

INTRODUCTION

MBK Community Action Resource Guide

PURPOSE

In September 2014, President Obama issued a challenge to cities, towns, counties, and tribes across the country to join the My Brother's Keeper (MBK) Community Challenge as "MBK Communities." The Challenge encourages communities (cities, rural municipalities, and tribal nations) to implement a coherent cradle-to-college-and-career strategy for improving the life outcomes of all young people to ensure that they can reach their full potential.

As an MBK Community leader, you have accepted this call to action indicating your commitment to enacting sustainable change in your community across some or all of the following key milestone areas identified by the May 2014 MBK Task Force Report¹:

1. Entering school ready to learn
2. Reading at grade level by third grade
3. Graduating from high school ready for college and career
4. Completing post-secondary education or training
5. Successfully entering the workforce
6. Reducing violence and providing a second chance

This guide is intended as an informational resource to support your MBK Community Challenge efforts. It introduces an illustrative sample of key principles, practices, and resources to consider in building your local initiatives. These materials are not meant as requirements and are not intended to be exhaustive or definitive. Ideas and resources may not apply equally in every community as there is no one-size-fits-all solution to these complex issues. Our hope is that you will build on the illustrative examples highlighted in this resource guide, adapting them to create tailored solutions for your community.

The MBK Community Action Resource Guide series is a project of the National Convening Council, with support and technical assistance from the White House and a number of Federal agencies.

In preparing this guide, the National Convening Council is also grateful for the expertise and experience shared by National League of Cities, StriveTogether, United Way, PolicyLink, Urban Institute, and Deloitte. These groups comprise a wide variety of nongovernmental organizations, philanthropies, and academics that have studied and provided ongoing support to communities implementing cradle-to-college-and-career approaches.

These resource guides include information and examples from nongovernmental sources. These resource guides are provided for informational purposes only. Inclusion of nongovernmental information and resources does not indicate endorsement by the White House or the U.S. government of entities, their products or services, and the **information contained at referenced sites does not necessarily reflect the official views of the U.S. government.**

OBJECTIVES

After reading this guide, you should:

- Build a high-level understanding of milestone-specific issues, critical players to engage, and key considerations in activating your community around this issue
- Recognize evidence-based practices and examples of programmatic success that can be adapted to meet local community needs
- Conduct a detailed needs assessment benchmarking current performance on the critical metrics for each of the six milestones
- Begin to understand institutional resources available for use in launching local initiatives
- Identify outstanding questions to address when developing local solutions
- Feel empowered to drive systemic change in your community

CONTENT OVERVIEW

This guide is designed to support your planning and execution process through a series of three core steps: first, it helps you (1) **build an understanding** of the milestone-specific issue area; then it (2) **identifies several illustrative leading practices** to help inspire your approach; and finally, it provides a selection of (3) **key resources** to help guide you as you begin to take action.

(1) Build Understanding

- **Milestone Overview:** an introduction to the key drivers affecting the milestone issue area, as outlined in the MBK Task Force Report published in May 2014
- **Engaging Your Community Ecosystem:** initial thoughts on how to mobilize key stakeholders within your community to create joint accountability and a shared vision
- **Key Principles:** milestone-specific thought leadership to help provide a trusted foundation for local action

(2) Identify Leading Practices

- **Evidence-Based Practices:** illustrative set of effective milestone-specific practices included to help inspire policy and program development in your community
- **Programmatic Success from the Field:** sample of strategies and programs communities have used to improve outcomes on this milestone - demonstrating how to apply and adapt leading practices to meet local needs

(3) Take Action

- **Turning Theory Into Action – Institutional Resources:** examples of resources to help you begin to create change, organized by key drivers outlined within the milestone overview

¹ Access the MBK Task Force Report here: http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/053014_mbk_report.pdf

MY BROTHER'S KEEPER
Community Challenge

Entering School Ready to Learn

STEP 1: Build Understanding

MILESTONE OVERVIEW

All children should have a healthy start and enter school ready – cognitively, physically, socially, and emotionally.

