



Families as Partners

In Newark's evolving early childhood landscape

Quality, Affordable Childcare and Early Learning

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V. Quality, Affordable Childcare and Early Learning



The childcare and early learning landscape in Newark resembles that of maternal and child health in its layered and complex nature. In childcare, multiple state agencies, place-based funders

(including the Early Years Funders Collaborative), and ACNJ have established an ambitious agenda for high-quality, accessible, affordable childcare in New Jersey. Programs for Parents is the county childcare resource and referral agency serving Newark, and Central Intake/Early Childhood Hub supports families in connecting with childcare and other resources. Numerous ward-based community organizations and childcare centers offer infant and toddler care for families in Newark. SPAN provides supports for families (including those with young children, children with disabilities, developmental delays, and special healthcare needs) access to inclusive, high-quality early learning including early intervention, childcare and family childcare, and preschool. Newark Public Schools

Policy is getting caught up to the reality: A childcare system built on the back of parent contributions isn't going to work. Brain science tell us this is a critical period of development. Low-quality childcare can be detrimental. Philanthropy and government understand now that we can't change P-12 graduation rates if we don't invest earlier.

— Stakeholder (Childcare Credentialing)

Quality matters. Access is central. Without childcare quality, you are not going to change children's trajectory. The childcare workforce is the central mechanism through which we create change in children's trajectories.

— Stakeholder
(Childcare Credentialing)

coordinates with several of the agencies and childcare centers, as the district evolves an early learning program as part of Clarity 2020. In early learning, prominent public institutions like the Newark Library and Newark Museum of Art are interested in working with coalitions promoting early learning to expand their offerings, which are mostly targeted to families of preschool-aged children and up. The Leon and Toby Cooperman Family Foundation and the Newark Trust are currently engaged in an early learning campaign, a two-generation positive parenting and early learning program, and a grant program to support childcare agencies in boosting quality of care as part of their mission to strengthen early learning in Newark.

TABLE 7: Childcare and Early Learning Programs

LEVEL	ORGANIZATION	FOCUS ON NEWARK
National	National Association for the Education of Young Children	NAEYC has established standards and offered services in early learning for the last 30 years. The organization offers a 10-point accreditation program that enables early learning centers to enhance teaching, learning, assessment, staff capacity, program leadership, and other dimensions. NAEYC has accredited 15 childcare organizations across Newark. Many accredited centers are part of the ward-based organizations like La Casa or the Leaguers. Others are independent childcare centers.
State	Department of Human Services	DHS conducts the Grow NJ Kids quality ratings system in collaboration with William Paterson University, regional technical assistance providers (in Essex, it is Prevent Child Abuse New Jersey), county-level childcare resource and referral agencies (for Essex it is Programs for Parents), and home-based and center-based childcare agencies that participate in the rating program to gain a quality rating between 1 and 5. The ECERS is the system of assessment for early childhood centers, ITERS for infant/toddler centers, and FCCERS for family-owned childcare agencies. Currently 137 centers in Essex participate in Grow NJ Kids, of which half are in Newark. SPAN's NJ Inclusive Child Care Project is funded by NJDHS to provide training, technical assistance, and consultation to centers participating in Grow NJ Kids on inclusive education.
State	Department of Education	Early Head Start, serving infants and toddlers, is in three sites in Newark. There is great demand for EHS in Newark, and many families are eligible, but the infrastructure for training EHS workers and preparing for more centers is still being developed. DOE's New Jersey Council for Young Children developed the NJ Early Learning Standards, including detailed indicators for verbal, cognitive, socio-emotional, and motor development, as well as links to other resources such as the Center for Disease Control's development milestones. The NJ Coalition of Infant/Toddler Educators, a member of the NJ Council for Young Children, has developed a series of informational cards for families tied to the Early Learning Standards.
State	SPAN Parent Advocacy Network	SPAN is New Jersey's federally-designated Parent Training and Information Center and Family to Family Health Information Center for families and children, including young children, with or at risk for developmental delays, disabilities, and special healthcare needs. SPAN provides individual assistance, workshops, parent-to-parent support, and leadership development to families.
State	Advocates for Children of New Jersey	A 2017 survey by ACNJ exposed a shortage of childcare in Newark. Existing childcare for infants and toddlers could only serve 18% of families with children in that age range (ACNJ, 2017). As mentioned previously, ACNJ has been instrumental in advocating for expanded, affordable, quality childcare in New Jersey through the Right from the Start campaign.

