Common Good Iowa
Bold Policy for Families & Communities

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KIDS AREN'T BORN AT 4

Iowa needs strategy for infants and toddlers along with preschool expansion

Iowa should continue expanding access to high-quality preschool. But as our state invests in preschool, we also need to protect and strengthen the early-childhood system serving children birth to age 3.

Infant and toddler care is among the most expensive care for families and the most costly for providers to offer. Babies require smaller group sizes and more staff, making these classrooms difficult to sustain financially. Preschool expansion can also have unintended consequences: if 4-year-olds move out of community child-care programs, providers can lose revenue that helps them maintain infant and toddler classrooms.

The answer isn't to slow down preschool expansion. It's to expand preschool while investing in the rest of the birth-to-5 system.

OTHER STATES OFFER MODELS

- **Illinois:** Protects funding for birth to 3. Current law dedicates at least 20% of its Early Childhood Education Block Grant for birth-to-3 services and directs at least 25% of certain new funding to birth to 3.
- **Oregon:** Baby Promise funds contracted infant and toddler child care slots for children from six weeks through age 3, complementing publicly funded preschool.
- **New Mexico:** Contracted infant and toddler slots provide participating providers predictable monthly funding to maintain care for children six weeks to age 3.
- **Colorado:** Enrollment-based subsidy payments for infants and toddlers provide predictable revenue and encourage providers to maintain difficult-to-sustain slots.

State examples: Illinois Early Childhood Education Block Grant (325 ILCS 3/15-25); Oregon Department of Early Learning and Care, Baby Promise; New Mexico Early Childhood Education and Care Department, Infant & Toddler Contracted Slots; Colorado Department of Early Childhood, CCCAP Enrollment-Based Payments.

Every significant new preschool investment should be accompanied by a dedicated investment in children birth to 3

Iowa should dedicate 20–25% of new early-childhood investments to birth-to-3 strategies, building on the Illinois model while allowing Iowa communities the flexibility to address local needs.

Funding could support: new infant/toddler child-care slots or classrooms, CCA reimbursement that better reflects the cost of infant and toddler care, workforce recruitment and retention, Early Head Start partnerships, evidence-based home visiting, family child-care homes, and other local birth-to-3 priorities.

Preschool expansion should strengthen — not compete with — Iowa's existing child-care infrastructure. Iowa should embrace a mixed-delivery preschool system that includes qualified community child-care providers, Head Start programs and schools. That helps preserve child-care businesses and the infant and toddler classrooms Iowa families depend on.

To learn more about meeting the needs of infants and toddlers, contact Senior Policy Advocate Sheila Hansen at shansen@commongoodiowa.org or visit www.commongoodiowa.org.