Foundations for Flourishing Futures

A Look Ahead for Young Children and Families

In a flourishing society,

every person would have strong foundations on which they could build a fulfilling life and determine their own path.

They would have full and equitable access to high-quality education, as well as to artistic and cultural assets; would be mentally, physically and spiritually well; would have the ability to develop strong relationships and to contribute to their community and would enjoy personal and family stability. Research across disciplines shows that, while everyone needs these opportunities throughout their lives, having them in the first eight years of life is particularly essential. Even so, society has not yet delivered on its fundamental promises of equity, abundant opportunity and universal dignity for every young child and all families.

Leaders committed to improving the lives of young children and their families have worked tirelessly on these issues for decades. By some measures, realizing the goal of flourishing childhood and family life seems within reach. However, other data show that much work remains.

State spending on preschool more than doubled between 2002 and 2017,[4] while federal child care subsidies increased more in 2018 than in any previous year.[5]

More than 80 percent of center-based educators who care for and teach infants and toddlers earn less than $15 per hour.[6]

The amount of time that fathers spend with their children has tripled over the last 50 years, and the time that mothers spend with their children has also increased since the 1960s.[10]

Paying for child care continues to be problematic for many families.[11]

In 2018, funding for the federal Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) was extended through fiscal year 2023.[1]

Black and Hispanic children continue to be less likely than White or Asian children to enjoy very good or excellent health[2] and are more likely to have experienced an adverse childhood event.[3]

As supports for new parents have strengthened, attention to postpartum depression has increased,[7] and a new drug to treat it was recently approved by the FDA.[8]

The number of children whose parents lack secure employment has decreased since 2010.[12]

For most working people, the purchasing power of wages has been stagnant for the past 40 years.[13]

Depression and general anxiety disorders among children have increased dramatically over the past half-century.[9]

The multifaceted opportunities and challenges that these data points reflect will demand creative, cross-disciplinary action beyond the boundaries of what have traditionally been considered children's issues. As the organizations, communities and individuals that aim to serve young children and their families work to continue progress and to address persistent gaps, they must stay aware of changes happening in the broader environment. Attending to the five domains below and to emerging issues within them will be critical to helping young children and their families flourish over the next decade.

» **Health by the Numbers:** Emerging technologies and new understandings of community-level health are reshaping how young children's and families' well-being are measured and supported.

» **Learning in Flux:** Social and economic uncertainty and new research into the importance of relationships are influencing approaches to early learning.

» **The Autonomy Gaps:** New notions about young children's autonomy, along with increasing inequity, are creating cultural and generational tensions and are widening disparities among children's access to free expression.

» **Stretched Social Fabric:** Shifting support structures and information sources are changing the ways in which increasingly diverse families navigate and access resources.

» **Care at the Core:** New economic and employment realities and the aging of the population are creating tensions related to caregiving structures and values.

These shifts are increasing the urgency of rethinking programs, practices, policies and systems and are even calling into question the underlying social values and cultural norms related to the support of young children and their families. Given how important the early years of life are for individual development and for our social fabric, we owe it to young children, their families and society to grapple proactively with change and to examine critically the opportunities and challenges that it presents.

Amid such change, timeless needs will remain. No matter what the future holds, children need love, support, stability and dignity. However, our collective ability to meet those needs fully and equitably will be hampered without urgent attention to the changing contexts in which young children and their families live. To work toward a society in which every young child and all families can flourish, we need to broaden our lines of inquiry, embrace complexity and take action with the future in mind.

Using This Forecast

This section provides guidance on what to expect from this forecast, background on how it was created and suggestions for approaching future-related content.

WHAT IS THIS FORECAST AND WHO IS IT FOR?

This ten-year forecast presents a range of possibilities for the futures of young children and their families. It is addressed to a broad range of critical stakeholders, including, but not limited, to:

» Leaders, advocates and thought leaders in fields fostering young children's development and well-being, as well as their families' supports and well-being

» Policymakers working in or adjacent to areas affecting young children and their families

» Innovators and entrepreneurs building ventures focused on meeting the needs of young children and their families

» Professionals and organizations working for or with young children and their families or impacting the lives of young children and their families through their policies and practices

In presenting future possibilities, this forecast explores five **domains**, or topic areas. Each domain's section:

» Describes the domain

» Identifies two **emerging issues** that could have major impacts on young children and their families over the next decade

» Provides present-day **examples** of those emerging issues

» Illustrates three distinct **artifacts from the future**, which are objects, places, practices, policies or roles that could exist in ten years' time

» Outlines **issues to watch** as stakeholders reflect and plan for action

» Poses **questions to guide next steps** in order to help readers consider changes on the horizon in their own contexts

The forecast closes with **questions to guide reflection** and a section that raises cross-cutting **insights and implications** intended to support stakeholders in considering their next steps in taking action to support the flourishing of every young child and all families.

HOW WAS THIS FORECAST CREATED?

This forecast was created using strategic foresight methodologies. Strategic foresight is a discipline that investigates and raises possibilities for the future and supports stakeholders in using those possibilities to chart an informed path forward. Generally, the process of imagining future possibilities requires thinking beyond present-day plausibility, examining assumptions about what the future might hold, exploring current trajectories and considering alternative futures using both data and creativity. More specifically, this forecast was created using the methodologies listed below.

» Scanning for trends and signals of change in society, technology, the economy, the environment and politics

» Identifying key domains affecting young children and their families

» Developing a set of future possibilities, in this case artifacts from the future, that extrapolate from what is happening today to what the next frontier of each key domain might be

» Analyzing what those future possibilities might mean for individual children, for families, for communities and for society

HOW SHOULD I READ THIS FORECAST?

Look from the outside in. Many of the social, technological, economic and political changes that are currently underway are not typically thought of as being children's issues, even though they could significantly affect young children, their families and their futures. This forecast focuses on those broader changes; therefore, some critical issues on which you currently work may not be addressed. As you read, consider how these broader changes might affect you and those you serve.

Set aside linear thinking. The future does not unfold in a clear, predictable or linear way. For that reason, the possibilities presented in this forecast offer glimpses of many possible futures that could emerge; they do not together create a single story. Considering various combinations of future possibilities and trajectories of change can offer a fuller sense of what might be possible.

Remember that the artifacts from the future represent possibilities, not preferences. Some of the possibilities presented in this forecast may seem preferable; others, cautionary. That range of possibility is by design and is meant to help you consider which futures you might want to enable and which futures you might want to prevent.

Examine your assumptions and mental models. Each of us carries a set of assumptions about how the world works, along with a set of frames through which we understand and experience it. These perspectives are necessary and valuable. However, they are not fixed. As you read, reflect on the underlying beliefs that you bring to the forecast's content and ask yourself whether they can or should shift to support your work on behalf of young children and their families.

Use your context to inform your processing of the material. The content presented in this forecast is one input into your own exploration of the future. The emotional reactions, ideas and questions that arise as you read represent other valuable sources of insight. Both the context in which you work and your own values will inform how you interpret the forecast and which elements are most useful to you. Allow your individual takeaways to inform your own next steps.

A NOTE ABOUT EQUITY

Young children often experience the harmful effects of inequity more intensely than other groups do. They can find themselves in contact with systems that are structurally discriminatory based on race, gender, class and ability level. Often, those systems are intended to help children but have been designed in ways that perpetuate marginalization and inequity. This forecast does not assume that the fundamental challenges of equity will be solved in ten years' time. In fact, some of the future possibilities that it presents reflect deeper inequity than exists today because a more unequal society is one future that we could face. For precisely that reason, grappling with the widest range of possibilities you can and examining them in light of your own commitment to equity can help you decide how you might want to shape the future so that every young child and all families can flourish.