The earliest years of a child's life are critical for building the foundation for success in school and beyond. During these years, children's brains develop rapidly, influenced heavily by their experiences.

Children who live in poverty face an array of environmental factors that can harm their development and life outcomes. With gaps between children from lower and higher income families beginning early in life, efforts to narrow disparities and facilitate economic mobility must start before birth and focus on the individuals who are most influential in children's lives: parents, caregivers and teachers.

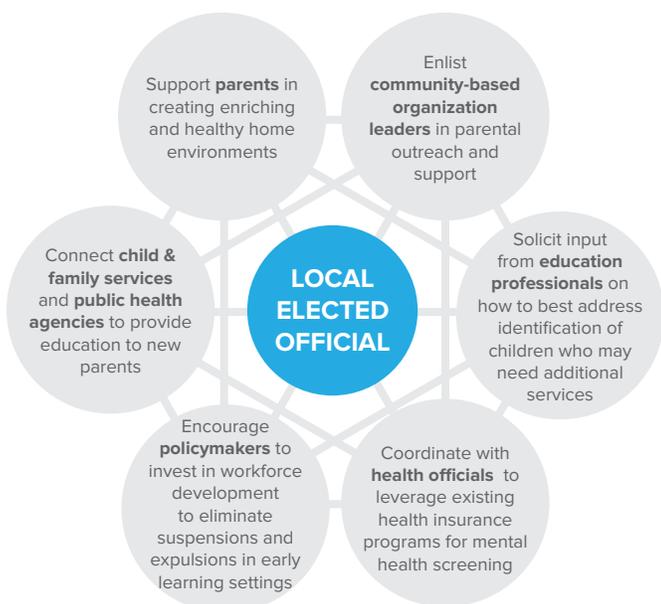
To drive real change in our community, we must seek opportunities to:

- Close the Word Gap and Support Enriching Home Environments
- Implement Universal Early Health and Developmental Screenings
- Ensure Access to High-Quality Early Care and Education
- Invest in a High-Quality Workforce of Early Childhood Teachers
- Eliminate Suspensions and Expulsions in Early Learning Settings

For a more detailed explanation of these drivers, see the My Brother's Keeper Task Force Report, May 2014, http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/053014_mbk_report.pdf

ENGAGING YOUR COMMUNITY ECOSYSTEM

A key next step toward driving change involves assessing community needs, with a focus on engaging and connecting key stakeholder groups,* including:



*These key stakeholder groups are meant to serve as an illustrative sampling, to be validated and adapted as relevant to your specific community

KEY PRINCIPLES

1. **Parents and guardians** are children's first and most important teachers, caregivers, and advocates.
2. **Building comprehensive systems and promoting systemic alignment across early childhood service providers requires a clear strategy and strong infrastructure**, which can take a variety of forms, such as a mayor's office dedicated to early childhood issues or an early childhood department within city, school, or community-based agencies. It is most important that these structures enable coordination across existing health, education, and other silos, and that they take on or form new roles to promote school readiness.
3. No single "system" of early childhood education currently exists. As a result, **aligning the disparate suite of early childhood services** is an important step in making sure that children and families have access to high-quality, affordable opportunities to learn and grow.
4. **Ongoing training and coaching of family and early care providers** is necessary to ensure provision of quality early learning experiences for children.
5. Over time, **ensuring quality early care access to all** should be considered as a part of any early childhood strategy.
6. Many children suffer from developmental delays that go unattended for years, increasing the difficulty and cost of addressing them later and impacting the children's school readiness and overall wellbeing. **Early identification and intervention pays immediate and long-term emotional and financial returns.**
7. The developmental readiness expectations for kindergarten entry are often divorced from preschool programming. As such, it is important that communities **help children, families, and early care providers understand what "kindergarten ready" means, and that they implement effective strategies and practices to achieve it – including** visits to kindergarten classrooms, communication between child care providers and kindergarten teachers, and / or aligning school readiness standards and expected outcomes between early education and the K-12 system.
8. The health and optimal development of infant, toddler, and pre-school children are fostered by **efforts to reduce institutionalized racism, class and ethnic prejudice, economic inequality, and gender stereotypes.**

