Investing in a high-quality infant/toddler workforce supports, builds the foundation for lifelong learning, and strengthens families, communities, and the nation.

Every baby, regardless of race, family income, or opportunity, has the right to high-quality, affordable early learning experiences. It is the interactions that occur during a child’s first three years of life that will unlock their full potential in school and in life. Bank Street College of Education builds upon a century of hands-on experience and research in early childhood education and educator preparation in its new report, Investing in the Birth-to-Three Workforce: A New Vision to Strengthen the Foundation for All Learning. Bank Street outlines recommendations to advance and scale critical workforce reforms that will transform infant/toddler preparation in this country. In partnership with leaders and experts from across the country, Bank Street is working to deepen professional learning opportunities, improve compensation and other key supports for infant/toddler educators, strengthen and align the systems, structures, and resources that impact young children and their families, and generate the public support required to drive these critical reforms.

Neuroscience has confirmed that attuned infant/toddler educators play a critical role in setting the stage for healthy brain development and later educational and life success.

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WHAT WE KNOW:
Investing in the Early Childhood Workforce

Today, the lack of access to quality, affordable child care remains a crisis facing most American families.

- Two out of three children under age five now live in homes where both parents work, compared with fewer than one in 10 in 1940.
- Infants and toddlers living below the poverty line spend at least 35 hours per week, on average, in full-time child care.
- Only 10 percent of early childhood providers across the U.S. are considered high quality.
- Child care deserts: three in five of America’s rural communities lack adequate child care supply.

As a nation, we do not value the care and education of infants and toddlers.

- The U.S. ranks 25th in public spending on early learning, spending less than 0.5 percent of GDP on early childhood education and care.
- The U.S. is still one of only eight countries in the United Nations without national paid family leave laws.

Child care costs are astronomical, yet investments in professional learning and compensation for infant / toddler educators are so low that many cannot make ends meet.

- Four in 10 parents (39 percent) say that the cost of child care in their area is not affordable. In 35 states, families pay more for child care than for their mortgages.
- In no state does the cost of center-based infant or toddler child care meet the federal definition of affordable (i.e., no more than seven percent of annual household income).
- Nearly one-half of early childhood educators depend on public assistance. Only 15 percent receive employer-sponsored health insurance.
- Compensation for early childhood educators has increased only one percent in the past 25 years, and the average turnover rate in child care settings is more than four times higher than elementary school teachers.
- At every level of educational attainment, there is a wage penalty of $2 per hour for teachers working exclusively with infants and toddlers, compared to those working with children aged three to five.

U.S. public spending on family benefits and education for our youngest children is drastically lower than other wealthy nations as a percentage of total public spending.
Why A High-Quality Workforce Matters

We know from breakthroughs in neuroscience that children’s brains are growing explosively during the first three years of life—developing more than 100 trillion synaptic connections. This is the time in which a sensitively attuned parent, educator, or caregiver makes the greatest impact on a child, helping to build brain architecture that lays a strong foundation for success in school, relationships, and life. This period also offers the greatest chance to reduce the stark inequalities present in kindergarten readiness; inequalities that are rarely addressed after second grade. By 24 months, many toddlers living in poverty already show both behavioral and cognitive delays. Thoughtful early investment in quality early care and education, followed by consistent high-quality elementary education, has a significant positive impact on children’s lives and the nation’s economy. In fact, every dollar invested in quality early childhood programs yields a $4 - $9 return on investment in individual and community outcomes.

Despite this potential, we have not invested enough in infants and toddlers and the committed educators who help them learn and grow. The U.S. spends $18 billion annually ($5,625 per teacher) on professional development in public K-12 schools, five times more than Head Start and 20 times more than CCDBG quality set-asides (on a per educator basis). Per capita, the U.S. spends six times more on public K-12 schools than on early childhood care and education. Additional investments in quality, affordable child care are needed to ensure that all children have access to the types of experiences that build the foundation for all future learning.

Federal, state, and local funding for early childhood education was close to $30 billion in 2016. This is compared to $668 billion for public elementary schools in the United States.
Strengthening The Early Childhood Workforce: Key Recommendations

Bank Street’s report, *Investing in the Birth-to-Three Workforce: A New Vision to Strengthen the Foundation for All Learning*, lays out four categories of recommendations to improve outcomes for all infants / toddlers and their families:

1. **Deepen expertise and professional learning for infant / toddler educators to help foster healthy child development.** Establish a system of year-long residency programs that provide home and center-based educators with access to high-quality job-embedded learning and the opportunity to connect theory and practice through the guidance of an experienced coach. In addition, residency programs will incorporate accessible coursework in a blended online format, structured peer-to-peer support, and relevant curricula rooted in the specific needs of infant / toddler caregivers. Fully funded through financial aid and scholarships, these infant / toddler residency programs are based on Bank Street’s clinically rich, K-12 teacher preparation programs and rooted in an understanding of adult development that encourages independent and creative thinking, offering opportunities for practice and reflection while fostering respect for and collaboration with others.

2. **Improve compensation to attract and retain a well-qualified workforce.** A tiered compensation plan is needed, including an initial boost in the living wage for all educators in the field. Salaries must increase as educators achieve additional levels of educational or credential attainment and advance towards the ultimate goal of achieving pay parity with similarly credentialed elementary school educators.

3. **Strengthen the leadership and the systems that govern and support program quality to sustainably advance reform.** From the outset, the related structures (e.g., funding, accountability, oversight, etc.) that govern and support child care program quality and professional learning must be aligned to ensure coherence, sustainability, and sufficient resources. States and other localities may need capacity-building support to ensure there are an adequate number of high-quality placement sites, align the tools intended to define and measure quality (such as QRIS and program licensing standards), identify sustainable funding streams and other financing mechanisms, design programs to meet local needs and revise credential requirements, and build systems of ongoing professional learning for all infant / toddler educators. Key to these reforms is also a focus on new programs to strengthen policy leadership by providing decision makers with the knowledge and tools to manage large-scale reform grounded in a deep understanding of child and adult development.

4. **Generate public support for reforms that position quality infant / toddler care as a public good.** Public and political support is growing around the idea that more investment is necessary in young children and their families,
but essential high-quality learning models for infant / toddler early childhood professionals has not been a top policy priority. To sustainably improve the quality of child care and other early learning opportunities, funding priorities should support accessible, high-quality models of professional learning for infant / toddler educators along with wage increases. Increased investments should be guided by a clear definition of what constitutes high-quality professional learning and a robust research agenda based on the experiences of infant / toddler residency programs on-the-ground.

When we released our landmark Starting Points report 25 years ago, it sparked a national conversation about the need for high-quality child care, but that was just the beginning. If we’re serious about building an excellent education system that sets every child up for success, we have to start with babies and toddlers, along with the educators who care for them.

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About Bank Street College of Education

Bank Street College of Education is a recognized leader in early childhood education, teacher and leader preparation, and the development of innovative practice in school systems across the country. Since our beginnings in 1916, Bank Street has been at the forefront of understanding how children learn and grow, and has advocated for children, families, and the system and policy changes that bring effective and equitable teaching to all. Learn more about Bank Street’s Children’s Programs, Graduate School of Education, and the Bank Street Education Center at bankstreet.edu.