Health by the Numbers

Emerging technologies and new understandings of community-level health are reshaping how young children's and families' well-being are measured and supported.
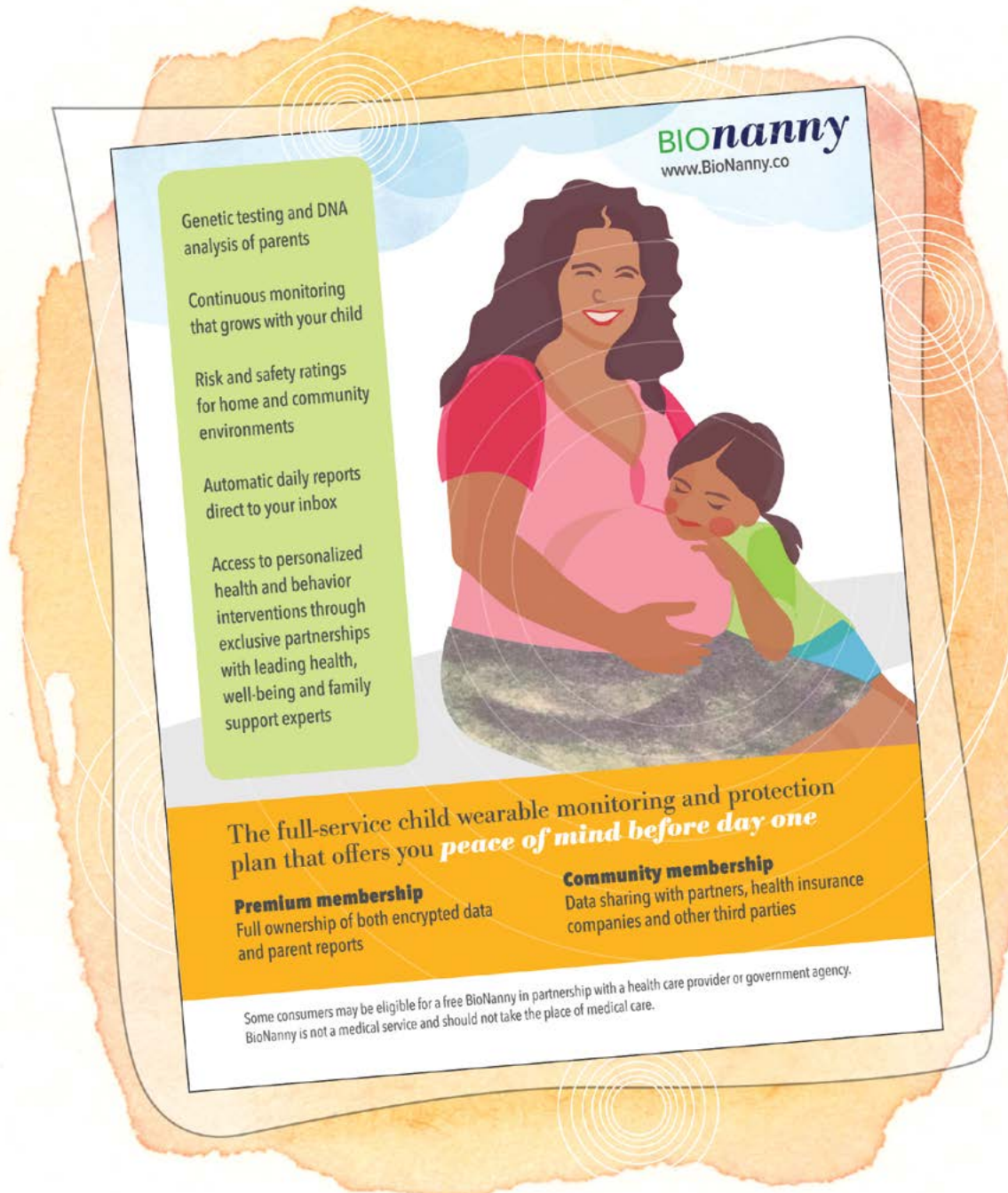
Efforts to support young children's health and well-being have traditionally focused on markers such as health insurance rates, vaccination rates and developmental milestones. While those measures remain relevant, increasing interest in using data to solve big problems and the realization that disease management has not adequately improved health outcomes are changing approaches to supporting young children's and families' health and well-being. These insights are leading more and more people to look to **individualized health data tracking through technology** and are also leading the health care field to shift its focus to **prevention and population-level health**.

» The Owlet Smart Sock 2 allows parents to monitor babies' heart rates and oxygen levels while they sleep,[14] though the accuracy of its readings is a source of debate.[15]

» The DNA kit company, Orig3n, offers a child development test focused on identifying young children's predisposition to certain sports, eating habits, sleeping behavior and learning abilities.[16]

» California named its first statewide surgeon general, choosing a doctor whose experience and priorities center on childhood trauma, toxic stress and other mental health issues.[17]

» The Family Treatment Court in Montgomery County, Ohio, combines drug and mental-health treatment with counseling to decrease the amount of time that children spend in foster care.[18]

The full-service child wearable monitoring and protection plan that offers you *peace of mind before day one*

Genetic testing and DNA analysis of parents

Continuous monitoring that grows with your child

Risk and safety ratings for home and community environments

Automatic daily reports direct to your inbox

Access to personalized health and behavior interventions through exclusive partnerships with leading health, well-being and family support experts

BIO*nanny*
www.BioNanny.co

Premium membership
Full ownership of both encrypted data and parent reports

Community membership
Data sharing with partners, health insurance companies and other third parties

Some consumers may be eligible for a free BioNanny in partnership with a health care provider or government agency. BioNanny is not a medical service and should not take the place of medical care.

BioNanny: Smart Health Accessory

BioNanny is a smart accessory for expectant mothers, infants and children that collects and processes data using machine learning and predictive analytics. Increased interest in personalized health data for children is driving individual sales, particularly for more affluent parents who can afford the level of privacy offered by the more expensive premium membership. Some insurance companies and public agencies now require parents to use the tool and to share the data; families in vulnerable socio-economic situations claim that the data are being used to restrict benefits. In turn, health care specialists have expressed concerns about the impacts of constant alerts on new and expectant parents' mental health, the lack of transparency in the creation of reports and the identification of interventions, and the overall utility of the amount of information that BioNanny provides.

Child-Centered Communities Scorecard: Measuring Child and Community Well-Being

Greenhaven is one of 200 communities across the United States that participates in the voluntary Child-Centered Communities Scorecard, a program that uses Census; American Community Survey; and real-time, voluntary, specialized survey data to assess young children and families' health and well-being. In addition to measuring traditional markers such as vaccination, asthma and physical activity rates; environmental quality; and prenatal and maternal health ratings, the scorecard includes new indices intended to provide a more nuanced understanding of young children's and families' health and well-being. Some communities, especially rural ones, are using the scorecard not only to assess their own policies and programs, but also to attract employers and young families. However, communities with high numbers of noncitizen children and families cannot rely on their scorecards due to noncitizens' underrepresentation in the 2020 Census as a result of anti-immigrant rhetoric.

Child-Centered Communities Scorecard

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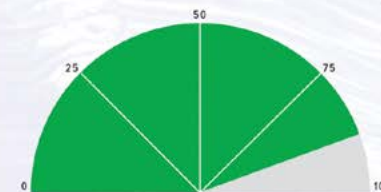
Child Care Flexibility
How accessible is child care for families, regardless of their schedules?
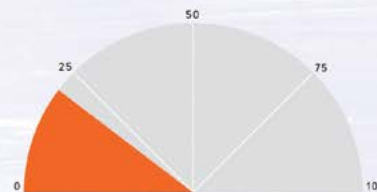
Status: **Developing**

Family Support Index
How timely, fair, respectful and efficient are the support resources that families access?

Status: **Commendable**

Relational Health Index
How high-quality are the relationships and interactions between children and caregivers and between parents and community networks?

Status: **Commendable**

Access to Cultural and Artistic Assets
How convenient is access to diverse, high-quality cultural and artistic assets, and how frequently do families use them?

Status: **Typical**

Fairview County Employment

Job Opportunities

Health and Planning Department ⌄

Pediatric Urban Designer

Job Type: Full-time
Location: Fairview
Department: Health and Planning
Job Number: PedUDA
Closing: 6/20/2029 4:30 Central

Summary
Fairview County seeks a Pediatric Urban Designer to join its Health and Planning Departments. The ideal candidate will have an M.D.; five-to-seven years'

experience working with children and families in a clinical setting (experience working with underserved populations preferred); and a strong research or academic background in the social determinants of health, urban design and/or city planning. This role will ensure that Fairview County is incorporating best and innovative practices for child development into its planning and city design activities.

Learn about the benefits for this position

See FAQ about the recruiting process

Tags: Pediatric, medicine, doctor, children, planning, urban, designer

Apply >

Pediatric Urban Designer: A New Role for Community Health

As Fairview County started to become more dense, diverse and technologically connected, leaders began to see that young children's and families' needs were not always being considered in planning decisions. The county created this role to bridge the gaps between the theoretical understandings of young children's development and well-being and the practical implications of constructing, remodeling or maintaining spaces in ways that support them. The pediatric urban designer is expected to be part of county decisions and planning around transportation, recreation, economic development and other domains. The city hopes that the use of data-informed decision-making and best practices will improve child and family health and well-being and that it will also benefit residents of all ages. However, some members of the hiring committee, along with parent groups, have expressed concern that the role might lead Fairview to endorse or advance specific parenting styles or limit important economic development.

Issues to Watch

Recognize the opportunities and challenges that come with abundant data. Access to more and increasingly specialized data has the potential to help prevent health issues and to empower parents, caregivers and health professionals to take action on behalf of children's health. However, more data does not always equal better insight into how to respond to health needs, either at the individual or the societal level. That is particularly true when technology analyzes that data in ways that are not completely transparent, resulting in potentially misleading, biased or incomplete conclusions. Stakeholders should pay careful consideration to who owns the data, who can access them, the types of data being collected in relation to the problems that are trying to be solved and even how the questions and problem statements are worded.

How might stakeholders usefully and equitably incorporate new health data collection and analysis tools to ensure that the tools are pursuing optimal outcomes?

Explore the next frontiers of well-being measurement. Advances in technology and increased interest in taking a broader view of health and well-being provide unique opportunities to explore new possibilities in what is measured and how. While many of today's traditional measures of health and well-being remain essential to track and pursue, many of them are also lagging indicators, are deficit-based or offer an incomplete picture of either the causes of health issues or possible interventions. Cross-sector collaborations should explore the next frontier of those measures, with the aim of adopting more human-centered, asset-based and actionable ones.

