

# Build

Strong Foundations For  
Our Youngest Children



The BUILD Initiative helps states create comprehensive early childhood systems – coordinated, effective policies that address children’s health, mental health and nutrition, early care and education, family support, and early intervention. BUILD’s vision is at the center of an emerging and vibrant state-based policy movement in the early childhood development field. We work with those who set policies, provide services and advocate for our youngest children to make sure that they are safe, healthy, eager to learn and ready to succeed in school. Visit [www.buildinitiative.org](http://www.buildinitiative.org).



## The First Seven Years:

### *The BUILD Initiative and Early Childhood Systems Development, 2002 to 2009*

*Charles Bruner and Michelle Stover Wright, September 2009  
Child and Family Policy Center*

#### **Historical Overview of the BUILD Initiative in the States ● ● ●**

In May 2002, the BUILD Initiative launched. Teams of state early childhood leaders from inside and outside of government from four states – Illinois, Minnesota, New Jersey, and Ohio – met with BUILD staff and early childhood experts to begin to define their agendas.

The six to ten member teams varied in composition. Most members knew one another, but had not formally come together to discuss how to build a comprehensive early learning system in their state. Much of the time at the initial retreat was spent in team meetings, seeking to establish common ground and set out a strategy for developing strategic early childhood systems building plan for their states.

Work on early childhood systems in the states did not begin with the BUILD Initiative. In fact, the first National Educational Goal – that all children start school ready to learn – was already 13 years old and more than twenty-five major, multi-site foundation and government initiatives existed focusing on the earliest years of life, with at least some operating in each of the BUILD states.

What distinguished the BUILD Initiative from many of these other initiatives, however, was its commitment to investing in a core set of leaders from both the public and private sectors around the broad agenda of early childhood systems building and then supporting those leaders in developing their own strategies and action plans. Previous initiatives have referred to this as the “Margaret Meade” strategy, enabling a small group of committed individuals to change the world. National BUILD staff took on a largely facilitative rather than directional role, supporting state teams in their work and helping them access outside resources and technical assistance, when necessary, but not requiring a specific organizational structure or specific set of policy activities.

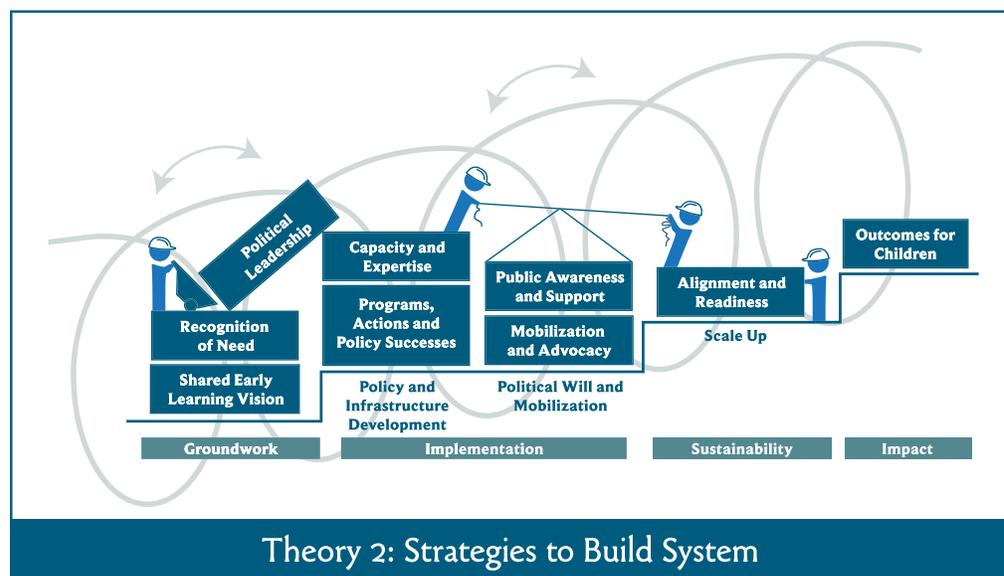
This organic or authentic approach to systems building also was incorporated into the evaluation strategy, where state teams selected a state evaluation partner to participate in their work, not only documenting their efforts through annual assessments but also providing advice on evaluation questions and tracking progress through collection of relevant baseline information.

The first eighteen months of work within states largely involved developing an overall strategic vision, establishing relationships and roles across team members, broadening connections with other early childhood stakeholders at both the state and community levels, and taking advantage of any opportunities for action. In some instances, particularly in Illinois, the BUILD Initiative proved to be in the right place at the right time for promoting significant state policy actions. In others, such as Minnesota, the locus of activity included corporate and foundation engagement to support local communities in further mobilization and action, as it was not possible to secure top level state political leadership and support.