LEVEL	ORGANIZATION	FOCUS ON NEWARK
State	National Institute for Early Education Research	The EQUIP study of Essex County center-based and home-based care includes a sample of 41 Newark infant/toddler classrooms and 22 licensed home-based centers. Findings show that Newark approached the state average for the quality of infant and toddler care, and that quality was lower for home-based centers than for childcare centers. NIEER identified a need for significant reforms in infant/toddler care in Essex and New Jersey, as overall quality was much lower compared to preschool quality, which had benefited from significant improvement efforts in recent years (Alexandre et al, 2013).
State	Coalition of Infant/Toddler Educators	CITE promotes the New Jersey Infant and Toddler credential to build enhanced knowledge, skills, and professional networks within the state's childcare community. The credential includes a portfolio of materials, including required courses, supervised hours of practice, recommendations, and other elements. CITE's ongoing activities, including the annual conference and four professional learning groups, advocate for childcare standards, promote best practices, support childcare providers, and collaborate with partners such as SPAN, Programs for Parents, and ACNJ as they engage legislators, providers, and parents in this work.
State	Center for Autism and Early Childhood Mental Health	The center, located at Montclair State University, offers direct counseling services, education, and professional development in socio-emotional learning and mental health for caregivers and childcare providers, as well as technical assistance to regional centers implementing the Grow NJ ratings process. As part of this process, they support capacity building in socio-emotional learning and mental health of several childcare centers in Newark in collaboration with partners such as Grow NJ Kids, CITE, and SPAN.
State	Child Care Aware NJ	An umbrella state-level organization, CCANJ supports the work of 15 Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) regional agencies serving all 21 counties in the state, including Programs for Parents, the CCR&R for Essex County. CCANJ convenes leaders of the county-based CCR&Rs for major policy, practice, and other issues, and works with ACNJ and other partners to improve childcare quality, access, and affordability
State	Maher Charitable Foundation	Maher is a champion of early learning, supporting advocacy, Early Head Start, and improved childcare and preschool access for children 0-8. For children 0-3 in Newark, Maher supported a new Early Head Start center at ICC and the new La Casa Early Childhood Center. Maher is a member of the Early Years Funders Collaborative, and supports the Pre-K Our Way and Right from the Start campaigns.

LEVEL	ORGANIZATION	FOCUS ON NEWARK
State	Nicholson Foundation	As part of investments in early health, community supports, parenting, and early learning, Nicholson supports ACNJ's Right from the Start Campaign as part of the Early Years Collaborative, a new Infant/Toddler Center at NIEER, and a pipeline of trained staff for small infant/toddler centers through Programs for Parents. Nicholson also supports SWCA's parenting programs, fatherhood initiatives, and supports to childcare centers in the South Ward. Nicholson has been a major funder of SPAN's Sister-to-Sister Doula program in partnership with NJDOH.
State	Turrell Fund	A member of the Early Years Funders Collaborative, Turrell supported ACNJ's campaign for quality, affordable childcare. The fund also supported the Early Head Start program at ICC and the SWCA Family College program.
County	Schumann Fund for New Jersey	A long-standing supporter of early childhood initiatives, and member of the Early Years Funders Collaboration, the fund supports the Right from the Start campaign, and supplements the budget of the Essex County Council for Young Children.
County	Central Intake/ Early Learning Hub	CI, apart from connecting expectant and new parents to homevisiting programs and SPAN's Doula program, also connects parents of infants and toddlers with Programs for Parents to find appropriate childcare in their area and apply for the Child Care Subsidy. CI also conducts the Ages and Stages Questionnaire, an early childhood assessment utilized by several homevisiting programs and childcare centers in Newark.
County	Programs for Parents	An umbrella agency serving parents and childcare agencies in Essex County, PFP is appointed by the state to manage several early childhood programs and services, including the following: Child Care Subsidy, childcare referrals, mentorship of new childcare agencies, credentialing and professional development for childcare center staff, on-site technical assistance for childcare agencies, and support with the first stage of the GROW NJ Kids process
City	Leon and Toby Cooperman Family Foundation	A key supporter and partner in the Newark Trust's early learning initiative focused on a communications campaign for parents on early learning, implementation of the second cycle of the ParentChild+ program in Newark, and a capacity-building grant program for childcare agencies in the city. The foundation is supported by the SWCA Promised Neighborhood initiative, which has a strong early childhood and parenting emphasis.
City	Newark Day Center	The oldest daycare in Newark, NDC currently services 32 infants and toddlers in its Early Head Start program and about six in its private program. The center participates in Grow NJ Kids, emphasizes parent involvement, and has programs for fathers to participate in early learning and development with their children.