How might stakeholders explore new approaches to evaluating well-being, including factors that are essential to young children's and families' health but which are difficult to quantify?

Consider how rapid innovation could affect the ability to build consensus. As more products flood the market, as new approaches become possible and as new understandings of health and well-being emerge, traditional research cycles and scientific consensus-building processes may struggle to keep up. This reality may affect how healthcare and other fields are able to agree upon and communicate best practices. In turn, parents and others who support children could struggle to access and use fact-checked information, potentially shaking trust in the expertise of health care and other professionals. New processes for building understanding among experts and the public will be needed to respond to this new reality.

How might stakeholders establish trusted, evidence-based health and well-being practices in an increasingly complex and rapidly changing environment?

Learning in Flux

Social and economic uncertainty and new research into the importance of relationships are influencing approaches to early learning.

The purposes and structures of early learning have long been diverse and a point of debate among stakeholders, particularly in the absence of a formal system or consistent funding streams. However, persistent achievement gaps, significant uncertainty about the world that children will encounter and new research on the supportive power of relationships are heightening the urgency of identifying the best approaches to early learning. Some new approaches are aiming to **optimize children's learning experiences** with a focus on work and life preparation, while others are seeking to **organize early learning programs around concepts of relational health**.

» **More than 80 percent of teachers believe that children should learn to read in kindergarten, up from 30 percent in 1998,[19] demonstrating a shift toward more skills-based early learning approaches among some stakeholders.**

» **The Waterford UPSTART program is a kindergarten readiness program that provides free "computer-adaptive instruction at home alongside personalized support from Family Education Liaisons" to low-income families[20] and is promoted by some as an alternative to traditional pre-kindergarten.**

» **El Centro de la Raza provides comprehensive programs and services to Seattle's Latino community, including a child development center that provides culturally relevant and justice-oriented educational programming for children from 15 months to 12 years of age and a home visiting program for parents.[21] The organization has been highlighted by Grantmakers in Health as a positive example of supporting early relational health.[22]**

» **The Saul Zaentz Early Education Initiative at the Harvard Graduate School of Education has developed a professional learning experience focused on supporting early education leaders, teachers, administrators and coaches in understanding and incorporating the "science of human interactions" in early learning environments.[23]**

LearnTogether: Digital Preschool on the Rise

Many states now require four-year-olds to engage with LearnTogether, a free, online preschool curriculum. The program requires participants to interact with the platform for at least twenty minutes per day unless they are enrolled in an approved in-person early learning environment. The mandatory curriculum focuses on early literacy and can be completed anywhere on any connected device. Parents, child care providers and other caregivers now use the compulsory curriculum, though some say that they have not received appropriate guidance on how best to support children in using the program. State legislators collaborated to establish this program in an effort to make preschool more accessible to everyone. Although its results have shown gains in literacy and early learning access, its detractors worry that it is of lower quality than many in-person experiences, that its implementation varies widely and that it increases screen exposure for young children.
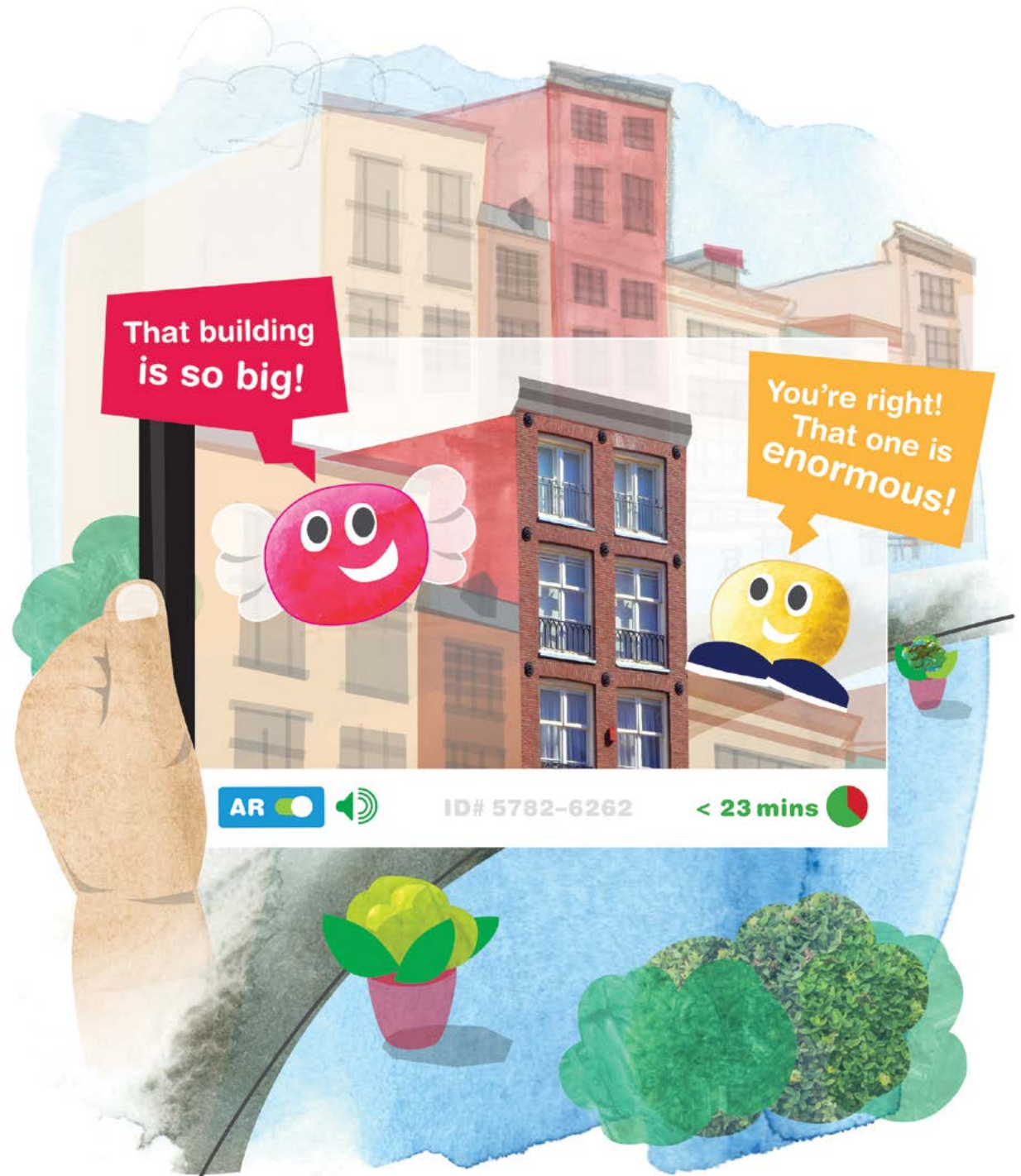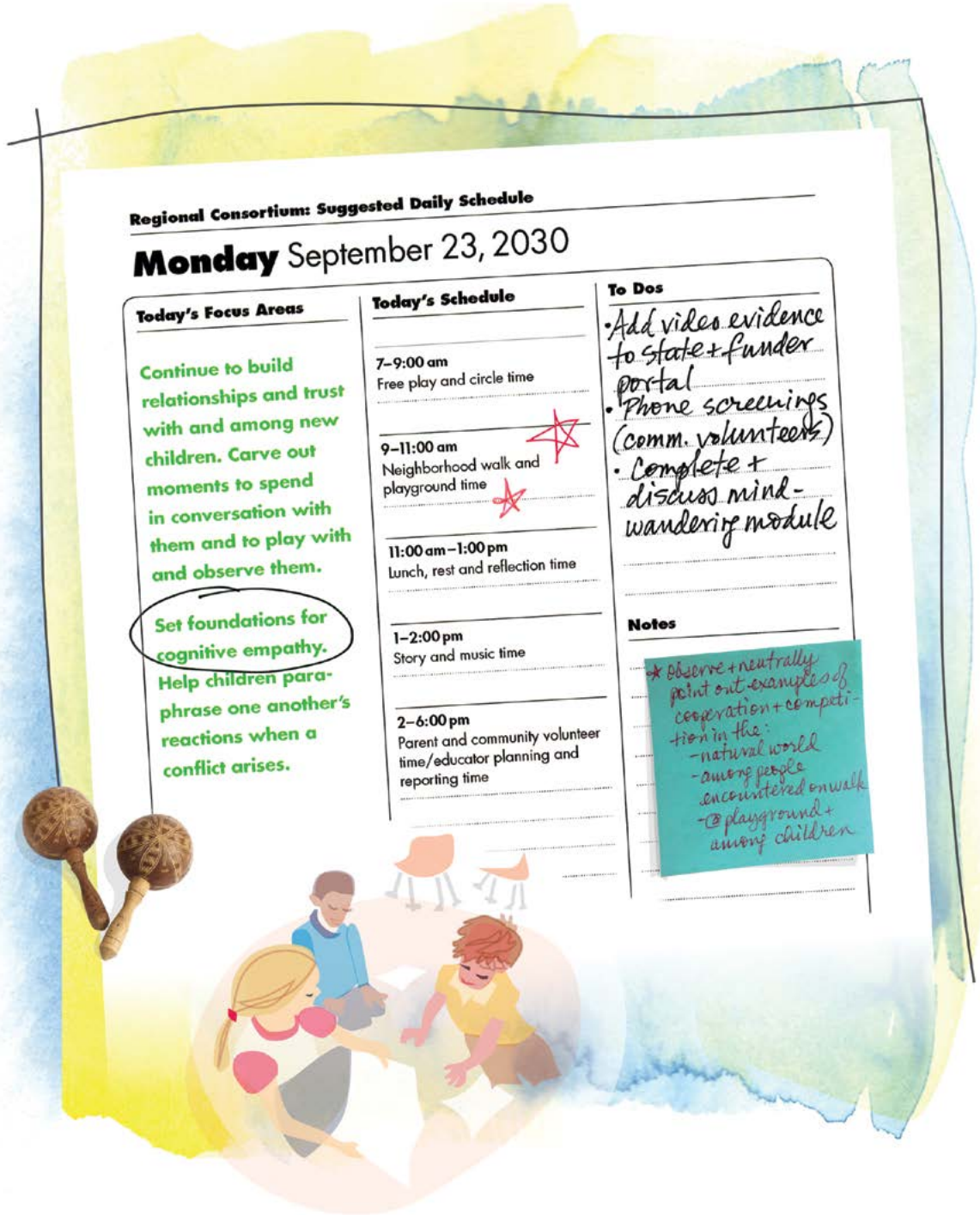
Code4Tots: Optimized Play