In 2004, Pennsylvania was added as a fifth BUILD Initiative state, and four states were enlisted as learning partners – Hawaii, Michigan, Oklahoma, and Washington. A year later, Michigan and Washington were established as BUILD Initiative states, but funding was not secured to continue supporting Hawaii and Oklahoma even as formal learning partner states. The BUILD Initiative, however, has continued to reach out, through topical conferences, webinars, and other organizations’ forums, to enable learning partner states from around the country to participate with BUILD states. National BUILD staff also has continued to work to enlist funding for additional states, and New York has been added as an eighth BUILD state in 2009.

## State Activities and Accomplishments ●●●

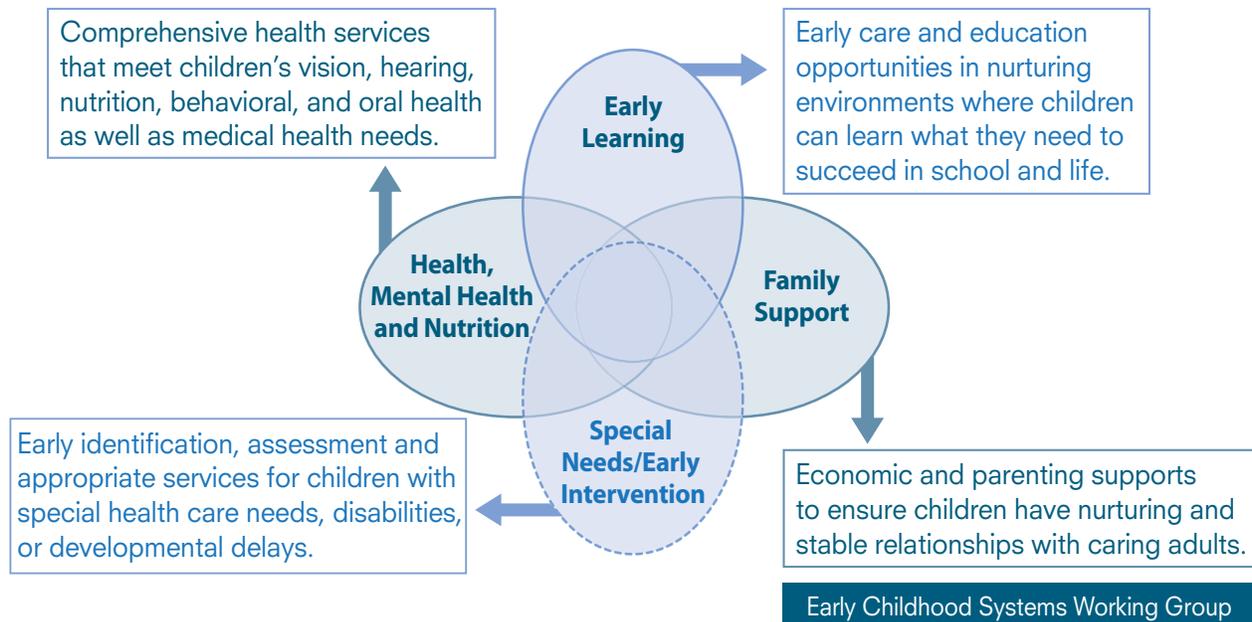
The emphasis upon supporting leaders and enabling peer networking and learning as a primary tool has encouraged substantial diversity in strategic action and has meant that there are no uniform metrics by which to



assess progress across all the states. In 2005, the national evaluators vetted a three-part “theory of change” at the annual BUILD Conference that was based upon the collective work of the states and of the initiative overall. This theory subsequently was modified on the basis of comments and accepted as a framework for evaluating and assessing progress. The first part of the “theory of change” spoke to the specific elements of an early learning system that would ensure all children’s healthy development and readiness for school. The second part spoke to the work that systems builders did to construct that system (see graphic above); and the third part spoke to the specific role of foundations and national staff in serving as a catalyst for that systems building. The second part of the framework was the specific focus of the state team work and assessments of progress, challenges, and opportunities.



In 2006, BUILD staff worked with other early childhood organizations, initiative supporters and technical assistance providers to develop a systems framework. This graphic describes in more specific detail the components, characteristics, and interrelatedness needed for a comprehensive early childhood system. In essence, this helped to flesh out the first theory of change – what would need to be put in place as a system to ensure school readiness for all children in a state. The state teams also were involved in reviewing the interconnected elements – early learning, family support, special needs, and health, mental health, and nutrition – and have seen the framework as very useful; individual states have adapted it for their own particular work. The “four ovals” that represent the elements of systems building, along with their descriptors, have been adapted and used throughout the country.