LEVEL	ORGANIZATION	FOCUS ON NEWARK
City	South Ward Children's Alliance	SWCA's Family College supports 100 families (250 children) under 3 with parenting and early learning services, and collaborates with the Clinton Hill Early Learning Center to implement Grown NJ Kids, with technical assistance from PFP.
City	Ironbound Community Corporation	Inbound Community Corporation is an Early Head Start center for infants and toddlers serving 72 children 56 in center-based care and others receiving home visits from EHS. The home-based children are in a play group with each other. All staff are credentialed and participate in additional professional development as well
City	La Casa de Dom Pedro	La Casa recently opened an Early Head Start Center serving 100 infants and toddlers from the North and South wards. The approach includes opportunities for early intervention, mental health consultation, and parent involvement.
City	The Leaguers	The Leaguers serves more than 400 infants and toddlers through its Early Head Start partnerships with community-based childcare centers. Similar to La Casa and ICC, Leaguers also offers opportunities for early screening and intervention, mental health consultation, and parent involvement, with emphasis on fatherhood initiatives.
City	United Vailsburg Service Organization	UVSO partners with Leaguers to offer Early Head Start at two sites to around 110 children, and makes referrals to early intervention and infant/toddler mental health services as needed.
City	North Ward Center	Established 50 years ago, the North Ward Center has a private program for 2 year olds, and an established public preschool. The center emphasizes early assessment and intervention.
City	Center for Culture, Race & Equity	In partnership with the Newark Trust, CCRE offered a series of professional development sessions on cultural responsiveness to staff from childcare centers and preschools. The workshops highlighted individual, institutional, and systemic approaches to improving cultural awareness, and professional practices to improve equity in early learning settings.

LEVEL	ORGANIZATION	FOCUS ON NEWARK
City	Newark Public Schools	PS currently serves 7,000 students in Pre-K 3 and 4. Additionally, the district provides two high-school based infant/toddler centers for children of NPS students. As part of the Healthy and Ready to Learn Plan, the district is developing strong connections with the maternal and child health and early learning and childcare sectors in Newark. The HRL plan as part of the district's Clarity 2020 plan, and includes a baby registry, connections to resources in prenatal health, nutrition, and mental health, information and resources on meeting developmental milestones, and information and connections for families to health and learning resources in the city. NPS offers Head Start and Early Head Start, offers families connections with Early Intervention and other critical agencies that support early learning and health. NPS and PFP are developing partnerships with childcare agencies to support quality improvement in infant/toddler care.
City	Newark Museum of Art	The Museum has well-developed preschool programs including the popular Night at the Museum for preschoolers and their families. The Museum is looking into developing art programs for infants and toddlers, and for their parents that support learning from the earliest stages.
City	Newark Public Library	The Library has a subscription list of more than 100,000 Newark residents, and is interested in partnering with other organizations to disseminate information on the importance of early learning. It currently has a Mommies group where mothers and preschool-aged children participate in weekly reading groups. There is interest to engage infants and toddlers and their caregivers as well in similar early learning programs at the main library and ward-based branches.
City	Newark Trust for Education	The Trust conducted a demonstration of the ParentChild+ program including 180 families from all five wards of Newark from 2019-2021. The multicultural, multilingual team employed a multi-generational approach to support the parent or caregiver in strengthening their capacity as the child's first teacher. The Trust is currently developing a grant program to support small, licensed childcare centers with release time and supplemental funds for approved professional development opportunities so that they can achieve a 3+ star Grow NJ quality rating.