Code4Tots centers provide personalized learning to four-year-old children through playful weekly one-hour experiences that are customized carefully by neuroeducators. Their goal is to systematize the non-linear learning process of young children to improve their economic opportunities in the long term. Every room is equipped with advanced monitoring technology to track a child's cognitive development. To provide rigorous interpretations of the correlation between Code4Tots's optimized play curriculum and the brain waves generated, each child is assessed in isolation. While the program has proven to be a success for some participants, it has also been accused of engineering automatons with very poor relational health and of failing to foster secure attachment. Parents who do not fully support this approach have been questioning the use of neuroscience to advance technical skills to the exclusion of social and emotional skills. They have also been questioning the service providers' claims to be experts in supporting young children's academic growth.
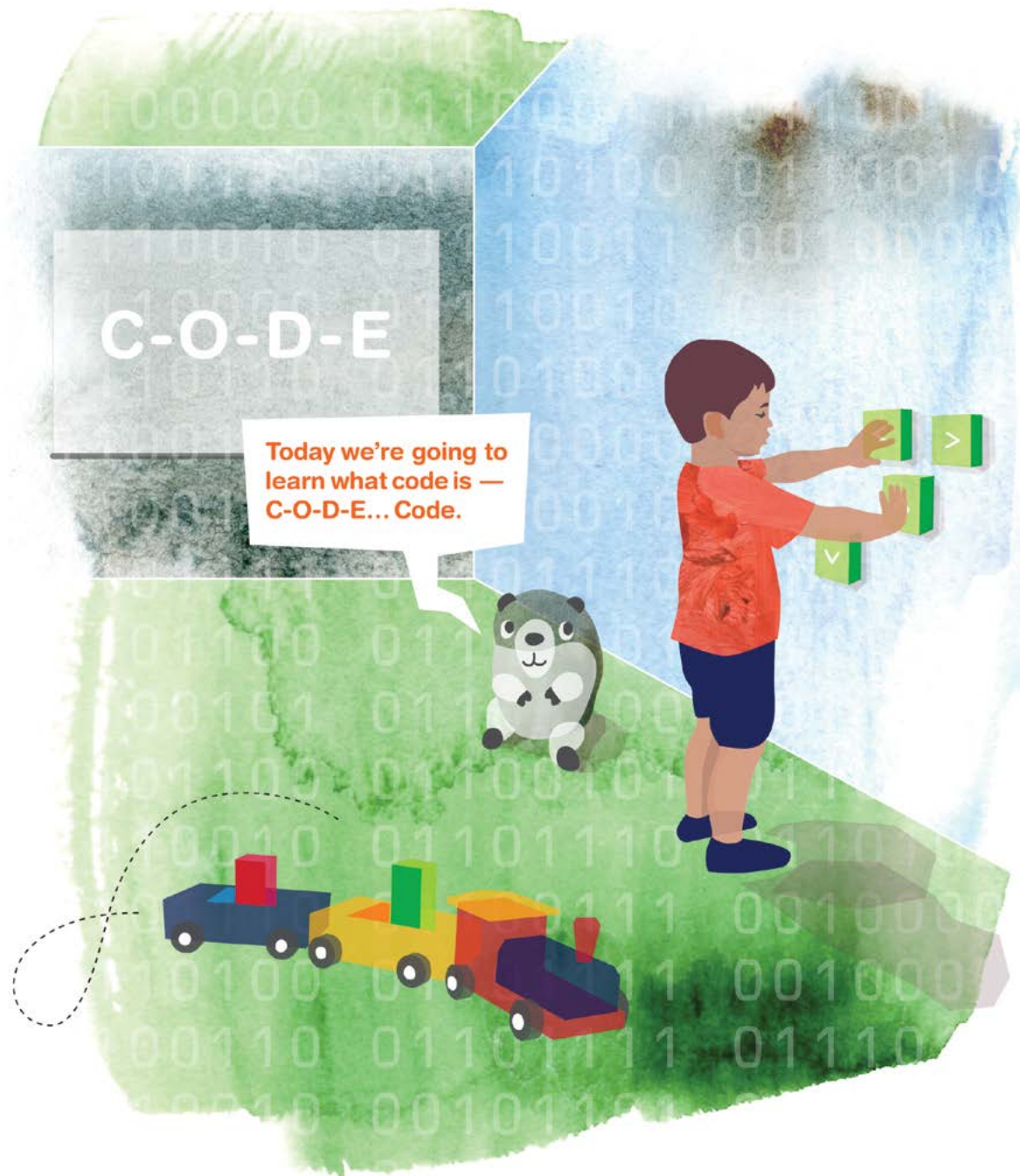
Flexible Early Learning Systems: Relationships in Context

A neighborhood and family resource center receives daily suggested schedules and resources from the regional consortium to which it belongs. Based on research into the importance of relationships as critical foundations for early literacy, numeracy and other academic and life skills, early learning professionals now use evidence-based approaches to focus many of their efforts on helping young children develop habits and skills related to healthy relationship building. Due to recognition that strong relationships can be built in a variety of settings, flexibility around what counts as an early learning environment has increased, as have funding and professional supports. Government policy has enabled local cohorts of early learning professionals, organizations and communities to design their programs in the context of children's and communities' needs. Accountability measures have been streamlined with a wide range of providers in mind, leading some experts and parents to voice concerns about the quality and consistency of implementation.

Regional Consortium: Suggested Daily Schedule

Monday September 23, 2030

Today's Focus Areas

Continue to build relationships and trust with and among new children. Carve out moments to spend in conversation with them and to play with and observe them.

Set foundations for cognitive empathy. Help children paraphrase one another's reactions when a conflict arises.

Today's Schedule

7–9:00 am
Free play and circle time

9–11:00 am
Neighborhood walk and playground time

11:00 am–1:00 pm
Lunch, rest and reflection time

1–2:00 pm
Story and music time

2–6:00 pm
Parent and community volunteer time/educator planning and reporting time

To Dos

• Add video evidence to state + funder portal
• Phone screenings (comm. volunteers)
• Complete + discuss mind-wandering module

Notes

* observe + neutrally point out examples of cooperation + competition in the:
  – natural world
  – among people encountered on walk
  – @ playground + among children

Issues to Watch

Address disparities in definitions of quality. As both learning environments and children's needs diversify, debate about what a high-quality early learning environment looks like will continue. Even though play- and relationship-based environments are widely considered to be of superior quality, persistent achievement gaps and anxiety about the future of learning and work can make those priorities feel like luxuries compared to more directly academic and outcome-focused approaches to learning. A focus on school readiness and future preparation can cause some learning experiences for young children – particularly for children of color, children with special needs and low-income children – to be developmentally inappropriate. Stakeholders should carefully consider what they deem to be high-quality early learning environments and whether the definition applies to all children. As they do so, they should surface biases and assumptions that may some children to have lower-quality experiences despite best people's intentions.

How might stakeholders create dignified and self-affirming early learning experiences for all children?

Balance universal access and flexible approaches. Many barriers stand in the way of achieving the goal of universal access to high-quality early learning. Those include lack of funding, low educator pay and inconsistent policy, among others. The temptation to hope for a standardized federal early learning system is strong. However, as K-12 and other systems demonstrate, the existence of a single system does not ensure positive outcomes or adequate resources and could actually constrain providers' ability to meet the needs of every child. Stakeholders should consider how to provide universal access to early learning and how to create cultures of quality while also allowing for flexible, responsive and inclusive structures, which are often lacking in large systems.

How might stakeholders extend their imaginations about what a universal early learning system might look like?