While BUILD leaders in the states began their work focusing primarily upon early learning – strengthening the early care and education and preschool programs in their states – they all progressed in their work to focus on the other components as well. This often started with a review of how early childhood programs could connect young children and their families to services and supports within the other components.

By providing core support for state BUILD planning and networking, the BUILD Initiative helped to maintain a locus for leadership that could continue state strategic thinking and action. While many early childhood leaders in the state focused their personal energies on their own agendas within agencies and programs, the BUILD Initiative provided the glue to support linkages and mobilize support where it was most needed.

Annual state evaluation reports showed that different states were able to take advantage of different opportunities that presented themselves. While there were different foci of activity, however, state teams found that they had much to share with one another, and found peer-to-peer exchanges of particular value. BUILD staff also was able to secure funding support for some specific common areas of work and interest – developing quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS); supporting family, friend and neighbor care (FFN); and linking health and mental health services to early childhood, among them.

## BUILD Cross-State Accomplishments Chart ●●●

	IL	MN	NJ	OH	PA	MI	WA
<b>Preschool and Early Childhood Education</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Increased funding and children served – pre-K	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Child Care Quality/Quality Rating and Improvement Systems</b>							
Created/developed QRIS program	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Piloting QRIS program		✓	✓			✓	✓
Implemented QRIS program	✓			✓	✓		
Increased funding/expanded access of mature QRIS program	✓			✓	✓		
<b>Child Care Subsidies and Access</b>							
Increased subsidy rates/increased access	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Professional Development</b>							
Engaged in professional development planning/increased professional development investment	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
<b>Early Learning Standards and/or Alignment with K-12 Standards</b>							
Released early learning guidelines/standards	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Health, Mental Health Services</b>							
Expanded health coverage	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Planned/convened on early childhood mental health services with a cross sector focus	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Expanded developmental health/child mental health screening, services, and training	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Expanded early intervention and services for children with disabilities	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
<b>Public Will Building and Public Engagement</b>							
Increased support/commitment from state and local officials	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Supported/recruited new champions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Increased public awareness/knowledge	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Governance and Leadership</b>							
Expanded/improved state-level planning and governance structures	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Expanded/improved state-local connections	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Expanded/improved local structures	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Improved integrated planning and actions across systems	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Financing and Data Systems</b>							
Conducted fiscal analysis – cost benefit, economic impact, costing out the system or parts of the system	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Agreed on/increased use of indicators and outcomes to inform policy	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Conducted/planned kindergarten readiness assessments	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Collected valuable early learning data	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Planning or implementing an early childhood specific data system	✓				✓		
<b>Other Breakthroughs on Early Childhood Issues</b>							
Developing planning or focus on Family Friend & Neighbor Care issues		✓			✓	✓	✓
Assessed/expanded infant toddler system	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Created/expanded/improved family support/parent education and leadership programs		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Increased investment/planning for home visitation services	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Begun to address issues of race/ethnicity/culture/language in early childhood systems planning and implementation	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓

BUILD staff also worked with state leaders in convening seminars to tackle identified, emerging issues related to early childhood systems building – establishing state and community governance structures to build reform; developing evaluation and self-evaluation strategies to chart progress and continuously improve; addressing issues of race, language, and culture within systems building; and engaging natural support systems and community building as part of systems building. This enabled both the BUILD Initiative and individual states to be leaders in developing specific key components of early childhood systems.

As the original BUILD states start their seventh year, all current BUILD states can look back and see significant advances in their early childhood systems building efforts. While there have been setbacks as well as advances, the BUILD Initiative has enabled early childhood leaders to be in the right place, at the right time, with the right capacity to create and take advantage of new opportunities. The individual sixth year case studies of the first four BUILD states provide overall summaries of the advances they have made, which are summarized in the Accomplishments Table along with accomplishments of three other states that have subsequently joined the BUILD Initiative. While it is not possible to attribute causality to the BUILD Initiative to all these gains, the BUILD Initiative often created a nexus for community, action, and the underlying credibility needed to impact policy. Some of the noted accomplishments were also implemented prior to BUILD involvement such as the development of prekindergarten standards in Illinois, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and early learning standards in Washington or the creation of state level governance structures in Pennsylvania and Illinois. BUILD does play a role in the continuation and improvement of these already existing successes.

