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Local Communities to Prioritize a Strong Start for Babies and Toddlers

Leading National Groups Announce Selection of Communities across the Country to Focus on Healthy Beginnings, Supported Families and Quality Child Care from Birth to Age 3

DATELINE—April 24, 2018—Leading national organizations announced today that they will work with 29 communities across the country to focus on child development from birth to age 3. Research shows investments in the first three years of life, when a child’s brain develops faster than at any other time period, are most critical in helping more children become more confident, empathetic, contributing members of their communities.

The National Association of Counties, National League of Cities, Center for the Study of Social Policy, National Institute for Children’s Health Quality (NICHQ) and StriveTogether each selected community partners that are demonstrating a commitment to ensuring children have a strong start in life. The partnership is funded by the Pritzker Children’s Initiative (PCI), a project of the J.B. and M.K. Pritzker Family Foundation. The Sorenson Impact Center, housed at the University of Utah’s David Eccles School of Business is working with PCI and the partner organizations to manage the initiative.

The communities named in today’s announcement include:

National Association of Counties

- Boone County, Missouri
- Champaign County, Illinois
- Dauphin County, Pennsylvania
- Pierce County, Washington
- Ramsey County, Minnesota
- Washington County, Virginia
- Watauga County, North Carolina
- Tarrant County, Texas

- Ventura County, California
- Volusia and Flagler Counties, Florida

National League of Cities

- Austin, Texas
- Baltimore, Maryland
- Chattanooga, Tennessee
- Cleveland, Ohio
- Denver, Colorado
- Minneapolis, Minnesota

Center for the Study of Social Policy

- Boston, Massachusetts
- Denver, Colorado
- Guilford County, North Carolina
- Los Angeles County, California
- Kent County, Michigan
- Multnomah County, Oregon
- Orange County, California
- Onondaga County, New York

National Institute for Children’s Health Quality (NICHQ) and StriveTogether

- Albuquerque, New Mexico
- Memphis, Tennessee
- Norwalk, Connecticut
- Salt Lake City, Utah
- Spartanburg County, South Carolina
- Tucson, Arizona

“This announcement marks an unprecedented moment in our nation’s commitment to our youngest learners. For the first time, communities across the country will work together to take action to increase high-quality services for children from birth to age 3 toward a common goal of kindergarten readiness,” said Janet Froetscher, president of the J.B. and M.K. Pritzker Family Foundation. “The communities will support a strong start for babies and toddlers through local solutions: giving children a healthy start at birth, strengthening support for families with infants and toddlers and expanding high-quality care and learning environments.”

The selected communities will launch the initiative in partnership with national organizations supporting the effort. Partner organizations will equip communities with tools to strengthen early childhood systems and share best practices with other cities, counties and states. In turn, communities will share resources that will drive policies and make the case for public and private investment in core services for infants and toddlers.

The needs of infants and toddlers cannot all be addressed with a one-size-fits-all approach. As part of this joint initiative, local leaders will pursue a variety of interlocking strategies in the child care, health, early childhood education and human services domains that promote and work toward the well-being of young children. These integrated approaches will build on promising existing community-driven efforts and work to address new challenges as they aim to provide parents with unique tools, information and guidance at a time when many feel most overwhelmed.

“These communities will be at the forefront of developing public policy and practice that embraces the new knowledge we have about brain science. We now know that waiting to invest in our children — our nation’s future — until kindergarten or even pre-K is too late,” said Rachel Schumacher, director of PCI. “By bringing communities together around shared goals and outcome measures, we can move the needle to set our nation’s babies and toddlers up for success.”

Research shows that investments in children and their families in the earliest years help communities create better education, health, social and economic outcomes that increase revenue and reduce the need for costly, less effective interventions later in life. With an estimated 3 million of the nation’s youngest children at risk of reaching kindergarten not ready to learn, this Initiative seeks a dramatic investment in improving kindergarten readiness.

In addition to the economic benefits, high-quality early childhood development programs can reduce chronic disease and health care costs, and their benefits include better education outcomes and higher incomes as adults. Early childhood development lays the foundation for school readiness with social-emotional skills that children need to do well both in and out of school, including attentiveness, persistence, impulse control and sociability.

Program partners' comments:

Frank Farrow, president, Center for the Study of Social Policy:

"The Center for the Study of Social Policy is pleased to announce that ten EC-LINC communities will be participating in the Pritzker Children's Initiative, a specialized effort to make sure young children are developmentally on track for school by age three. EC-LINC (Early Childhood Learning and Innovation Network for Communities) has made significant strides in advancing early childhood systems by promoting peer learning, innovation, results-based action and equity for all. Thanks to generous support from PCI, participating communities will tackle the toughest challenges related to maternal and child health, family support and early care and education. They will develop models for how communities across the country can work to create brighter futures for the youngest children and their families."