Prioritize shared experiences across boundaries. As more early learning models appear and as families become increasingly segregated by race, income and worldviews, the opportunities for children to share experiences and to develop relationships across those boundaries are dwindling. In addition to limiting the richness of children's interactions, the lack of cross-group encounters and relationships has the potential to affect social cohesion and awareness. Already, political polarization and a lack of shared cultural and lived experiences seem to be wearing away at the social fabric. Because the first eight years of life are foundational to people's ability to build meaningful relationships and in establishing norms that will influence children into adulthood, early learning environments have a unique opportunity to help children build connections across traditional boundaries.

How might stakeholders cultivate opportunities for equitable, shared experiences for young children and their families within a diversifying early learning landscape?

The Autonomy Gaps

New notions about young children's autonomy, along with increasing inequity, are creating cultural and generational tensions and are widening disparities among children's access to free expression.

The concept of childhood is socially constructed and has shifted over time. Childhood has become in recent decades a more distinct phase of life with its own structures and norms, and young children's time and physical movements have become accordingly more directed.[24] However, shifting social expectations and parenting choices are leading to more autonomy for young children. As such, more and more young children are finding the space to develop and express their own opinions, to set their own boundaries about their bodies,[25] to define their own identities[26] and to explore their physical[27] and digital worlds more freely. While many people see these shifts as representing positive developments, others perceive them as clashing with their beliefs, cultural and religious traditions, and preferences. This discord is leading to **cultural and generational tensions about the role of children in society** and the ongoing redefinition of childhood. Moreover, openly speaking one's mind and moving unencumbered through the world are not universally accessible freedoms. Increasing income inequality, growing neighborhood and school segregation, ongoing disparities in access to enrichment opportunities and persistent racial biases are **widening the gap between children who have relative freedom and those who do not**.

» Children's literature is increasingly taking a more activist tone, introducing even young children to current social issues.[28]

» In 2019, California updated its Health Education Curriculum Framework, which provides guidance on teaching about a range of health issues from kindergarten through 12th grade. Its updated sex education suggestions, which include material on gender identity and consent, have caused controversy among some who say that those topics are not appropriate for young children.[29]

» Utah passed a law that protects parents from being charged with neglect if their children are unsupervised in certain circumstances. However, some argue that the law is not sufficiently specific to protect poor parents and parents of color, who are more likely than more affluent and white parents to be reported and investigated for neglect.[30]

» A 2016 study from the Yale Child Study Center found evidence that implicit bias affected how early learning educators disciplined students, with teachers showing "a tendency to more closely observe black students, and especially boys, when challenging behaviors are expected."[31]

InviSafe: "Free" to Roam

Every day, more parents, caregivers and neighborhood groups are installing virtual perimeters. Equipped with facial recognition and distance measurement software, these sensors are securely anchored to the ground around the home or neighborhood. They give caregivers the peace of mind to carry out other tasks while children experience the joys of apparent independence. Some children have incorporated these digital fences into their games, while others have been finding ways to subvert the tracking, sometimes with the help of adults who believe that the fences offer only an illusion of freedom. Though the virtual perimeters were created for individual family use, some local police and school safety officers have started requesting access to the data that they collect. In the name of safety, these groups have also been installing digital fences in certain areas – primarily in low-income communities of color – leading those communities and their advocates to protest or seek bans on the use of the fences.
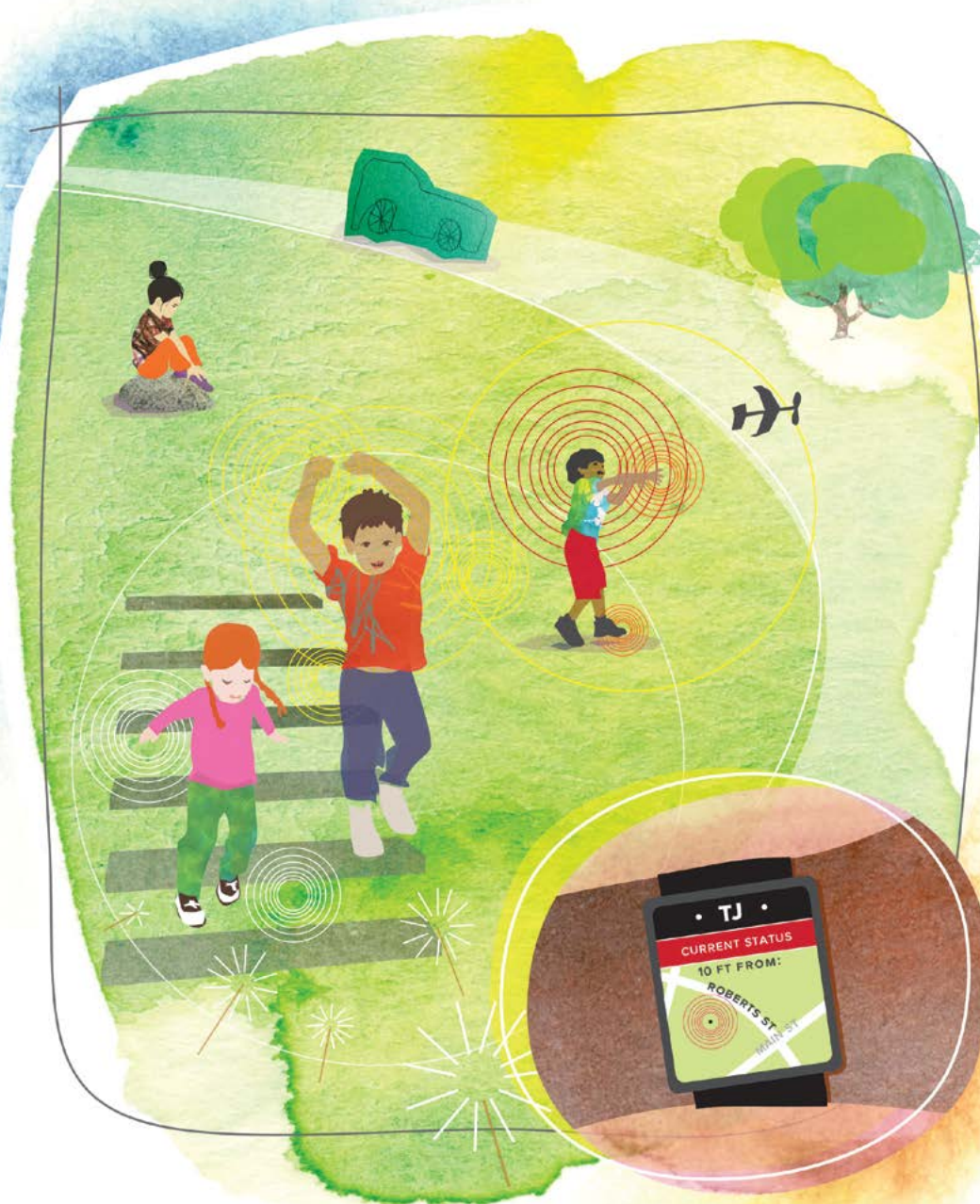
Children's Councils: Civic Engagement in the Early Years

Established in 2020, the first children's council was formed to promote civic engagement and awareness among five-to-eight-year-olds and to ensure that children's needs and voices were considered in public decisions. Now, more than 500 councils are active; they are a legal subdivision of local governments, and public officials are required to integrate them into their policymaking processes. After receiving parental permission to participate, children engage with issues that are currently affecting their lives, such as education policy debates, as well as with issues that will affect them in the future, such as climate change. Libraries, schools and museums have created collections of resources to support children's understanding of the issues. Despite the councils' growth, disparities among families', schools' and neighborhoods' capacity to support children's participation have caused the councils to be less racially and economically diverse than hoped. In addition, some communities have blocked their creation, often with the support of their longtime public officials, because they do not think that young children should be involved in adult spheres or engage with controversial social issues.

Attention Money: Attention as Currency

Attention Money (AM) was established to create an incentive for young children to watch advertisements at a time when those have become largely obsolete. With AM, young children can control when to enable advertisements. If they do, they are rewarded with AM that they can spend on buying merchandise shown in, or related to, their favorite shows. AM founders claim that the system helps young children learn financial responsibility and can help parents understand how their children are spending time in digital environments. Detractors claim that AM is nothing more than predatory surveillance that tracks young children's digital habits for commercial purposes. Since families that can afford to skip the ads have little incentive to use AM in place of traditional currencies, the advertising has disproportionally targeted lower-income children. In fact, a study reported that lower-income black and Hispanic children using the AM advertising system were being exposed to more junk food promotions than their white counterparts.

Issues to Watch

Recognize the unintended consequences of efforts to increase autonomy. The move to increase respect for young children's voices and needs has the potential to reframe views on children's role in society, positioning them as the full members of society that they are. However, if efforts aimed at increasing young children's autonomy are not crafted with equity in mind, they risk further marginalizing some children. For example, calls to allow children to be "free range" often do not acknowledge that unsupervised children of color may be seen as a threat or as being neglected. Similarly, the admiration elicited by white children's activity in civic spaces is not always extended to children of color, who may be treated as acting defiant when they engage. As discussion of how to offer appropriate levels of autonomy for young children continues, these disparities in their perception and treatment should be addressed.

How might stakeholders examine their values related to young children's autonomy and address inequities in how different children are perceived?