Again, the BUILD Initiative has not been the sole effort within any of the states to build an early childhood system. What has distinguished the BUILD Initiative, however, and may have led to the sustainability of its work within states, has been its:

- Emphasis upon a long-term, organic approach that builds individual leadership as well as systems capacity;
- Involvement of advocacy as well as public sector leaders in the systems building agenda;
- Use of interactive evaluation strategies; and
- Collaborative approaches with other initiatives and organizations, including networking through a learning community that enables individual state leaders to provide technical assistance to their peers.

## **BUILD States as Leaders ● ● ●**

BUILD states are at the cutting edge in early childhood systems development, both in:

- developing exemplary services and strategies that represent key systems components, and
- developing a systemic approach to ensuring children’s healthy development and readiness for success in school.

On designing services, BUILD states are recognized national leaders in such areas as supporting family, friend, and neighbor care, providing mental health consultation to early care and education programs, constructing quality rating and improving systems, providing articulation in the transfer of credits for early childhood professional education. They have been at the forefront in developing and expanding high quality preschool programs. These are summarized in the insert to illustrate BUILD states’ leadership role.

## BUILD State Leadership in Developing Exemplary Services and Strategies

- **Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) Care.** Following research on the extent and variety of care arrangements in the state and the particular role of FFN care, **Minnesota** enacted legislation establishing a competitive grant program to expand services and supports for FFN caregivers, recognizing their role in child development. **Washington** also established funding support for FFN care; Minnesota and Washington are the first two states to recognize and develop state policy supports to strengthen such caregiving.<sup>1</sup>
- **Mental Health Consultation.** Through its funding set-aside for birth to three services, **Illinois** has developed a mental health consultant program model that provides expert help to early care and education programs in meeting children's behavior needs.<sup>2</sup> **Michigan** has continued to support and expand its Child Care Expulsion Prevention Initiative (CCEP), effective in linking the child care community with mental health services to enable providers to better address the social and emotional needs of young children.
- **Quality Rating and Improvement Systems.** **Pennsylvania** and **Ohio** are recognized leaders among states in developing quality rating systems with strong provisions for quality improvement. Research from Pennsylvania shows that its QRIS has improved the quality of care for children and has been instrumental in enabling Pennsylvania to continue to secure support to expand its QRIS.<sup>3</sup>
- **Articulation in the Transfer of Early Childhood Education Credits.** **New Jersey** has established a model system for ensuring easier transfer of college credits between two- and four-year colleges, to enable students to progress from associate degrees at community colleges into early childhood degrees in four-year institutions. This articulation is essential for providing career advancement opportunities for persons in early care and education who may start with limited educational backgrounds, including persons initially with limited-English proficiency.
- **Preschool Expansions.** **Illinois** and **New Jersey** are national leaders in developing high quality preschool programs designed to serve all young children, with among the largest state investments and commitments nationally. **Pennsylvania** moved from having no state investments in high quality preschool to having one of the largest such investments in the country. **Ohio, Minnesota, Washington, and Michigan** also have made significant advances in developing high quality preschool services over the period of their involvement in BUILD.

<sup>1</sup> Chase, R. (2009). *State Policies for Supporting Family Friend & Neighbor Care*. BUILD Initiative Policy Brief. <http://www.buildinitiative.org/content/family-friend-and-neighbor-care>

<sup>2</sup> McCann, C. (2008). *Including Health in a School Readiness Agenda: Lessons from Illinois*. BUILD Initiative Policy Brief. <http://www.buildinitiative.org/content/health-and-school-readiness>

<sup>3</sup> Barnard, W. et al. (2006) *Evaluation of Pennsylvania's Keystone STARS Quality Rating System in Child Care Settings*. University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development and Pennsylvania State University Prevention Research Center. Mitchell, A. (2009). *Quality Rating and Improvement Systems as the Framework for Early Care and Education System Reform*. BUILD Initiative Policy Brief. <http://www.buildinitiative.org/files/QRIS-Framework.pdf>

Equally important and in addition to leadership in developing service strategies, BUILD states have been leaders in developing systemic approaches to their work that can help to sustain gains and build systems. These include developing comprehensive frameworks, governance, community-level systems building, public and private partnerships, addressing equity and diversity issues, and creating data and information systems, described in the insert on the following page.



