



Common Start Legislation-Frequently Asked Questions

Why is the Common Start legislation needed? What problems do we face?

- Massachusetts has always been a nationwide leader on issues that affect working people and families, including early education and child care. **Now, at a time of unprecedented crisis for families, children, businesses, and our entire economy, it's time for us show leadership again by ensuring that all Massachusetts families can access affordable, high-quality early education and child care.**
- We've made important progress in recent years, from raising educator salaries and improving provider quality, to supporting affordability for low-income families and closing gaps in access for parents who work nontraditional hours.
- But the current system remains broken and **access to quality early education and child care remains out of reach for too many families.**
- This year, **the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted just how critical early education and child care is** for Massachusetts families, for children, for businesses, and for the entire Massachusetts economy.
- During the immediate recovery from the pandemic and over the long term, access to affordable, high-quality early education and child care is critical to building a stronger, more equal and just Massachusetts.
- Investing in early education and child care will help support families and early educators as we recover from the pandemic, combat racial and gender inequities, reduce income inequality, and jumpstart our economy.

How would the Common Start legislation help families?

- Without access to affordable, high-quality early education and child care, parents and other caregivers are either unable to work, or struggle to balance work with caring for their children. Our legislation would **make it easier for parents to pursue the right job or opportunity**, especially as we recover from the pandemic recession that has driven tens of thousands of Massachusetts parents, overwhelmingly women, out of the workforce entirely.
- **Promoting racial equity requires investing in access to affordable, high-quality child care for all.** Even before the pandemic, Black and multiracial parents experienced early education and child care-related job disruptions at nearly [twice](#) the rate of white parents.

- Right now, young families have to spend far too much of their income on early education and child care, which means they often don't have enough for other basic needs, like being able to afford a decent house or apartment, paying for school or job training to get a better career, or paying for a car or public transportation to access job opportunities.
- Our legislation would **open the door to economic advancement for families by taking the burden of paying for early education and child care off their shoulders**. Lower-income families would pay nothing for early education and child care, while middle-income families would be able to access care at affordable rates, rather than spending as much as a third – or even half – of their income.
- **Promoting gender equity requires investing in access to affordable, high-quality child care for all**. The burden of early education and child care often falls more on women than men, and is one of the biggest factors limiting women's equity and advancement in the workplace. Ensuring access to reliable early education and child care for all would help women advance in the workplace, get higher wages or secure new jobs.

How would the Common Start legislation help children?

- Failure to address the child care crisis now will take its toll on the next generation: when denied access to high-quality early education and child care, vulnerable children miss out on the learning environments, structure, and stability that help set them up for education success, optimal earnings, and long-term health and wellbeing.
- Providing children with high-quality early education and child care is one of the most effective ways to **further a child's success in grades K-12 and beyond**, which in turn results in higher income, lower likelihood of incarceration, [health benefits](#) and life-long success.
- Ensuring that all children have access to high quality early education and care is how we prevent achievement gaps from widening and health disparities from worsening.
- There are different reasons families depend on early education and child care, especially after- and out-of-school time for older children. High-quality care provides children with the supervision and guidance they need to avoid tempting but unhealthy activities that may negatively impact their development, identity and confidence.
- Our legislation ensures that providers and educators receive the resources they need to provide the highest quality programs. Our legislation uses direct-to-provider funding and raises subsidy reimbursement rates to give providers the financial resources required to provide high-quality care.

How would the Common Start legislation help early education and child care providers and educators?

- The COVID-19 crisis has hammered the finances of early education and child care providers, and many have closed their doors. But even before the pandemic, providers lacked stable funding. **Our legislation would provide a stable source of funding**, setting

providers up to provide the highest quality programming. It would enable new providers to open in geographic areas where early education and child care is currently hard to access, as well as to offer care at non-standard hours.

- Our legislation would ensure that early educators are paid higher wages and receive better benefits and professional development, which will help reduce turnover and improve the overall quality of care.
- The early education and child care workforce is disproportionately women of color and, nationally, [half](#) of early education and child care businesses are owned by people of color. Establishing access to affordable, high-quality early education and child care for all, and ensuring fair pay for those who provide it, are two critical steps toward racial justice.

How would the Common Start legislation help businesses?

- Without access to high-quality early education and child care, parents are unable to return to work at full capacity or at all. As a result, our entire economy suffers.
- Major business groups in Massachusetts [support](#) investments in child care and early childhood education because doing so would **help alleviate one of the biggest problems their employees face, which is finding reliable early education and child care.**
- In a fall 2020 [survey](#), 91 percent of Massachusetts employers reported significant concern about child care and school issues adversely impacting employee engagement and productivity.
- And by preparing children to do well in school, investments in high-quality early education **help contribute to Massachusetts' highly-educated workforce** — our biggest source of economic prosperity.

How would the Common Start legislation help our entire economy?

- Improving access to affordable, high-quality early education and child care is the best investment we can make in Massachusetts' future. Our legislation will help **provide children with an equal start in life, strengthen our economy in a way that also reduces racial, gender, and income inequality in our state, and meet the needs of working parents and the 21st century workforce.**

Is there public support for this legislation?

- Public opinion research demonstrates broad support for a system of affordable high-quality early education and child care. In a poll of 800 Massachusetts voters conducted in early December by Beacon Research for the Common Start Coalition, **64% of Massachusetts voters favored the coalition's legislative proposal, while only 23% opposed it.** Support for the legislation is widespread, with a majority of all regional, gender, age, education, ethnic/racial, and income groups in the poll supporting the proposal.

What exactly does the Common Start Legislation do?

