On Your Mark, Get Set, Go! Philadelphia's Plan to Improve School Readiness

Population Health Sciences

Date Posted:

Jul 27, 2015



Kudos to the city of Philadelphia on *A Running Start*, the citywide plan to improve school readiness. The plan is a multi-faceted effort of multiple stakeholders to make real changes in the city's early childhood arena and to have an impact on battling poverty. There are five main goals of the plan:

1. All infants, toddlers, and preschoolers have the opportunity to experience high-quality, full-day/full-year early learning in formal and informal settings
2. Philadelphia has an ample supply of high-quality public, private, and nonprofit providers with supports for entering, sustaining, and growing the number of high-quality opportunities
3. Philadelphia has a sufficient, stable, and diverse high-quality early learning workforce with access to professional development supports and adequate compensation
4. Children and families are continuously supported by the early learning and K–3 systems
5. Philadelphia has the required infrastructure and funding to support a high-quality, robust early learning system

So where do Philadelphia-based health care professionals, especially pediatric providers, fit in to this plan? We know of vast amounts of research from economists, psychologists, educators, the military, and more that show that school success and success later in life are dependent on a child's early learning experiences. We have listened to our families at well child visits, specialty visits, and hospitalizations talk about the challenges of finding and affording high-quality child care. We have also come to realize that parents sometimes overlook early childhood as an important time of learning and for getting ready for school.

A study showed that parents did not think of going to their health care provider for advice on education, but they were open to doing so. Let's take advantage of that fact. One potential immediate policy intervention is for

pediatricians to recommend a high-quality preschool program to all families at or before the 30-month well child visit.

Philadelphia-based pediatric health care providers should be thrilled to be part of *A Running Start*, and we should commit our time and efforts to support it. In all cities, not just Philadelphia, pediatric health care providers have the opportunity to focus on the well-being of the whole child by championing the importance of early years as a time of learning, by identifying any special needs at an early stage, and by recommending a high-quality early learning experience for every child.