## BUILD State Leadership in Developing a Systemic Approach

- **Governance.** **Illinois** has established an Early Learning Council that has brought together a wide variety of stakeholders and state agencies to advance the development of a comprehensive early childhood system. **Pennsylvania** created the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) that provides a state agency structure which extends across the education and welfare departments, departments that operate independently in most states. **Ohio** has created an Early Childhood Cabinet to unite key agencies around a common vision for young children. All are cited as promising state models for building early childhood systems across agencies and departments.
- **Comprehensive Frameworks.** Through a collaborative effort involving the Washington Head Start State Collaboration Office, the Foundation for Early Learning, the Washington State Department of Health and the BUILD Initiative, **Washington** developed a comprehensive early childhood framework (Kids Matter) that has been broadly embraced as an overall planning tool and served to coordinate work across agencies and departments. Colorado and other states have used Washington's framework and adapted it to their own state efforts. **New Jersey** similarly has established a framework that has helped to incorporate health, mental health, child welfare, and other service systems into the early childhood systems building picture.
- **Community Level Systems Building.** **Michigan**, through its Great Start Collaboratives under its Early Childhood Investment Corporation, and **Minnesota**, through its Minnesota Early Childhood Initiatives administered through the Minnesota Initiative Foundations (Initiative Foundation, Northland Foundation, Northwest Minnesota Foundation, Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation, Southwest Initiative Foundation, and West Central Initiative), are leaders in providing support and funding at the community level to develop high quality, locally-based early childhood systems. These efforts have built leadership at both the state and local levels to design and implement early childhood systems.<sup>4</sup>
- **Public and Private Partnerships.** **Minnesota**, with the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation, has engaged the business community in pressing for early childhood systems development and committing private-sector resources to that purpose through the Minnesota Business for Early Learning organization. **Washington** has worked to increase private sector involvement in early childhood systems development, with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation committing major, long-term resources to develop comprehensive early childhood systems in two low-income communities in the state (Thrive Communities).
- **Equity and Diversity.** **Washington** was the first state in the country to undertake concerted work to incorporate language and culture dimensions into its early learning standards, with those standards now representing a basis for other states to incorporate language and culture.

<sup>4</sup> Coffman, J. et al. (2006). *Beyond Parallel Play: Emerging State and Community Planning Roles in Building Early childhood systems*. The BUILD Initiative Policy Brief Series and The State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network. Minnesota's community based efforts were highlighted in the piece as an example of successful community level system building efforts. [http://www.buildinitiative.org/files/Beyond%20Parallel%20Play%20Sept%202006\\_0.pdf](http://www.buildinitiative.org/files/Beyond%20Parallel%20Play%20Sept%202006_0.pdf)

## BUILD State Leadership in Developing a Systemic Approach *CONTINUED*

into their standards.<sup>5</sup> **Pennsylvania**, through use of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Race Matters toolkit, conducted regional meetings that created a strong nexus for addressing issues of race and culture within its continued development of QRIS. In **Michigan** the state's Early Childhood Investment Corporation has launched the Children of Color Initiative beginning with eleven local summits focusing on the unique challenges and opportunities for diverse populations across the state.

- **Data Systems Development.** **Illinois** developed a comprehensive data system (Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map) for its preschool programs that provides information down to the neighborhood level. This has enabled Illinois to determine where there are specific service gaps that need to be addressed, particularly related to immigrant and minority communities. **Pennsylvania** is developing an Early Learning Network to bring together early childhood data across programs and services in order to support both implementation and continuous improvement within public systems and to make data available for outside research. Pennsylvania is the lead state in the country in building early childhood data into its longitudinal student record (K-12) data system, supported by the federal Office of Education Statistics.<sup>6</sup> **Ohio** is developing a comprehensive cost simulation to determine how much is currently being spent on the four "ovals" of its early childhood system. Its goal is to identify the various domains and components (including services and infrastructure) of Ohio's EC system, determine what public funding exists to support it, and where there are gaps (by identifying the total number of children being served and the cost per participant).

<sup>5</sup> Chang, H. (2008). *Crafting Early Learning Standards for a Multi-Ethnic Society: Lessons Learned from Washington and Alaska*. BUILD Initiative Policy Brief. The BUILD Initiative has produced a series of policy briefs (<http://www.buildinitiative.org/content/diversity-and-equity>) describing best practices and policies, state learning experiences, and key challenges and opportunities for the field in meeting the needs of all children in our multi-ethnic society.

<sup>6</sup> Bruner, C. (2009). *Opportunities to Incorporate Young Child Data into Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems through American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)*. BUILD Initiative Policy Brief.  
Bruner, C. & Emarita, B. (2009). *Building Public Early Childhood Data Systems For a Multi-Ethnic Society: Issues and Opportunities*. Build Initiative Diversity Policy Brief Series.



## The BUILD Initiative's National Knowledge Building Activities ● ● ●

As state work has proceeded, and as learning community activities have increased, the BUILD Initiative also has taken on a greater national role in early childhood systems building. Particularly through its continued strong links to the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative, the BUILD Initiative has helped to inform other foundation strategies to support early childhood efforts, and the BUILD Initiative itself has contributed to knowledge building in the field. Much of this work has been through joint projects with other national early childhood organizations.