MY BROTHER'S KEEPER
Community Challenge

Entering School Ready to Learn

STEP 2: Identify Leading Practices

EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES

This section is intended as an informational resource to support your MBK Community Challenge efforts. It introduces an illustrative sample of principles, practices, and resources to consider in building your local initiatives. Ideas and resources may not apply equally in every community as there is no one-size-fits-all solution to these complex issues.

Practice 1: Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting program is a strong evidence-based program out of the Department of Health and Human Services that supports pregnant women and families by helping parents of children from birth to age five tap into resources and develop the skills they need to raise children who are physically, socially, and emotionally healthy and ready to learn.

Practice 2: Healthy Start

Healthy Start is a federal program designed to improve health outcomes for mothers and babies in communities with high rates of infant mortality and pregnancy complications. Healthy Start projects provide services including health education and screenings, case management, and prenatal and postpartum care to help ensure moms and babies have access to needed medical care and other community services to give their baby a Healthy Start in life.

Practice 3: Early Head Start

Early Head Start provides early, continuous, intensive, and comprehensive child development and family support services to low-income infants and toddlers and their families, and to pregnant women and their families. As infants and toddlers grow and change, and as family needs evolve, diverse program options can support them over time.

Practice 4: Head Start

Head Start promotes the school readiness of young children from low-income families through agencies in their local community, with a focus on encouraging the role of parents as their child's first and most important teachers. In addition to education services, programs provide children and their families with health, nutrition, social, and other services, all of which are responsive to each child and family's ethnic, cultural, and linguistic heritage.

Practice 5: High-Quality Pre-Kindergarten

A large and longstanding body of evidence shows that children who attend high-quality pre-kindergarten programs have more advanced language and math skills, enter kindergarten knowing how "school" works, are less likely to be held back, and are more likely to graduate from high school. High-quality programs are characterized by well-educated teachers with low staff turnover, competitive teacher salaries, low teacher-child ratios and small class sizes, research-based curriculum aligned to K-12 standards, engaged families, and focus on the whole child and family.

Practice 6: Dual Generation Programs

Dual generation programs enhance children's development by enrolling parents in education or job training at the same time that they enroll their children in high-quality child care. The most promising programs combine three elements: they build strong connections between components for children and adults; they ensure that children and their parents receive services of equal duration and intensity; and they incorporate recent advances in both education and workforce development.

PROGRAMMATIC SUCCESS IN THE FIELD

The following programs are highlights received from organizations participating in the MBK Community Challenge. Their efforts are not sponsored, supervised, or independently evaluated by the U.S. Government.

Snapshot 1: Success by 6 – National

Success By 6 is a national strategy of United Way of America in more than 350 cities across the country all focused on ensuring young children enter school ready to succeed. Communities work to understand what local practices impact kindergarten readiness. After a thorough review of the data, communities come up with many findings. In one community they found that children from preschools with certified teachers and low student-teacher ratios are more likely to be developmentally on target. Local investors like United Way and Colleges of Education then worked to enable teachers to get certified and invested in lower class sizes as opposed to new programs.

Key Takeaways

- Kindergarten readiness rates in some communities have improved more than 11 percent

Snapshot 2: EarlyLearn NYC – New York, NY

Through the EarlyLearn NYC initiative, New York City's Administration for Children's Services reorganized contracted child care to maximize funding for early child education, better distribute child care coverage, and raise the quality of both provided care and education.