Anticipate how over-monitoring could evolve. Both parents and children's advocates have begun to question more seriously the overscheduling of children's time and to recognize that the fear of children's independent exploration may be misplaced. However, as young children begin to participate more in digital experiences and as those experiences evolve, continuous tracking of children's online habits and movements could threaten their privacy and expose them to new types of over-monitoring by technology companies and by other commercial interests. Stakeholders should consider how much digital autonomy young children should have and how data created by children's digital activity should be collected and used. Though regulations exist and though technology companies claim to be working to improve the safety and privacy of digital environments for children, those rules and efforts may not keep up with new tools and platforms – or with new norms for young children's technology use.

How might stakeholders examine critically their preferences for children's digital autonomy and prepare for emerging technological developments?

Develop frameworks for young children to engage in new spheres. As young children become more involved in decisions at the social, community and commercial levels, stakeholders will need to address questions of developmental appropriateness and find new ways to help children navigate those new terrains. These demands will require parents, caregivers, educators and children's advocates to engage in new types of frank conversations with young children and to consider what decisions young children are developmentally equipped to make. As has been the case throughout history, such questions will have a multitude of answers. These answers will influence where and when children are expected to exercise voice and choice, as well as what structures adults put in place around children's physical, digital and cognitive safety and freedom. The key will be to revisit these big questions about children's agency and autonomy repeatedly while considering both necessary boundaries and opportunities to loosen restrictions.

How might stakeholders support young children in exercising age-appropriate voice and choice?

Stretched Social Fabric

Shifting support structures and information sources are changing the ways in which increasingly diverse families navigate and access resources.

Over time, demographic, economic and cultural changes have slowly but steadily reshaped the structures and definitions of family: single parenthood, double-income households and same-sex parenthood have all become commonplace. Most family supports are not oriented to those families' needs today and are at risk of falling further behind. Factors contributing to this risk include the continued diversification of family configurations and support structures; declining use of community resources such as libraries,[32] playgrounds[33] and places of worship;[34] and declining trust in the institutions that provide social infrastructure.[35] To fill such gaps, some **families are self-organizing their own solutions**, while **governments and other traditional institutions are increasingly recognizing the need to prioritize families and children** and to meet their growing needs around connection, recreation, support and social capital.

> » **Millennial parents say that digital communities such as online forums and social networks are among their top parental resources and influences.**[36]

> » **San Diego in 2019 approved an updated "placemaking law" that streamlines the process for community groups to create their own parklets and meeting places in parking lots and intersections.**[37]

> » **Four states and the District of Columbia enacted paid family leave laws between 2014 and 2018.**[38] **Previously, only California and New Jersey had policies in place; those laws were enacted in 2002 and 2008, respectively.**[39]

> » **Major political candidates**[40] **and elected officials**[41] **have recently put forward wide-ranging proposals to expand access to family leave, preschool and other family supports.**

Early Growing: Universal Home Visiting

The success of home visiting programs at improving outcomes for babies and families, particularly those at risk of health issues or struggling with poverty, substance abuse or lack of support, has led to the establishment of Early Growing, a universal home visiting program that has become a benefit for all new parents. No matter their birth setting or health insurance status, parents are given the option of selecting a home visiting provider or being assigned one during standard postpartum care. All new parents receive at least two in-person visits and a telephone or digital check-in; some are offered additional follow-up visits based on need. Government agencies, hospitals and nonprofits run most of the home visiting programs, and parents can select the area of expertise of their certified support provider. Given increased skepticism about both public and private institutions, these providers have had to find creative solutions for building trust with parents.

Co-Parenting Agreement: The New Blended Family

Two couples, one a married same-sex couple and one a cohabitating heterosexual couple, along with a friend who served as a sperm donor to the first couple, entered into an agreement to raise two biological and two foster-to-adopt children together. These five adults living in two households share physical custody and financial responsibility as co-parents. These types of arrangements are becoming increasingly common as people continue to want children but find traditional family arrangements unsustainable or inaccessible to them. Despite its relative affluence, this family faces hurdles to being fully recognized and supported. Legal and social legitimacy is even more elusive for nontraditional families with less privilege. For instance, public and immigration benefits remain available only to those dependents who can prove a family relationship through lineage or marriage. Schools, health care providers, faith communities, child development researchers and courts are struggling to keep up with the dynamics emerging from new types of family configurations.

Neighborhome: PlugIn Housing as a Gateway to Care Solutions

Thanks to state and federal incentives aimed at addressing acute housing shortages and affordability issues, small annex housing that can be added onto existing residential and previously unused properties has become mainstream in many places. Buyers select features and needs and can then choose among different layout and cost options. After the digital model has been approved, the company schedules the deployment of its 3D printing equipment along with local contractors. Families that were already living multi-generationally now have more options, and subsidies and tax credits are making multigenerational living more appealing to others. Some families are using the program to address ongoing caregiving challenges, offering their plugin homes for free or reduced rent to people who help care for their children or elder relatives. However, the incentive programs have also been used by exploitative landlords, who attract tenants with the promise of low rent and then do not keep up with maintenance.

NEIGHBORHOME

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PI29 — PlugIn 3D Printed House

First name	HANNAH
Last name	KIM
E-mail	KIMH@MAIL.COM
Phone	202.555.0130
Address	189 DUNLAP DR.
City	MINNEAPOLIS
State	MN
Zip code	55108
Country	US

Do you need financing? ● Yes ○ No

You may qualify for subsidies and tax credits. LEARN MORE

Number of rooms   ○1 ●2 ○3

Number of stories   ●1 ○2

Number of residents   ○1 ●2 ○3 ○4

Have property for your Neighborhome? ● Yes ○ No

If Yes, what is the lot size? 0.3 ACRES

Special needs

Elderly couple caring for a child.

Issues to Watch

Navigate a low-trust environment. More and more political figures are developing proposals and enacting policies aimed at supporting young children and families, and an increasing number of private companies are offering products and services aimed at meeting needs that were once the exclusive purview of government. However, decreasing trust in the quality of or motivations behind the solutions offered by both public and private institutions means that those proposals, policies and services can suffer from a lack of buy-in or uptake in favor of more decentralized or customized supports. Additionally, parents and others are increasingly expecting to be involved in the development and oversight of the supports that are intended for them. As stakeholders consider how to create large-scale solutions to address young children's and families' needs, they should work to recognize shifting expectations and to ensure that they are being responsive to people's needs, varying local realities and the overall social and political landscape.

How might stakeholders balance the growing desire for large-scale solutions with declining trust in traditional institutions and increasing comfort with decentralized supports?

Design supports for a range of families and needs. As technology companies, governments and service providers scramble to find ideal solutions to improve outcomes for young children and their families, they often make assumptions about who constitutes a family and what they need. For example, apps geared toward new mothers often make broad assumptions about race, marital status and gender identity, and caregiving solutions tend not to take into account the growing array of families' needs. As family structures grow more complex and as families' needs diversify, solutions will need to become more responsive and asset-based to avoid bias and to support young children and their families more authentically. Stakeholders should work to anticipate blind spots and to consider the unintended consequences of the solutions for which they advocate. They should also consider how those solutions fit local realities and people's daily lives.

How might stakeholders design solutions that account for the wide range of young children and families' realities and needs?

Foster public will for respectful family support. Public assistance and government support for families have long been fraught areas of public policy and opinion. People receiving supports are often subject to demeaning assumptions and requirements, along with overly complex processes that diminish the value of the support. However, public support for policies aimed at children and families is quite high. To prioritize dignity and equal access to the supports and opportunities that might help young children and their families flourish in the future, stakeholders should move away from dialogues and policies that take a paternalistic and deficit-based approach. Instead, they can promote young children and their families as people deserving of respect whose potential can be fully realized under a set of different circumstances than many of them face today.

How might stakeholders build public will for dignified approaches to supporting young children and their families?

Care at the Core

New economic and employment realities and the aging of the population are creating tensions related to caregiving structures and values.

Affordable and accessible family care is already a major challenge for many families, despite the central role that it plays in allowing people to participate in the economy and to fulfill our basic drive to form families. Emerging circumstances promise to complicate the picture further. As a result of technology, globalization and shifting social values, the economy continues to transition away from predictable schedules and long-term relationships between employers and employees, making **parents' needs for child care even more diverse**. In addition, the population is aging rapidly, with the number of **families who support both older and younger relatives expected to increase**.

