

Sample Op-Ed on Infant-Toddler Portion of the President's Early Learning Proposal

How to use this Op-Ed:

- *Make it your own! Here are some suggestions that could make your Op-Ed more powerful by giving it a more local feel:*
 - o *Mention a local high-quality program*
 - o *Use a local news hook (e.g. home visiting program start-up, home visiting or Early Head Start graduation, field trip taken by a program, high profile visit to a program)*
 - o *Add in state-specific facts (use your own and see below for other sources)*
 - o *Use a title that has local relevance*
- *Do not feel limited by the approach or scope of this Op-Ed, elaborate or cut down as you see fit.*
- *We've suggested places where you can add statistics – We have used statistics we know are available for all states (see link at end). Some states have more statistics available than others, so you may be able to add more descriptive data on your state.*

Too many children in [INSERT STATE] arrive at the kindergarten door already behind their peers. But where do we start if we are to make sure our children are ready for school? Earlier than you think. From the moment of birth, babies start on a path of learning and discovery that determines how confidently they step over the kindergarten threshold. That's why the President's birth-to-five early learning plan begins at the beginning.

The President's proposals support parents and other caregivers in fostering the early development of infants and toddlers. One proposal would expand high-quality early learning opportunities by promoting partnerships between Early Head Start and child care. The other would expand voluntary home visiting programs, already being embraced by communities across the country as they provide resources and support for vulnerable families with young children.

Supporting infants and toddlers is critical because their earliest experiences shape their brain architecture, laying the foundations for later learning. Without positive experiences that create strong foundations, learning gaps appear early, sometimes detectable before a child's first birthday. Disparities widen as children grow. By age two, low-income toddlers are often behind

both in cognitive and social-emotional measures. By the time they reach prekindergarten, they're playing catch up, not moving ahead.

Too many infants and toddlers in [INSERT STATE] face adversity of one sort or another. ___ percent live in low-income families and ___ percent live in outright poverty. ___ percent are born with a low birth weight. Only ___ percent are read to every day. ___ percent are considered at moderate or high risk for developmental or behavioral problems. [YOU CAN CUSTOMIZE YOUR STATS. SEE SOURCES BELOW.]

Strong, nurturing relationships, most often with parents, can buffer children from the effects of adverse experiences. But when parents face the added stress of poverty, mental health problems, unstable housing, or the sheer struggle to put food on the table, that buffer can crumble.

Parents aren't the only adults who influence babies' development. Six million infants and toddlers spend a large portion of their day in child care. In [INSERT STATE], ___ percent of mothers with infants are in the workforce. Yet high-quality care for infants and toddlers is in short supply and often out of reach altogether for families who could most benefit.

President Obama's proposal recognizes the importance of these early years. By partnering with child care programs, Early Head Start—which serves infants and toddlers—would extend its comprehensive services to more working families whose low-wage jobs still leave them in poverty and help encourage overall improvements in the quality of child care. Research shows that Early Head Start, which reaches less than 4 percent of eligible children, has positive effects on child development and parenting practices.

Many families in [INSERT STATE] are already welcoming the nurses or social workers from the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting, or MIECHV, program to get the how-to's of parenting and their child's development. The President proposes to extend MIECHV's evidence-based models to many more pregnant women and families with young children who elect to participate. [PERSONALIZE WITH INFO ABOUT HOME VISITING IN YOUR STATE—SEE LINK AT END].

These proposals for infants and toddlers, together with the President's proposal to expand prekindergarten, will give children the opportunity to have high-quality early learning experiences throughout their first five years of life, which will give them the best opportunity possible to succeed.

All babies and toddlers in [INSERT STATE] need a strong start in life if our state and our nation are to prosper. Families are struggling, and young children's potential is being squandered. Babies who miss out on key ingredients for strong development today will never get these

years back. They simply can't wait. We need a new investment in early learning, starting at birth, right now.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON INFANTS AND TODDLERS AND PROGRAMS SERVING THEM:

Facts about infants and toddlers in your state can be found in ZERO TO THREE's State Baby Facts (www.zerotothree.org/policy/statebabyfacts).

More background on infants, toddlers, and school readiness can be found in ZERO TO THREE's [*Putting Infants and Toddlers on the Path to School Readiness: A Policy Agenda for the Administration and 113th Congress*](#) and [*The School Ready Child*](#) (infographic).

Information about home visiting in your state—find state grantees for the MIECHV program: <http://mchb.hrsa.gov/programs/homevisiting/grants.html>