



# NIH CHILD

New Haven Children's Ideal Learning District

## Ideal Learning Roundtable educational partners



## Montessori Leaders Collaborative





# Making the Case

## Establishing the New Haven Children's Ideal Learning District

### **Executive Summary**

Birth through age eight is a critical time of development for all children and forms the foundation for later success. The growth that takes place in this period sets the stage for all complex learning, including problem solving and the ability to sustain meaningful and caring relationships.<sup>1</sup> However, without careful support and care, young children can begin to gather compounding challenges instead of strengths.<sup>2</sup> Quality early care and education can significantly improve children's outcomes. Heckman's analyses of multiple early care and education programs show that every dollar spent on high-quality, birth-to-five programs serving disadvantaged children yields a 13% annual return.<sup>3</sup>

To expand these types of supports, reduce gaps and improve outcomes, we propose creating place-based partnerships aimed systematically to increase access to high-quality early care and education for all children from birth to age eight. Critical to this effort is a comprehensive approach built upon proven pedagogical beliefs shared across the early care and childhood community. The principles of Ideal Learning, as defined by the Trust for Learning, offer a strong foundation.

Ideal Learning starts at birth and puts the child at the center of the design. It supports children in all aspects of their development, deepening and accelerating academic learning through direct experiences with their community. It also transforms home and day care settings and classrooms into exciting places where children learn by exploring the wonder of the world around them. Ideal Learning helps children learn to think for themselves and with others, better positioning them to positively engage as citizens in a rapidly changing world.

New Haven, Connecticut is well poised to serve as a national model for an Ideal Learning place-based pilot given its size, diversity, capacity and commitment to early childhood. At least 1,966 children under the age of five in New Haven do not have access to quality early care and education. This lack of access contributes to lower academic performance, especially for low income students. The achievement gap in Connecticut is 34%—the largest in the country—and in New Haven the gap is 33%. The strength of the existing early childhood community in New Haven, including dedicated leadership from the Mayor and public school district on this issue, further underscores the opportunity. Many providers already operating in the city have successful centers that attract waiting lists of families and are philosophically aligned with the Ideal Learning model. In addition, there is growing interest and momentum among the early childhood community to provide coordinated access to quality early education for children from birth through second grade and professional learning to educators of young children.

In order to make significant gains in New Haven, attention must be paid to both closing the access gap—by increasing the number of seats available in early care and education programs—and to improving the quality of those programs. By expanding and replicating existing models of programs that are already aligned with

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<sup>1</sup> NRC and IOM, 2000

<sup>2</sup> Greenough & Black, 1992

<sup>3</sup> Garcia, Heckman, Leaf & Prados, 2016



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the Ideal Learning philosophy and approach, it is possible to create 1,966 new seats for young children who currently do not have access to early care and education. In addition, existing and new funding models need to be explored, including a review of state funding streams as well as sliding scale tuition programs, where private funds supplement public resources. It is particularly crucial to explore ways to overcome barriers to access for children in poverty so that they can enroll in high-quality early care and education. Two possible options include improving transportation options to child care sites and creating a universal application system.

At the same time, it is important to provide the supports necessary to improve the quality of existing and new programs, including those in the private sector and those run by New Haven Public Schools. Early care and education programs need to adhere to standards aligned with the Ideal Learning philosophy and approach in order to translate to positive long-term outcomes for children. Based on our preliminary research we propose providing professional learning supports to educators and providers across the community in order to bridge the divide that exists as children transition from one level of care to the next and foster a common language and set of practices across the continuum of care. At the same time, targeted supports to meet the specific needs of infant and toddler home care providers, pre-K to second grade providers, and preschool educators are also needed. We will seek to identify existing efforts that are making a positive impact and bolster those initiatives. Finally, in order to comply with new educational requirements that require preschool teachers to have a Bachelor's degree by 2020, we will build degree-granting satellite programs aligned to Ideal Learning for preschool teachers.

By establishing the New Haven Children's Ideal Learning District (NH ChILD) we can work together to advance these strategies. Since the success of this one-of-a-kind Ideal Learning district is contingent upon the participation of the entire New Haven community—including city government, the public school system, private providers, businesses and nonprofit organizations—our intention is for this paper to provide stakeholders with the foundation necessary to inform the development of a more detailed, inclusive implementation plan in the next phase of the work. Through this process we aim to galvanize the New Haven community to collaborate on shared solutions while raising the funds necessary to bring high-quality early care and education to all children in New Haven.