» One-fifth of parents with children under the age of 14 have atypical schedules, a percentage that is expected to increase since jobs with nonstandard work hours are among the fastest-growing occupations.[42]

» According to a 2018 survey, the top reason parents gave for having fewer children than they wanted was that "child care is too expensive." [43]
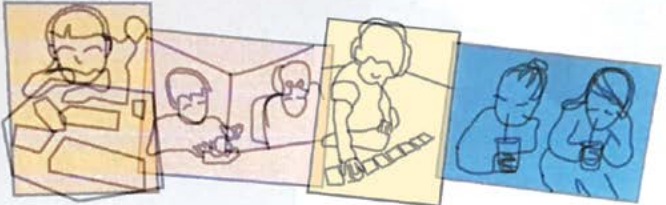
» Jobs focused on caring for the aging population, which have a lower-than-average median hourly wage, are expected to grow quickly in the coming decade.[44]

» In the United States, 12 percent of parents who have a child at home are also providing unpaid care for an adult.[45] 70 million Americans are expected to become multigenerational caregivers by 2030.[46]

Care Co-Op: Learning and Working Together

Families in the mixed-income and racially diverse Oak Terrace neighborhood have created an affordable and flexible caregiving solution. The co-op is governed by member families and prioritizes meeting parents where they are with cost, schedule and caregiving needs, even if that means that not every family is paying the same amount or dedicating the same amount of time. Adults are allowed to co-work in the care center building, and some have the flexibility to care for their and others' children at points during the workday. Others who work at times when child care centers are typically closed rely on the community of co-op members to help care for their children at their homes. An ongoing crowdfunding campaign to help replicate the model in other locations has thrived, but not every community has experienced the same success. A local community foundation is supporting the creation of new governance structures that can retain the co-op's values of broad and inclusive decision-making while streamlining what has become slow and cumbersome administration.
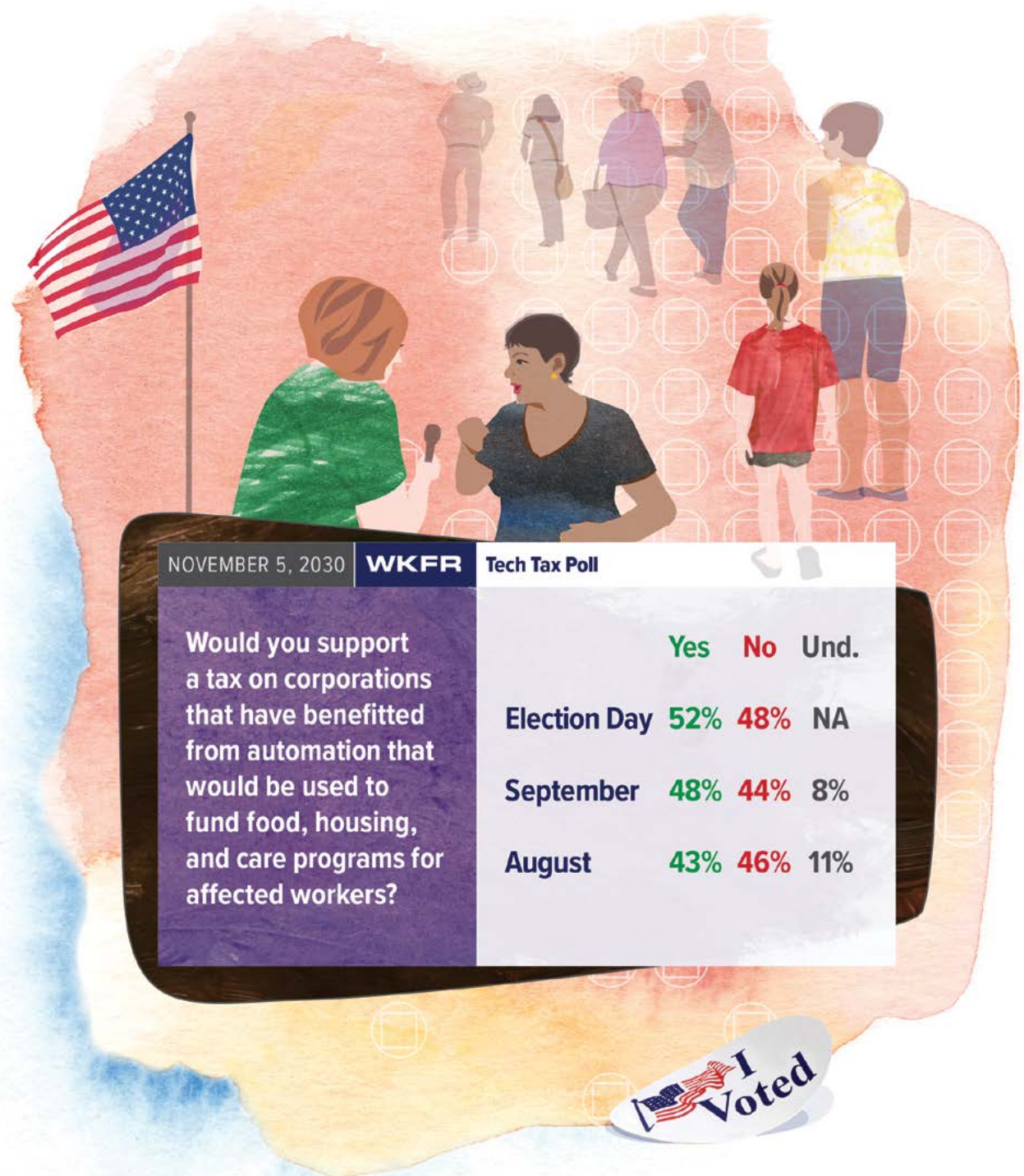
Measure T: Tech Tax for Care

Voters have approved a new funding mechanism requiring companies that have largely automated their workforces to contribute to a new fund to cover displaced workers' basic needs. The fund will cover food and housing costs, expenses related to the care of children zero to five years old and costs associated with caring for an aging relative. Advocates are hailing the election outcome while also scrambling to adjust regulations and offerings to make the most of the influx of funding. To avoid handing off these resources to what they describe as "inefficient government agencies," some big-tech CEOs are proposing their own programs to assist displaced workers, a move that some dismiss as seeking a corporate tax shelter. Apart from that debate, many organizations are warning that they will have to pass the cost of the tax onto customers through increased prices. Other businesses wanting to ensure that they avoid the penalty are only automating about half of their workforces because their operations would otherwise be too complex and costly.

NOVEMBER 5, 2030 **WKFR** **Tech Tax Poll**

Would you support a tax on corporations that have benefitted from automation that would be used to fund food, housing, and care programs for affected workers?

	Yes	No	Und.
Election Day	52%	48%	NA
September	48%	44%	8%
August	43%	46%	11%

Day without a Caregiver: Mass Demonstration and Lawsuit

The country's unsustainable, individualistic and patchwork approach to caregiving has reached a tipping point, with the majority of Americans now having trouble affording or accessing high-quality care. Caregiving has become a focal issue for activists, children's and senior advocates and civil rights organizations. The philanthropic community is following the lead of the grassroots community efforts led by low-income parents, parents of color and parents of children with special needs, all of whom are disproportionately affected by the care crisis. Parents and children have brought lawsuits against the government, demanding that it support children's health and well-being and parents' economic participation by adopting a comprehensive approach to caregiving across the country. The federal government is concerned that this movement might bring widespread social, economic and political unrest. There are rumors that a fringe pro-caregiver group plans to take over an important state capitol until their requests are met.

Issues to Watch

Identify and communicate the value of caregiving in society. As the economy and employment structures change, overhauling traditional child and elder care systems will be essential. However, the value of affordable and high-quality care goes far beyond its economic benefits. Caring for one another is a deep instinct for people. Society's ability to do it well has major positive social and emotional implications for both the caregiver and the care receiver. As the population ages and as child care becomes increasingly complex and unaffordable, the dialogue around an intensifying crisis of care could increase, creating an opportunity to re-evaluate narratives about caregiving and to revisit caregiver compensation along with recognition of, and public awareness about, society's caregiving needs. Stakeholders should take that opportunity to broaden the cultural narrative about caregiving to reflect its deep human and societal value in addition to its economic ones.

How might stakeholders reexamine the role of caregiving in society, setting up systems, structures and narratives that reflect the true value of caregiving?

Recognize cultural shifts around governance and decision making. New political and cultural realities are changing people's expectations around who should be setting the agenda and making decisions on a wide range of social issues. Frustration with the exclusive, opaque and unresponsive governance of many agencies, nonprofits and corporations is leading people to question those entities' legitimacy and to seek opportunities to expand the pool of leaders and decision makers. This shift, along with growing pressures caused by an unsustainable approach to caregiving in society, could lead to extreme social tension. Stakeholders should examine critically their own governance and decision-making processes, ensuring that they involve the people most affected by their decisions and are flexible enough to respond to a changing landscape.

How might stakeholders involve a wide range of people, particularly those who have historically been marginalized, in tackling major caregiving challenges?

Leverage intergenerational relationships and joint solutions. The need for new types of child care, combined with the need for more and better elder care, are inextricably linked and can be approached in an inter-connected way. Though creating new systems and structures for caring for one another is daunting, the demographic and economic shifts on the horizon represent opportunities to address more than one challenge at a time and to promote intergenerational relationships, which have proven benefits for every age group. For instance, the aging of the population could be an enabling force for the creation of joint care structures for elder adults and children or for the creation of a comprehensive caregiving sector. Stakeholders should rethink approaches to care across generations and create new opportunities for people of all ages to foster healthy social bonds.

How might stakeholders embrace intergenerational relationships and consider a range of care needs when developing future caregiving solutions?

Questions to Guide Reflection

This forecast has presented a set of emerging issues along with artifacts from the future reflecting a range of possibilities. You might prefer some of them and fear others. Also, possibilities depicted in this forecast represent only a subset of what could emerge. Because we cannot be certain about what will come to pass, we have a responsibility to reflect, to anticipate and to act, steadfast in our commitment to young children and families and with an awareness of fundamental changes on the horizon.

