cabinet.** The mayor should, in consultation with the superintendent of schools, create a Cabinet composed of nine individuals. The Cabinet would advise the mayor in setting policy on all matters affecting young children. The Cabinet would have both elected and appointed public sector leaders, and include non-governmental appointees representing important stakeholders. Cabinet responsibilities are:

- Recommend and oversee city policy on early childhood;
- Establish short- and long-term goals and targets;
- Advance the "Passport To Success" *Blueprint*; and
- Assume the functions of the state-mandated School Readiness Council.

Cabinet members include:

Mayor (chairperson)  
Superintendent of Schools  
Chief Operating Officer, City of Hartford  
An early care and education professional  
A representative of the agency that runs Head Start  
Representative of a children's health care delivery organization  
At-large representative of the philanthropic community  
At-large parent representative  
At-large member of the Hartford business community

**Office For Young Children.** Part of the Mayor's Office, the Office For Young Children would perform day-to-day planning and coordination, serving as the interdisciplinary lead agency to coordinate and implement early childhood policy and the *Blueprint*. It would have a director and staff necessary to carry out its mission. Responsibilities are:

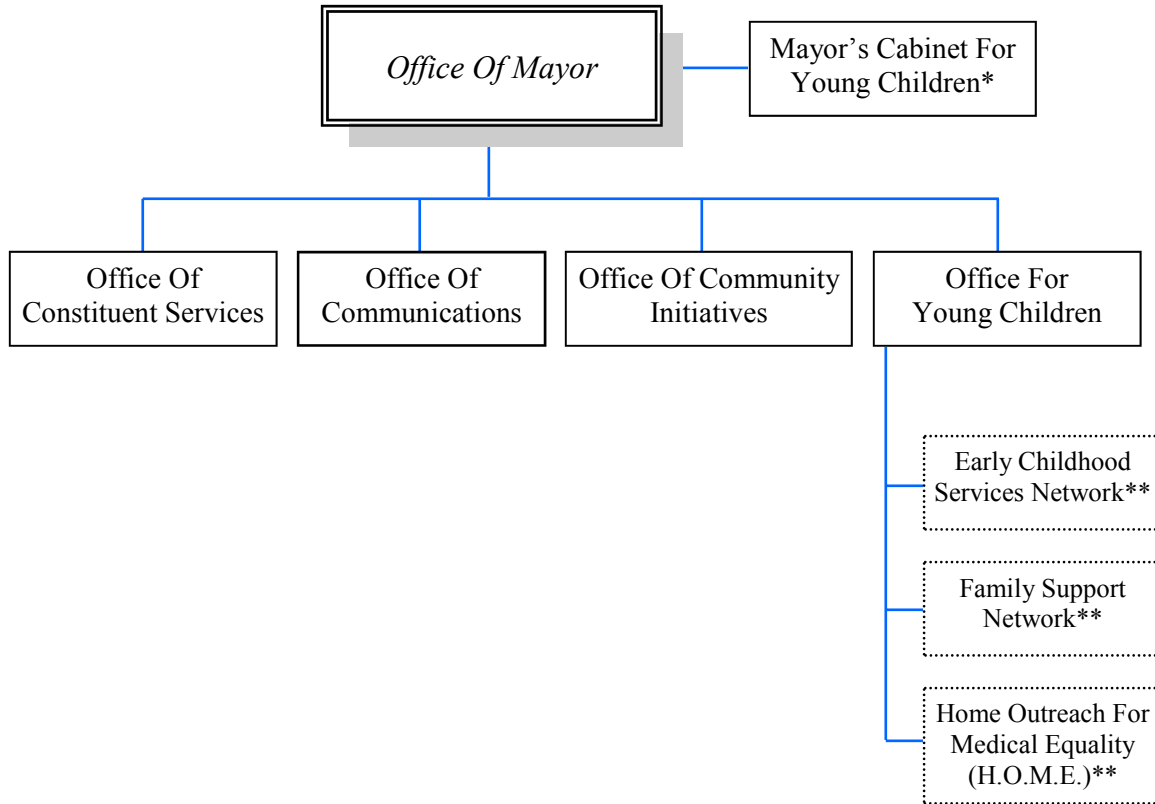
- Implement early childhood policy and the *Blueprint*, coordinating early care and education planning;
- Develop annually (with Office of Management and Budget) a "Children's Budget";
- Issue a bi-annual "report card" on the status of early childhood;
- Lead and/or participate on boards and commissions related to early childhood; and
- Seek additional revenues.