Key Takeaways

- Program staff note that professional development and the braiding of funding for early child education and care is a key strength of the program
- Child care vouchers, budget assumptions that are too low, rising child care costs, required provider contributions, and unfilled seats cause financial strain on the program

Snapshot 3: Seattle Office of Education and Early Learning – Seattle, WA

The City of Seattle conducted a gap analysis in access to quality early learning services for young children and identified that several thousand 4-year-olds were not in formal preschool care. Furthermore, low-income families were significantly less likely to have their children enrolled in such programs than high-income families. The City Council partnered with the mayor to successfully advocate for Proposition 1B, a \$58 million property-tax levy to adopt and fund a four-year pilot preschool program. Voters approved the measure in November 2014.

Key Takeaways

- Public officials can use the convening power of their office to identify gaps in critical services and then bring together a diverse group of leaders and stakeholders to champion a solution
- High-quality early learning is supported by a diverse cross-section of the community, including business leaders, faith leaders, educators, law enforcement, parents, and non-profit representatives
- Make the case for action using the well-established sciences and economic benefits of high-quality early education

MY BROTHER'S KEEPER *Community Challenge*

Entering School Ready to Learn

STEP 3: Take Action

TURNING THEORY INTO ACTION: INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES

Now is the time to drive impact in promoting a community-oriented approach to early childhood education, including fostering enriching home environments, ensuring access to high-quality early care, promoting developmental mental health screenings, and eliminating harmful disciplinary action in early learning settings.

Here are some helpful resources to get you started. *These resources include information and examples from nongovernmental sources. These resources are provided for informational purposes only. Inclusion of nongovernmental information and resources does not indicate endorsement by the White House or the U.S. government of entities, their products or services, and the information contained at referenced sites does not necessarily reflect the official views of the U.S. government.*

Close the Word Gap and Support Enriching Home Environments

Talking is Teaching: Talk, Read, Sing: Talking is Teaching is a multimedia campaign of *Too Small to Fail* that is working to help parents understand that they have the power to boost their children's vocabulary through simple actions every day - like talking about things seen on a walk, or singing songs together during bath time. Using social media, books, videos, and information from expert partners, Talking is Teaching shares fun and easy ways that parents can improve their babies' learning. **This is not a U.S. Government guidance document.**

Access campaign information here:
<http://talkingisteaching.org/>

Supporting Parents: Promising City Efforts to Promote Early Childhood Success: Local elected officials can become active partners in helping parents of young children succeed. In doing so, city leaders have the opportunity to make their communities more family-friendly, their workforce more productive, and upcoming generations better prepared for school and life. This report highlights lessons for promoting early childhood success from six cities that participated in the National League of Cities' Cities Supporting Parents of Young Children project. **This is not a U.S. Government guidance document.**

Access the report here:
<http://www.nlc.org/Documents/Find%20City%20Solutions/IYEF/Early%20Childhood/supporting-parents-cs-sep08.pdf>

Implement Universal Early Health and Developmental Screenings

Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive!: This coordinated federal effort encourages healthy child development, universal developmental and behavioral screening for children, and support for the families and providers who care for them. This initiative will help families and providers celebrate milestones, promote universal screening, identify possible delays and concerns early, and enhance developmental supports. As part of this initiative, Birth to Five has published a Compendium of Screening Measure for Young Children appropriate for use across a wide range of settings.

Access the Initiative and related documents here:
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ecd/child-health-development/watch-me-thrive>

Ensure Access to High Quality Early Care and Education

Playbook for Becoming an Early Learning Community: An Early Learning Community works together to deliver measurable improvements in the lives of its youngest children. It provides all children, regardless of what zip code they live in, an equal opportunity at success by implementing a continuum of high-quality early learning services. This playbook identifies a snapshot of strategies, promising practices, and innovative ideas being employed in communities across the country.

Access the playbook here:
http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/playbook_for_becoming_an_early_learning_community.pdf

Eliminate Suspensions and Expulsions in Early Learning Settings

Eliminate Suspensions and Expulsions in Early Learning Settings: This policy statement is designed to support families, early childhood programs, and States by providing recommendations from the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Education (ED) for preventing and severely limiting expulsion and suspension practices in early childhood settings.

Access the policy statement here:
https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/eecd/expulsion_suspension_final.pdf