Matthew Chase, executive director, National Association of Counties

"We are grateful and proud to partner with the Pritzker Children's Initiative in our efforts to improve kindergarten readiness. We applaud the pioneering work of the counties and cities named in today's announcement. County leaders leave no stone unturned in pursuit of our goal to build healthy, vibrant, safe communities for our residents – and the best path to success starts early. With the Pritzker Children's Initiative, we will strengthen early childhood systems and help to build brighter futures for kids today."

Jill Sells, MD, FAAP, Clinical Director of Early Childhood Initiatives, National Institute for Children's Health Quality (NICHQ):

"We are excited to partner with these communities and help facilitate solutions to challenges in early childhood systems in communities across America. Given our experience in spurring and managing transformational change, we believe this initiative will give the next generation a better chance to grow and thrive."

Clifford M. Johnson, executive director, National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education and Families:

"NLC is excited to provide leaders in these six cities with new tools to help them increase supports and services for the youngest children in their communities. As the elected leaders closest to their constituents, these city officials are driven to find solutions to better their communities, and have been at the forefront of developing local innovations that increase opportunities for families with young children. They know that a child's earliest years, from prenatal to age three, are the most critical times for learning and development, and these leaders are looking to adopt promising policies and practices that support the full development of infants and toddlers."

Fraser Nelson, managing director, Sorenson Impact Center:

"We are looking forward to working with and learning from these exceptional and diverse communities across the country who are committed not only to investing in their tiniest residents to ensure readiness for kindergarten, but also preparedness for life beyond the classroom."

Jennifer Blatz, president and CEO, StriveTogether:

"A healthy start at birth ensures children have the opportunity to succeed and fulfill their potential. At StriveTogether, we know using data is the key to uniting communities around shared goals and outcome measures. Through this partnership with PCI and NICHQ, we are bringing our proven approach of data-driven tools and cohort learning to improve outcomes faster for infants, toddlers and families across the country."

About the Partners

Center for the Study of Social Policy

The [Center for the Study of Social Policy](#) (CSSP) is a national, nonprofit public policy, research and technical assistance organization headquartered in Washington, D.C., with offices in New York City and Los Angeles. CSSP is committed to securing equitable opportunities and optimal outcomes for children and families. CSSP strives to achieve this by focusing on the families facing the most significant barriers – including families living in poverty and those whose lives are affected by discrimination based on race, immigration status, sexual orientation and gender identity.

National Association of Counties

The [National Association of Counties](#) (NACo) unites America's 3,069 county governments. Founded in 1935, NACo brings county officials together to advocate with a collective voice on national policy, exchange ideas and build new leadership skills, pursue transformational county solutions, enrich the public's understanding of county government and exercise exemplary leadership in public service.

National Institute for Children's Health Quality (NICHQ)

The [National Institute for Children's Health Quality \(NICHQ\)](#) is a mission-driven nonprofit dedicated to driving sustainable improvements in the complex issues facing children's health. We provide deep expertise in developing the pathways and partnerships for catalyzing change to achieve better outcomes for children and families.

National League of Cities

The [National League of Cities \(NLC\)](#) is dedicated to helping city leaders build better communities. Working in partnership with the 49 state municipal leagues, NLC serves as a resource to and an advocate for the more than 19,000 cities, villages and towns it represents. The Institute for Youth, Education and Families (YEF Institute) is a special entity within NLC that helps municipal leaders take action on behalf of the children, youth and families in their communities.

Sorenson Impact Center

The [Sorenson Impact Center](#), housed at the University of Utah's David Eccles School of Business, is a think-and-do tank that marshals capital for social good, empowers data-driven programs, breaks down silos across sectors, and equips the next generation of leaders with social purpose.

StriveTogether

[StriveTogether](#) leads a national movement of 70 communities to get better results in every child's life. We coach and connect partners across the country to close gaps, especially for children of color and low-income children. Communities using our proven approach have seen measurable gains in kindergarten readiness, academic achievement and postsecondary success. The StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network reaches 10.4 million students, involves 10,800 organizations and has partners in 30 states and Washington, D.C.

About the Pritzker Children's Initiative

For more than 15 years, [the Pritzker Children's Initiative](#) (PCI) has been committed to a single, attainable goal: that all of our nation's at-risk children will have access to high-quality early childhood development resources, increasing their likelihood of success in school and life. With a focus on the importance of ages birth to three, PCI supports initiatives that unlock public and private investments in early childhood development, increase the supply and reach of evidence-based interventions and accelerate innovation and knowledge sharing.