# A Structure To Lead (continued)

## City Of Hartford

### Organizational Structure: Cabinet & Office For Young Children



\* School Readiness Council responsibilities, mandated under C.G.S. §§ 0-16(r), to be assumed by Cabinet.

\*\* The two networks and H.O.M.E. are to be established to provide support to the Office that integrates early care and education services, family and preventive health services. H.O.M.E. is a concept for a pilot program to create a “medical home” for Hartford’s families with young children, providing outreach, case coordination, case management to assure families with young children are connected to the medical system, and to caregiver.

# Information Systems And Performance Monitoring

The city must articulate targets and outcomes for the city's young children and their families. To accomplish this, the Mayor and Cabinet need an adequate information system.

First, the Office For Young Children should explore collaborating with the Hartford Connects System, an existing relational database operated by Capital Workforce Partners, Inc. The system collects and tracks data on youth (14-21), and is de-centralized and web-based. Collaboration with Hartford Connects would:

- 1) provide baseline statistical information about Hartford's young children and families to identify and track key indicators;
- 2) provide statistical means to measure progress; and
- 3) provide early childhood programs with access to information about specific young children.

Second, the Cabinet and others involved in early childhood services must set outcomes. It was not the task of the Blueprint Team to unilaterally prescribe targets others ultimately would have to meet. The *Blueprint* describes key indicators drawn from the work of Connecticut's Early Childhood DataCONNECTIONS Project. The team proposes that many of its indicators be used as a template. Two dozen indicators are identified.

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## END NOTES

<sup>i</sup> Duran, F., Wilson, S., "Keeping Children on the Path to School Success: How is Connecticut Doing?" Connecticut Health and Development Institute, CT Department of Social Services. 2004

<sup>ii</sup> Flis, Debra, unpublished memo to Hartford Foundation for Public Giving analyzing 2000 census and 2004 accreditation report of NAEYC. 2004

<sup>iii</sup> Philliber Research Associates, "Preparing Hartford's Children for School," Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. 2004

<sup>iv</sup> Duran, F., Wilson, S., "Keeping Children on the Path to School Success: How is Connecticut Doing?" Connecticut Health and Development Institute, CT Department of Social Services. 2004

<sup>v</sup> Hall, C.H., Lee, M.A. and Solomon J. (1999), "The Children's Health Council: A Community Foundation/State Government Partnership," *Health Affairs*, 8, 4, 167-171.

<sup>vi</sup> Philliber Research Associates, "Preparing Hartford's Children for School," Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. 2004

<sup>vii</sup> Poverty status, Hartford, Connecticut, American FactFinder, US Census Bureau. 2000, Summary File 3.

<sup>viii</sup> Duran, F., Wilson, S., "Keeping Children on the Path to School Success: How is Connecticut Doing?" Connecticut Health and Development Institute, CT Department of Social Services. 2004. Pg. 59

<sup>ix</sup> Households and Families: 2000, Hartford, Connecticut, American FactFinder, US Census Bureau. 2000. Summary File 1

<sup>x</sup> Strategic School Profiles, Hartford, Connecticut, "Student Performance," Connecticut Department of Education, 2002-2003. Page 3.

<sup>xi</sup> Duran, F., Wilson, S., "Keeping Children on the Path to School Success: How is Connecticut Doing?" Connecticut Health and Development Institute, Connecticut Department of Social Services. 2004

<sup>xii</sup> Farnam, J., "Financing of Children's Services in Hartford," Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. 2004