As described earlier, the BUILD Initiative has worked with representatives from a number of national early childhood consulting and technical assistance organizations to develop the early childhood systems framework. The framework itself was adapted from a BUILD and State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network (SECPTAN) publication on governance structures. The BUILD Initiative has established an ongoing partnership with the Smart Start National Technical Assistance Center in convening preconference dialogues at the annual Smart Start Conference on cutting edge reform topics, with the most recent dialogue co-sponsored by Strengthening Families through Early Care and Education, as well. The BUILD Initiative recently partnered with the National Center for Children in Poverty and the Maternal and Child Health Bureau to conduct a national workshop on the health sector's role in early childhood systems building, involving both BUILD states and selected Early Childhood Comprehensive Services (ECCS) state teams. In 2005, the BUILD Initiative convened an Equity and Diversity Early Learning Summit for researchers and advocates to explore how issues of equity and diversity could be put at the forefront in early childhood systems building. This has led to a BUILD policy brief series under the direction of an Equity and Diversity working group including many of the leading researchers and policy experts in the field.

BUILD's national knowledge building work also has developed organically and has been based upon state BUILD team work and their identification of new challenges and opportunities and their willingness to test new strategies. This work has produced resources both for the BUILD states and the field, summarized briefly in the insert and in more detail in the appendix.

**“As state work has proceeded, and as learning community activities have increased, the BUILD Initiative also has taken on a greater national role in early childhood systems building.”**

## The BUILD Initiative's National Knowledge Building Accomplishments

- **Theory of Change.** Developing a three-part theory of change that provided measurable ways to assess progress and re-examine assumptions, related to the system needed to achieve results (part one), the state actions needed to build that system (theory two), and the national and foundation role in catalyzing state action (theory three).
- **Governance.** Describing core strategies and issues to address in developing state early learning governance structures and developing and aligning local governance with state governance.
- **Common National Framework.** Developing a common, national framework for describing an early childhood system to ensure children start school healthy and ready to succeed, including early learning, family support, health, mental health and nutrition, and responding to special needs.
- **Systems Building Evaluation.** Creating a systems building evaluation framework for assessing progress on all aspects of systems building, from context (mobilizing public will and public policy actions), to components (evidenced-based programs and practices), to connections (cross-system coordination and collaboration), to infrastructure (accountability and quality improvement structures), to scale (capacity to achieve results at a population-wide level).
- **Equity and Diversity.** Addressing equity and diversity issues as part of all systems building work, addressing gaps in participation, culturally responsive services, workforce diversity, and involvement in planning and governance to both eliminate achievement and opportunity gaps and equip all children to contribute within a multi-ethnic society.
- **QRIS and FFN Care.** Using quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) as a core strategy for systems building, while recognizing and supporting family, friend, and neighbor care (FFN) as a valued part of children's early care and learning, with public investments appropriate for both efforts.
- **Early Learning and Community Building.** Linking professional services and voluntary family and community supports to ensure school readiness, with a particular emphasis upon public system roles to strengthen protective factors and child, family, and community resiliency through mutual assistance, networking approaches.
- **Early Learning Data and Information Systems.** Developing information systems to support early childhood systems development, including kindergarten assessments, linkages to statewide longitudinal data systems for students, neighborhood-level data capacity, and ethnically- and language-responsive data.
- **Health's Role.** Defining and promoting the health community's role in early childhood systems building across the five "c's" of coverage (providing access to a consistent source of care), clinical care (identifying developmental and social as well as medical needs), coordination (making effective referrals to other early childhood services and supports), consultation (providing expertise and help to other early childhood systems so they can respond effectively to health issues), and community health (supporting population-based health prevention and promotion activities).



The BUILD Initiative now is a national partner in the Birth to Five Policy Alliance. Both its national staff and state team leaders are invited to participate and present at a variety of national early childhood conferences and forums. One of BUILD's strengths is that it can provide both a national and state perspective, with recognized leaders at both levels providing perspectives on cutting edge systems building issues.

In fact, the distinguishing characteristics of BUILD's national knowledge development work are very similar to the distinguishing characteristics of BUILD's state work:

- Emphasis upon a long-term, organic approach that builds individual leadership as well as systems capacity;
- Involvement of diverse state (and community and grassroots) as well as national leaders in the systems building agenda;
- Use of interactive evaluation strategies; and
- Collaborative approaches with other initiatives and organizations, with a particular emphasis upon involving on-the-ground state leaders and community practitioners as well as researchers and national experts in knowledge development activities.