TABLE 8: Preliminary Assessment of Childcare and Early Learning

GUIDELINES	MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH
Accepted standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GROW NJ quality rating frameworks for infant and toddler environments • B.A. in Early Childhood Education, Child Development Associate credential, • CITE credential for infant and toddler workforce development • Early Head Start suite of curriculum, assessment, professional development, accreditation, and parent engagement • Ages and Stages Questionnaire and other assessments like BRIGANCE and BAYLEY

GUIDELINES

MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH

Multi-generation approaches

- Central Intake and Programs for Parents facilitate connections to childcare centers, and also homevisiting and community organizations to promote positive parenting and economic and social stability
- Programs for Parents and the Newark Trust support positive parenting and early learning through ongoing parenting sessions and a homevisiting program, respectively
- Larger childcare organizations, Head Start, Early Head Start and district-contracted childcare centers, support two-generation approach to parenting, family stability, and early learning

Strengths-based and culturally sustaining

- Hiring childcare workers from the communities that children are from
- Participating in professional development on cultural competence and responsiveness
- Including and engaging families in programs and workshops on parenting and early learning as participants and leaders

Equitable access

- The cost of childcare and other issues of documentation, availability of information, and trust in safety and quality of care limit the number of families placing their infants and toddlers in childcare settings. Existing supports like the Child Care Subsidy, however, have durable funding and have even been expanded.

Systemic supports

- The larger childcare providers and Early Head Start centers have connections with social service agencies and can facilitate connections for families that come to their center. Other state, county, and local agencies also facilitate these connections

In addition to institutional stakeholders, we conducted interviews with owners of small childcare centers and family-based centers to better understand their perspectives on care, ratings, subsidies, professional development and credentialing, costs, and parent involvement. Due to COVID-19 closures, we were only able to contact seven agencies, including three centers and four family-based agencies, in the North (N), South (S), and Central (C) wards. All were licensed, received referrals from Programs for Parents (PFP), participated in the Child Care Subsidy (CS), were going through the Grow NJ Kids process (GNJK), and supported early screening and intervention (ESI) on-site as needed, as summarized below:

TABLE 9: Summary of Capacity and Cost of Family-based and Center-based Care in Newark

TYPE	WARD	AGES SERVED	NUMBER OF STAFF	NUMBER OF IT/T	COST/CHILD/WEEK	HOURS OPEN	PIP/CS/GNJK/ESI
Family childcare (n=4)	N	0-5	2	2/3	~\$150	7:00am-10pm	Yes
	S	0-13	2.5	4/3	~\$150	6:00am-flexible	Yes
	C	0-4	3	3/2	~\$100	6:00am-5:00pm	Yes
	N	0-5	2	1/5	~\$170	6:00am-4:00pm	Yes
Center-based childcare (n=3)	N	0-13	8	18/18	~\$250	6:00am-6:00pm	Yes
	C	0-6	17	18/38	~\$250	7:00am-6:30pm	Yes
	S	2.5-5	17	0/12	~\$165	7:30am-6:00pm	Yes

All childcare providers mentioned that they received referrals from Programs for Parents, and that parents also found them through their trusted circles of family and friends and through their website. They stated that parents were interested in activities related to parenting and early learning, but were time-poor due to work and family commitments. They found that parents relied on pediatricians for information on early childhood development given that regular immunization visits afforded ongoing communication. A few providers reported that they connected families with community organizations and city agencies for food and diapers. A center-based provider stated that she had several opportunities for parent involvement at her center, including, “a parent advisory board, parent-teacher conferences, on-site trainings on topics like temper tantrums with toddlers, tummy time with infants, yoga, hands-on activities with infants, and preschool readiness.”

Regarding credentialing and staffing, home-based providers held a Child Development Associate credential, but their full- or part-time assistants (usually family members) did not. Center-based facilities reported a mix of staff with college degrees, college credits, and CDAs. All providers listed routines that addressed comprehensive early childhood development, including motor skills, verbal and cognitive skills, and socio-emotional skills through age-appropriate activities for infants and toddlers respectively. A home-based provider described her routine with children, which involves circle time, outdoor play, and independent and group play with puzzles and arts and crafts, stating: “We need to get away from the stigma that home care providers are babysitters for children.”