In ten years' time, what new cultural norms and assumptions about young children and families might exist?

What systems, structures, policies and programs might exist that reflect those beliefs?

Where might old inequities deepen? Where might new ones emerge?

What shared beliefs might we hold, and what commitments might we have made about…

…health and well-being?

…education and learning?

…autonomy and freedom?

…family supports and access to resources?

…caring for one another?

What might they mean for…

…individual children?

…families?

…communities?

…society as a whole?

How might we ensure that all young children and families can flourish?

How might you shape the future?

Creating Flourishing Futures

Like all futures, the futures of young children and their families are inherently uncertain.

The possibilities explored in this forecast are by no means a given; they provide a glimpse into the kinds of developments that could unfold over the next decade based on trends and issues that are emerging today. Our collective actions will influence what actually comes to pass. Organizations that aim to support young children and their families can play an active role in responding to the changes on the horizon and in helping young children and their families flourish.

With that in mind, the recommendations that follow can help you and your organization examine what the emerging issues and future possibilities described in this forecast might mean for your organizational vision, strategy and current and future programs. Considering these recommendations, along with the related processing questions, can provide a starting point for exploring how you might begin to help shape dignified and equitable futures for young children and their families.

Recognize the Value of the Caring Adult

Across all the domains explored in this forecast, secure relationships between young children and caring adults stand out as being essential. The importance of a caring adult – whether that is a parent, another family member, a neighbor, a teacher or someone else – in a young child's life is impossible to overestimate. In the future, caring adults will continue to bear responsibility for meeting children's timeless needs for love, safety and stability. Indeed, as children's circumstances and experiences shift, parents and other caregivers will be the primary mediators, buffers, supporters and cultivators of children's inner worlds, helping them cope with the anxiety and stress that can arise when the external environment is changing. For instance, as job security and stability decrease for the majority of working-age adults, early childhood systems will need to adapt accordingly – not only to support employment but also to foster the resilience of young children and their families. Even in the face of sweeping changes, finding ways to support the adults who hold important places in children's lives will be one of the most important mechanisms for helping young children flourish.

How might you and your organization best support secure relationships between children and caring adults?

What broader supports might be needed to ensure that every young child has secure relationships with caring adults?

Place Stability at the Center of Efforts to Improve Family Life

The ten-year horizon is full of changes and uncertainties that have the potential to disrupt family life as we know it today. Whatever family, housing, employment and other support structures look like in ten years, young children and their families will still need safe housing, nutritious food, high-quality medical care and learning opportunities, and strong social and emotional supports.[47] Because the transition to a new reality can often shake individuals' and society's foundations, prioritizing stability will have a compound effect on the lived experiences of young children and their families. The narrative of innovation is often one of disruption; many new ideas, products and services are likely to fragment people's experiences instead of making them more coherent. In the case of young children and their families, the aim of innovation should be equitably and universally distributed stability. Thus, organizations and individuals seeking to ensure flourishing futures for young children and their families must build actionable initiatives that strive to solidify buffer structures and to establish resilient and reliable systems in service of all.

How might you and your organization create more stability for young children and their families?

How might you and your organization assist young children and their families in proactively responding to issues and opportunities emerging in their broader environment?

Engage in Inclusive and Responsive Design

The ways in which society supports and interacts with young children and their families are inevitably rooted in assumptions, which are the deeply held beliefs that ground our decisions and actions. In promoting young children's and families' well-being, organizations and individuals make many assumptions about what they need; those assumptions inform programs, policies, products and services. In particular, relatively vulnerable groups such as low-income families, families of color and those who receive public assistance or benefit from philanthropic efforts are often excluded from the decision-making processes that affect them. This exclusion can lead to a mismatch between needs and solutions and can risk stigmatizing instead of dignifying people. As we look ahead to navigating a changing landscape, organizations and individuals seeking to assist young children and their families in creating flourishing futures for themselves and others will need to challenge their deepest assumptions, develop equitable participation channels and establish empathetic practices based on the fundamental values of dignity and respect for all.

What assumptions might you and your organization need to challenge to ensure flourishing futures for young children and families? In turn, what assumptions seem essential to retain?

In what ways might you and your organization involve more people in your decision-making processes and extend your use of empathetic practices?

Challenge the Over-Optimization of Childhood

Every aspect of a child's development – physical, emotional and intellectual – unfolds in messy and often mysterious ways. The process of growing up is antithetical to the current data-, technology-, and outcomes-driven environment. However, in an attempt to improve the lives of children and families, many interventions are organized in ways that attempt to optimize children's experiences to achieve certain outcomes. In these cases, each stage of childhood is treated as preparation for the next; each moment, as being in service of a goal. In a society that supported young children's flourishing and whose systems ensured that every child's needs were met, children could play, learn, interact and live simply because they deserved joy and the opportunity to grow. Too often, those activities are treated only as opportunities to mold productive members of society. As anxiety about the future deepens and as uncertainty increases, so too will the temptation to curate children's lives. Those who care about children's well-being and dignity will need to work against those forces' taking over and reducing childhood to a phase of life that is valued only for what it later serves.

How might your organization deepen its respect for childhood as a phase of life with inherent value?

In what ways might the narratives of childhood be reframed to be more supportive of every child?

Work beyond Early Childhood Frontiers

While the five domains explored in this forecast should be focal points for efforts to ensure flourishing futures, the boundaries between them are often porous. For instance, when early learning experiences move away from focusing on academic rigor, they tend to be explained in terms of caregiving approaches. In turn, as pediatric health tracking devices come to incorporate more and more alerts, children could lose a certain amount of autonomy to define their own experiences and to keep them private. Moving forward, both the profound interdependency among the domains and the complexity of the overall ecosystem surrounding young children and their families will likely increase. As a result, organizations and individuals aiming to improve young children's outcomes will need to engage in issues beyond their traditional spheres of influence. This involvement will require deep collaboration across and beyond their sectors and a willingness to break out of comfortable silos. Systemic solutions involving multiple approaches, perspectives and organizations will thrive over narrow solutions that tend to overlook unintended consequences and ripple effects.

How might you and your organization establish strategic partnerships with stakeholders beyond your traditional scope of influence?

With what issues that are not currently treated as young children's and families' issues might you or your organization engage?

Identify Ethical Approaches to Technology

The lived experiences of young children and their families will be heavily influenced by technology. Indeed, this forecast highlights ways in which technological solutions could perform a variety of tasks. In the face of such possibilities, organizations aiming to support young children and their families have the responsibility to ensure that emerging technologies and the data generated by them are used ethically and in service of young children's development, family life and human relationships. While the current debates around technology access and screen time are important, stakeholders need to look more deeply at how technology might be affecting, or even replacing, some of the vital relationships among children and between children and adults. They also need to consider the ways in which abundant data collection uniquely affects children. Organizations and individuals seeking to improve outcomes for young children can spark conversations around what types of technological experiences might support early development and relationships and what types of practices might be established to ensure that technology and data promote equity instead of perpetuating existing biases.

How might you and your organization promote nourishing interactions among technology, young children and families?

How might you and your organization help ensure that technology use supports every young child and their family in leading a life of dignity?

Aim for Abundant and Equitable Flourishing

How people choose to raise and care for their children is highly personal. However, in an interconnected society, individual decisions have the power to affect the lives and outcomes of others. Too often, health care, high-quality education, self-determination and other social assets are treated as scarce resources that must be protected by those who have them. For a parent making a choice about where to send a child to school or for an organization deciding whether to collaborate with a potential partner, success can seem like a zero-sum equation. Future uncertainty, combined with the instinct to care for our loved ones, even at the expense of others, is heightening that impression. But true equity is not possible if the basic rights that every child and family deserve are treated as individual assets instead of as elements of the common good. Deep change in the lives of young children and their families, particularly those who have limited resources and or who face systemic barriers, will only occur when mindsets about what people deserve shift when individuals recognize their own roles in supporting other people's futures.

How might you and your organization help contribute to a mindset shift about the importance of fostering abundant and equitable flourishing for all?

How might you and your organization extend your understanding of your role in supporting the common good?

The Call to Look Ahead

Given the pressing needs that young children and families face today, looking ahead can seem like a luxury. However, considering what the future might hold is critically important to ensuring that today's approaches and desired outcomes are relevant to the realities in which young children and families will live. Additionally, new connections and insights, as well as blind spots and biases, can emerge from exploring issues with a wider and longer-term view than the pressures of day-to-day operations often permit.

Leaders have the responsibility to engage in bold, aspirational and long-term thinking that can lead to new avenues of innovation, unlikely but meaningful partnerships and a fresh mindset about what it will take to help every young child and family flourish in the future.

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Acknowledgments

KnowledgeWorks is a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing personalized learning that empowers every child to take ownership of their success. With nearly 20 years of experience exploring the future of learning, growing educator impact and working with state and federal policymakers, our passionate team partners with schools and communities to grow a system-wide approach to sustain student-centered practices so that every child graduates ready for what's next.

Learn more at KnowledgeWorks.org.

Capita is an ideas lab working at the intersections of research, public policy, social innovation, design and the arts. We explore how the great cultural and social transformations of our day affect young children, and we foster new ideas to ensure a future in which children and their families flourish.

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