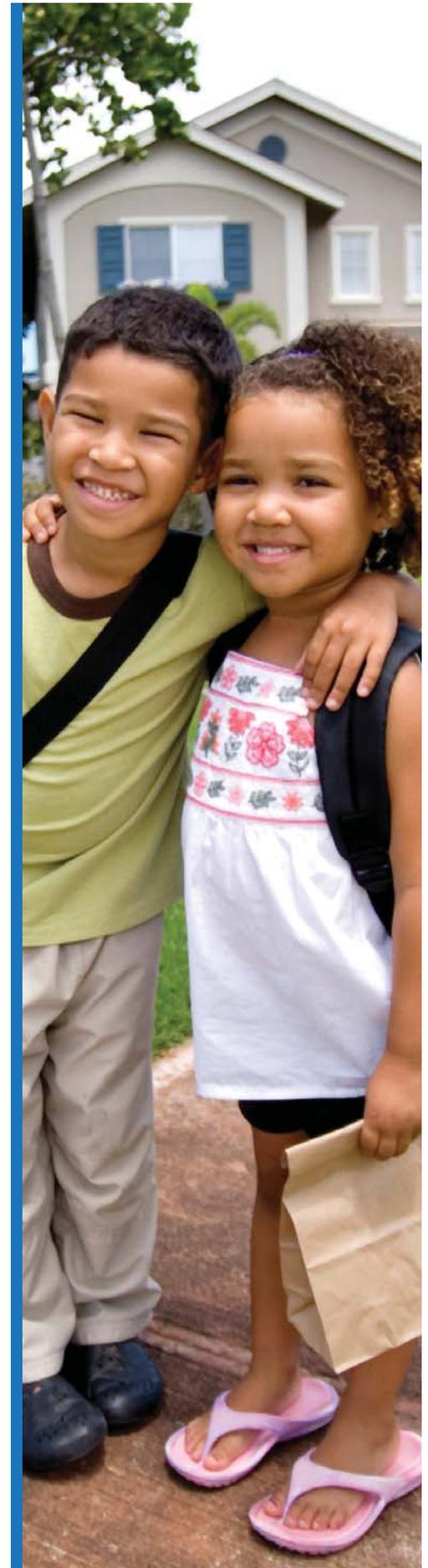
### **Concluding Thoughts: The BUILD Initiative at Seven ● ● ●**

The first BUILD evaluation essay, "BUILD at 2 ½," sought to place BUILD's work in early childhood systems building in context, recognizing that building a comprehensive, quality early childhood system is likely to require decades to complete and entail additional public funding in the tens of billions of dollars.

Looking forward, there is still a long road ahead to constructing that system and the challenge may seem as daunting as when the BUILD Initiative began in 2002.

Looking backward, however, there has been major progress. The contours of what constitutes an early learning system have been more clearly defined and more broadly understood. Successful, next step actions have been taking on many of the different elements needed to build that system.

Perhaps most importantly, there is a broader base of skilled and experienced (and emerging) leadership pressing for this systems building. The group of "committed individuals" has grown.



The BUILD Initiative does not lend itself to neat, programmatic evaluation. Because it has been organic and collaborative in its approach, the specific contribution that the BUILD Initiative has made often cannot be distinguished from other work and activities in the field.

This, of course, has presented a challenge to BUILD and its funders in justifying the investments made to BUILD, nationally and at the state level. The foundation funding community often develops initiatives with much more discrete goals and much more circumscribed strategies and structures to achieve those goals. The BUILD Initiative has been different – and the third theory of change starts to describe this difference. As foundations continue to make investments in early childhood and other comprehensive systems reform activities, the BUILD Initiative structure as a learning community may offer an alternative to more traditional approaches.

While BUILD’s overall budget is significant in terms of foundation investments, totaling around \$10 million over a seven year period, this needs to be assessed in relation to the capacity and accomplishments it has helped produce in its states and nationally.

In terms of investments needed to succeed with the next decade’s early childhood systems building challenges and opportunities, those fostering state leadership through learning networks that can inform and strengthen national systems building work may prove to be the essential ingredient and with the highest returns.



## Appendix 1:

### The BUILD Initiative's National Knowledge Development Activities and Accomplishments ● ● ●

In several areas, the BUILD Initiative has taken a leadership role in the early childhood community in defining the current knowledge base in the field and moving the boundaries of that knowledge. The following describes several different areas where the BUILD Initiative has taken a particular leadership role. While the national BUILD staff has produced many of the actual reports and documents, in all instances members of the BUILD state leadership teams have been consultants and advisors to the work, ensuring that it resonates with the experiences in the field.

