



## ALABAMA AND EARLY CHILDHOOD

# Blueprint for Strong Families, School Readiness, and Prosperity

Early childhood is a time of opportunity for Alabama. If we invest wisely in children and families, the next generation will pay us back through a lifetime of productivity and responsible citizenship.

The Alabama Partnership for Children has a plan—a blueprint for success. Developed and managed by the nearly 30 organizations that make up the Alabama Young Child Wellness Council, the Blueprint guides our work with state policymakers, businesses, and service providers on the policies and programs that will make the biggest difference for children, families, and the state of Alabama.



## 2018 PRIORITIES



### Families and Communities



### Health



### Early Education

From low educational and health outcomes to high crime and addiction rates, the biggest challenges we face in Alabama connect back to “birth to five” issues:

**30%** **CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY** of children in Alabama live in poverty

By age 4, a child living in poverty is developmentally 18 months behind those not in poverty.

**\$2.5** **CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT** billion each year

That’s what it costs Alabama to care for children exposed to chronic or “toxic” stress from abuse or neglect. For the children, the cost is even higher: disrupted healthy development and lifelong difficulties.

**32%** **CHILDREN NOT READY FOR SCHOOL** of young children are at risk

of behavioral and developmental issues that can prevent school success. Children not ready for school are more likely to drop out, be imprisoned, suffer poor health, and rely on public assistance.

### **CHILDREN AFFECTED BY MENTAL ILLNESS AND ADDICTION**

Poor prenatal care, neglect, and an overwhelmed foster care system stem from mental illness and addiction—particularly opioid abuse.

## BUILDING BRAINS, BUILDING COMMUNITIES

The architecture of the human brain begins before birth and is largely formed by age 5. Early experiences literally shape how the brain is built. Like a home, a strong foundation built in the early years means a higher probability of positive outcomes. A weak foundation increases the odds of difficulties later in life. **The early childhood period dramatically affects education, health, quality of life, and the economy in our state.** To be effective, supports for children and young families must start well before kindergarten—they must begin before birth.

## BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS

Just as a parent cannot focus on developing just one part of a child, we in Alabama cannot focus on just one program. The Alabama Young Child Wellness Council has identified the following immediate priorities for strong families, school readiness, and a more prosperous state:



**90%**  
of a child's brain is  
developed by  
age **5**



### HOME VISITING AND FAMILY STRENGTHENING PROGRAMS

**THE ISSUE.** Only 2% of eligible parents in Alabama who want the support of a home visiting program can get it. Participating counties often have waiting lists. In some rural areas, this is the only accessible or effective type of program.

**THE SOLUTION.** Home visiting models such as *HIPPY*, *Nurse-Family Partnership*, and *Parents as Teachers* help mothers and fathers be the best they can be. These programs and others that build the Protective Factors of the Strengthening Families™ framework protect against poverty. They are proven to enhance health, reduce abuse and neglect, and improve school readiness.



### HEALTHY CHILD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

**THE ISSUE.** Alabama consistently ranks at the bottom of national statistics measuring the health and wellbeing of our children, including low-weight births, infant mortality, developmental concerns, and undetected delays in children when they start school.

**THE SOLUTION.** The *Help Me Grow* program is a proven national model that supports early screening and assessment, connecting children and families to needed resources and programs. *Help Me Grow* screens more than 28,000 children each year and has a 90% success rate connecting families with service providers.



### EARLY EDUCATION PROGRAMS

**THE ISSUE.** Alabama has an exemplary pre-k program, but only 28% of our 4-year-olds have access to it. We do have many child care options, but almost 50% of centers are uninspected and unregulated, leaving our children vulnerable at the earliest ages.

**THE SOLUTION.** Increasing access to our First Class Pre-K program and inspecting and licensing all child care facilities will better ensure that all of our children are safe and enter school ready to succeed. Children who attend quality preschool outperform their peers at school and go on to graduate, continue their education, earn more, and have better health. For every \$1 we spend on high-quality preschool, we save \$7.

We have a blueprint for success, a smart investment in our future. Alabama voters agree.  
We encourage you to support early childhood programs in Alabama.

**Learn more about these and other programs at [www.smartstartalabama.org](http://www.smartstartalabama.org)**



*Every Alabama Child Will Have the Opportunity to Succeed in Life*