- **The Common Start legislation would establish a system of affordable, high-quality early education and child care** for all Massachusetts families, over a 5-year timeline.
- This system would cover early education and care for children from birth through age 5, as well as after- and out-of-school time for children ages 5-12, and for children with special needs through age 15. The new system would also ensure that a child who ages out during the school year can remain in care through the end of that school year.
- Programs would be available in early education and child care centers, private homes, and schools – the same settings where early education and child care is provided now.
- The bill provides a framework to **increase the scope of public investment in early education and child care** with an incremental roll-out over 5 years that prioritizes the lowest-income, highest-need families.
- The Common Start legislation would **dramatically increase the affordability and quality of early education and child care for all Massachusetts families**. The bill’s framework uses a combination of direct-to-provider funding and ongoing family financial assistance to reduce costs to families while compensating providers for the true cost of providing quality care.
 - **Bedrock Funding:** The legislation would create a new direct-to-provider funding allocation based on provider capacity (not attendance) that directly offsets provider’s operating costs, including higher educator pay.
 - **Family Subsidy:** Once fully implemented, families below 50% of statewide median income (50% of SMI today is \$62,668 for a family of four, or \$42,614 for a single parent with one child) would be able to access early education and child care options for free. Families with incomes above that threshold would pay no more than 7 percent of their total household income.
- Beyond affordability, the legislation also expands access to high quality early education and child care for families of children with disabilities or households that do not speak English.
- The legislation also directs the Department of Early Education and Care to implement new salary guidelines for early educators and a professional development grant program to make systemic investments in the early education workforce.
- The legislation improves the Department of Early Education and Care’s abilities to serve as the central coordinator of early education and child care system by providing it with new sources of data and creating tools for funding vital components of quality care.

Who is the Common Start Coalition?

- The Common Start Coalition is a statewide partnership of organizations, providers, parents, early educators and advocates working together to make high-quality early education and child care affordable and accessible to all Massachusetts families.

- Our goal is to ensure that all families have the care solutions they need and that all children in our Commonwealth have the same, strong start and enter school on a level playing field. We are a diverse coalition including community, faith-based, labor, business, and early education and child care organizations, as well as early educators, parents, individuals, and direct service organizations.
- The coalition, established in 2018, includes [more than 120 organizations](#) across Massachusetts, and is coordinated by a steering committee made up of the Coalition for Social Justice, Greater Boston Legal Services, the Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action (JALSA), the MA Association of Early Education and Care (MADCA), the Massachusetts Business Roundtable, the MA Commission on the Status of Women, Neighborhood Villages, Parenting Journey, Progressive Democrats of Massachusetts, SEIU Local 509, and Strategies for Children.
- The coalition has 6 regional chapters across the state that include local parents, early educators, providers, and other advocates.

How much will this bill cost? How will it be paid for?

- Tens of thousands of women have left the workforce, providers are closing their doors, and employers are suffering due to their employees' struggles with child care. We cannot afford not to fix this crisis.
- The state's existing early education and child care system involves over a billion dollars of state and federal funding, local commitments to funding pre-K programs through the public school system, and a significant amount of private tuition paid by families.
- Funding for the system of affordable, high-quality early education and child care proposed in the legislation would come primarily from the federal and state levels, with additional support from local municipalities (for public pre-K programs) as well as decreased but still meaningful parent fees from middle- and upper-income families.
- While the exact costs would be determined by the state Department of Early Education and Care over the course of the legislation's implementation, we estimate that it will require hundreds of millions of dollars each year in additional funding from the federal and state level, phased in over a 5-year implementation period.
- Early education and child care is a [top priority](#) for the Biden administration and Congress, and we believe now is the time to develop a framework that will allow Massachusetts to use federal funds, along with continued growth in state revenues, to deliver access to affordable, high-quality early education and child care for all.
- The state's FY21 budget established a legislative Early Education and Care Economic Review commission with a goal to "review how childcare programming is funded in the commonwealth and to make recommendations for potential legislative changes in funding and related policies as the commission deems appropriate." We look forward to the commission's review as momentum builds for state action to boost investment in early education and child care.

- While significant upfront investment is necessary to achieve the system we envision, over the long term, investments in high-quality early education and child care largely [pay for themselves](#). By improving education and life outcomes for children, spending on high-quality early education and child care reduces the need for future government spending on special education, grade repetition, healthcare, and incarceration. By improving workforce participation rates among parents and (over the long term) children, investments in high-quality early education and child care also lead to increased economic growth and additional tax revenue.

How would Bedrock Funding promote higher-quality early education and child care? What providers would be eligible to receive it?

- All licensed programs in the Commonwealth would be eligible to apply for Bedrock Funding. To receive Bedrock Funding, providers would be required to enter into and comply with contractual agreements with the Department of Early Education and Care concerning access, quality, and other terms as determined by the department.
- Providers receiving Bedrock Funding would need to demonstrate service to their local community's needs by allowing the enrollment of children using subsidies to pay for early education and care. Past acceptance of subsidies would not be a requirement for eligibility for Bedrock Funding, but providers that accept bedrock funding could not deny enrollment placements to children using subsidies.
- To ensure that additional public funding results in increased salaries and benefits for early educators, providers receiving Bedrock Funding would need to comply with new state guidelines on educator pay and benefits.
- Providers would need to report key data points to the Department of Early Education and Care to ensure that the department is able to effectively administer the system of early education and care.

How is the Common Start Coalition funded?

- Much of the coalition's organizing and policy work is done by its member organizations; members of the steering committee and other coalition members have contributed substantial in-kind work.
- The Coalition for Social Justice, the national Early Childhood Funders Collaborative, and the Commonwealth Children's Fund have all contributed funding to support additional costs including regional organizing, policy development, polling, and communications.