



CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE

A Voice for Washington's Children, Youth & Families

Early Learning Advocacy Project

Oscar G. & Elsa S. Mayer Family Foundation Interim Progress Report: August 2011

Brief summary of the overall progress on major outcomes:

Children's Alliance (CA) plays a leadership role in developing research-driven early learning policy and funding proposals, both of which are embraced by state policymakers and receive prominent attention: CA's focus in the 2011 legislative session was on protecting funding for Working Connections and Seasonal Child Care, programs which benefit thousands of children in Washington State. CA created policy briefs that give current information on the programs' status in the budget process, a key messages document that we shared with Early Learning Action Alliance (ELAA) coalition members and partners, and utilized materials from national partners. We successfully kept proposed deep cuts from being implemented during the legislative session, though funding cuts to child care resulted in the creation of a cap on enrollment and a waiting list for the program. CA's policy priority received a high amount of attention in the legislature, with complementary media coverage. Senate Majority Leader Lisa Brown has been a strong champion for child care in this legislative session as have many legislators in the House. CA was part of the Steering Committee developing our state's Child Care Development Fund Plan in order to secure federal funding. We are currently part of the Washington State Guidelines Redesign Steering Committee, and the Washington Home Visiting Coalition Steering Committee. In addition, we are part of the Advisory Group and advocacy subgroup for our state's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge application, a competitive federal grant funding opportunity for up to \$60 million over four years. CA was recently selected to serve on the new Educare Council of Greater Seattle. During December, CA had 18 individual meetings with key legislators to provide background on our organization's legislative agenda and issues. Meetings leading up to legislative session also included the Governor's Early Learning Policy Advisor, Department of Early Learning (DEL) Director Betty Hyde and key DEL staff, and Thrive by Five Washington staff. A quarterly meeting with DEL, and Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) staff was held prior to legislative session, and during session, we met weekly with staff of the Governor's, DEL, and the Office of Financial Management (OFM). During legislative session, ELAA had face to face meetings with 20 legislators and provided testimony at least 10 times.

ELAA will achieve agreement on a limited number of annual policy priorities resulting in policymakers receiving consistent messages from multiple sources. A near-final coalition agenda was adopted in October 2011, and finalized with three items on the agenda after elections in November. 86% of ELAA coalition organizations signed onto the agenda. CA convened and facilitated four ELAA Steering Committee meetings between September and the beginning of legislative session and 20 small group meetings with coalition members and/or key stakeholders to prepare our legislative agenda and share it once it was adopted. Our annual coalition retreat in November 2010 provided an opportunity to delve into strategies for mobilization, communications, and contact with policymakers. We provided up-to-date policy information to stakeholders and policymakers in order to coordinate consistent early learning messaging throughout the year. We gave regular policy advocacy updates to the monthly local coalitions conference call held by the Foundation for Early Learning as well as weekly ELAA conference calls for coalition members and partners who are not regularly in Olympia during legislative session. CA started a monthly ELAA newsletter in May 2010, which now has a



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subscription of over 600. CA has received multiple requests from policymakers for resource guides and/or specific information from these guides, as well as requests for specific expertise and knowledge on Working Connections Child Care.

ELAA will increase the breadth and depth of legislators who prioritize early learning. This year, CA created ELAA resource guides for all new legislators and legislative staff on early learning-related committees. These guides highlight the importance of brain development in the earliest years of life and research showing that an achievement gap can surface within a child's first year. Five legislators (two senators and three representatives) attended a leadership luncheon at ELAA's annual retreat, where discussion focused on the budget and our legislative agenda. Conversations about early learning caucuses in the House and Senate are continuing, and the first meeting of a bipartisan Senate Early Learning Caucus is currently being organized and scheduled by ELAA. We continue to utilize a coalition "move chart" of all House and Senate members to help us identify and prioritize legislative targets. Post-session, we reviewed and revised our chart and developed our shared interim plan for continued growth of champions and supporters of early learning. We have successfully moved one House member to leadership status and two senators to strong supporters in the past year. CA tracks early learning conversations in committee hearings and floor votes. We discuss legislators' positions and needed information regularly in ELAA meetings. We use our tracking in addition to information from private meetings to send thank you notes to legislators who speak out on early learning.

Early learning advocates will be better equipped for effective advocacy and will advocate for CA early learning priorities via non-lobbying educational activities such as informing policymakers of current needs, sharing personal stories, and speaking to the media. CA currently has 12,096 members, with 695 high action takers in early learning. CA held Advocacy Camp in October 2010, with greater representation from parents. CA's Advocacy Camp alumni have been active organizing members of their communities for Have a Heart for Kids Day (HHFKD), Children's Alliance's annual day at the capitol and in efforts to grow a parenting caucus as a part of ELAA. Two advocacy camp alumni helped lead small groups in the Early Learning Workshop of HHFKD. Parent voices in budget hearings on early learning have increased this session as a result of CA organizing. We continue to provide presentations and information to key civic and business groups to equip them to be better and stronger early learning advocates.

CA early learning capacity will increase, allowing the organization to continue effective policy advocacy and coalition support. CA is part of the Birth to Five Policy Alliance infant/toddler and quality access interest groups. Two CA staff attended the Zero to Three conference in December 2010. Two CA staff attended the Birth to Five Policy Alliance Peer Advocates Roundtable in July. CA continues to benefit from consultation and technical assistance from the Ounce of Prevention Fund, CLASP, National Women's Law Center, and other national partners.

Unanticipated developments, changes or challenges: The state and national budget contexts continue to provide challenges to moving early learning policy forward and in getting media coverage for any particular issue. The staffing transition of Children's Alliance Government Relations Director starting at the end of the 2010 session was an unanticipated change with challenging timing, but we hired a new Director in November 2011, who is now fully trained and up-to-speed on early learning issues and priorities.