All agencies accepted the Child Care Subsidy, and a few providers noted that there were a good proportion of parents who were not income-eligible for the subsidy but who still found it difficult to afford childcare for their infants or toddlers. Weekly costs for infants and toddlers varied by approximately \$25 across centers, with infant care being slightly more expensive than toddler care. Providers emphasized that infant care was expensive due to the low staff-to-child ratio, and that they were able to therefore serve only a few infants each.

All providers were enrolled in Grow NJ Kids, and some had even received a rating. They all noted that the process was involved and time-consuming, but also well-supported through on-site technical assistance. All providers had connections with early intervention, and when needed, had early screening and intervention contractors work on-site with children.

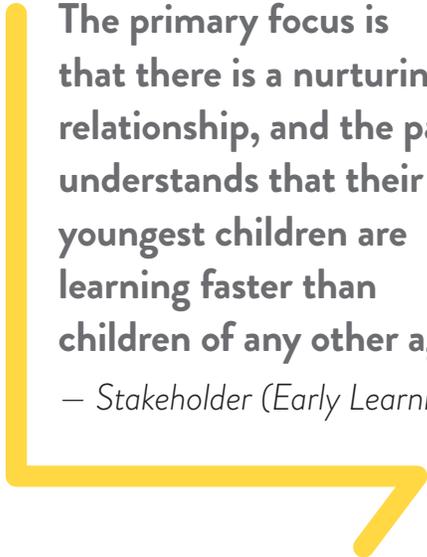
Despite the small sample, we learned from childcare providers that the cost of providing infant and toddler care is high, and participation in quality rating systems is involved. From parents, we learned that they find childcare expensive and rely on trusted friends and relatives when making decisions about childcare. Clearly, more exploration of both parent and childcare providers' perspectives and experiences is warranted. The Trust, with partners such as NIEER and Rutgers University-Newark and philanthropic partners, is well positioned to comprehensively study this sector and inform its development.

To summarize this chapter, childcare programs in Newark have access to established quality and accreditation systems such as NAEYC, Grow NJ Kids, and Early Head Start, although only a small fraction of centers participate in these programs. Studying the Grow NJ Kids site for Essex County shows that just about 70 Newark childcare agencies are either participating in, or have been rated by, Grow NJ Kids. The proportion of those offering standards-based infant and/or toddler care is therefore small.

Accrediting systems such as Early Head Start and rating systems such as Grow NJ Kids embed two-generation, culturally competent approaches in their capacity-building strategies. Parents and caregivers are prepared in ways that enhance infants' and toddlers' learning and development. However, the reach of these programs is small, and it is not clear whether unrated programs offer these opportunities for staff and parents.

As stated earlier, the numbers of infants and toddlers served by the large providers is small relative to the number of infants and toddlers in Newark. The smaller childcare agencies we interviewed reported serving less than a dozen infants and toddlers each, while the larger ones had a reach of less than 100. This finding echoes the childcare gap identified by ACNJ in their 2017 publication aptly titled, *Where Are the Babies?* Exacerbating difficulties with access is the cost of childcare. As mentioned, a 2017 review of childcare costs as a ratio of family income by ACNJ showed that in New Jersey, two-income families may spend almost 15% of their income on average on infant/toddler care, and female heads of households may spend more than 40% of their income on average on the same. These averages are likely to be higher for Newark, given the higher cost of living in the city and lower median income relative to state averages. The Child Care Subsidy, which either covers or subsidizes the cost of childcare to families (depending on family income), is administered by Programs for Parents following guidelines and using funds provided by the NJ Department of Human Services. Rates of reimbursement for childcare centers caring for infants and toddlers were judged to be low (ACNJ, 2017). In a major win for the Early Years Funders Collaborative and ACNJ, the NJ government announced increased funding for the Child Care Subsidy by \$54 million in 2019. These funding increases are now beginning to benefit small childcare providers and low-income families.

A few providers, especially those located in larger ward-based organizations, report connecting families with systemic supports when needs arose. Central Intake, Programs for Parents, and other important stakeholders in this area of work also seek to connect families of infants and toddlers with systemic supports.



The primary focus is that there is a nurturing relationship, and the parent understands that their youngest children are learning faster than children of any other age.

– Stakeholder (Early Learning)

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