**Articulating a Theory of Change for Systems Building.** Many logic models or theories of change for systems building work offer only a broad conceptual framework that is limited in offering testable and measurable assumptions to determine its validity or point to specific points of emphasis. By developing a three-pronged theory of change, the BUILD Initiative defined key, measurable and testable assumptions regarding: (1) the structure of an early childhood system needed to improve children's readiness for success in school; (2) the strategies that systems builders needed to take to build that system; and (3) the role that foundation funding and support played to support system builders. This, in turn, has helped BUILD both articulate a systems framework (for the structure of an early childhood system) and an evaluation strategy (for measuring the work of systems builders) for the field.

The theory of change also has helped to identify the magnitude of the systems building effort and the expected long-term and iterative nature of developing it, while offering tangible ways to track progress along the way.

- First Evaluation Essay: *BUILD at 2 1/2* (describes the magnitude and long-term nature of systems building)
- Second Evaluation Essay: (describes the theory of change and its application to BUILD and other systems building work)

**State and Local Governance Structure Articulation.** Drawing upon the work in its and other states, the BUILD Initiative partnered with the State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network to describe the key attributes of effective state early childhood planning and governance structures and to pose the value of looking at governance as it relates to different stages of systems development. With SECPTAN, the BUILD Initiative then examined how state and community planning structures could be aligned in systems building work, building upon the experiences in six states.

- The ABC's of Planning and Governance
- Beyond Parallel Play: Emerging State and Community Planning Roles in Building Early childhood systems
- Building Connections Symposium

**Establishing a National Systems Framework for the Components and Infrastructure for a Early Childhood System.** The BUILD Initiative participated in convening many of the early childhood organizations and consultants providing assistance to state early childhood systems building efforts. Drawing upon the BUILD Initiatives' framework of a "system of systems," this Early Childhood Systems Working Group developed a framework of systems components and structural elements for common use. The "four ovals" that were based upon BUILD-SECPTAN work increasingly are being used in the field to describe the desired early childhood system and show the need for strong interconnections across the different elements.

**Furthering Systems Building Evaluation Approaches.** Drawing together leaders from the BUILD states, the national early childhood research and evaluation community, and early childhood foundation leaders, the BUILD Initiative convened a symposium to assess the state of the field in systems building evaluation and to suggest future steps in research and evaluation on systems building. A case study, "Top Beginnings and the Case of the Missing Child Outcomes" (subsequently published in the *American Evaluation Review*) helped to frame the symposium. The result was both a summary of the proceedings that showed the current state of the evaluation field and the development of a systems building evaluation framework that is increasing use in the field, with a strong cross-walk with the systems framework and its components. This evaluation framework is further being used in work in Pennsylvania to explore how the research and evaluation community can be more closely linked to systems building work.

- Evaluating Systems Building Symposium Proceedings
- The Case of Top Beginnings and the Missing Child Outcomes
- A Framework for Evaluating Systems Initiatives

**Raising Diversity and Equity Issues to Prominence in Early Childhood Systems Building.**

Working with state team leaders and researchers and advocates on diversity and equity issues, the BUILD Initiative has committed to examining responses to race, language, and culture within all early childhood systems building activities. Starting with a Summit of leaders to first lay out the issues for the field, the BUILD Initiative established an Equity and Diversity Working Group that has framed the need to address issues of race, language, and culture to close current gaps related to: (1) achievement and opportunity, (2) participation, (3) provision of culturally-responsive services, (4) development of culturally-diverse workforces, and (5) ensuring diverse representation in planning and decision-making. The BUILD Initiative has incorporated this work on diversity and equity both as part of any early childhood systems building work and has produced different policy briefs for the field on different areas of concern.

- Overview of the Need for Addressing Equity and Diversity in All Aspects of Systems Building
- Early Learning Standards Development in a Multi-Ethnic Society: Washington and Alaska Experiences
- Quality Rating and Improvement Systems for a Multi-Ethnic Society
- Building Public Early Childhood Data Systems for a Multi-Ethnic Society: Issues and Opportunities
- Maintaining Workforce Diversity in Transition to a Credentialed Preschool Workforce: The New Jersey Experience



**Using Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) as a Core Strategy for Early Childhood Systems Building while supporting Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) as a Key Community Resource for Providing Care.** Increasingly, states are developing Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) to strengthen their early childhood systems, with some BUILD states being leaders in this movement. QRIS's hold potential for systems building, but they are still being developed and the research regarding their effectiveness has been mixed. BUILD convened a QRIS workshop to examine QRIS development both as a specific tool for assessing early care and education program quality and providing incentives to improve it and as part of a larger effort to develop a quality system. The BUILD Initiative continues to view continuous improvement and learning from QRIS's as essential to establishing a quality early childhood system. At the same time, the BUILD Initiative also has supported work to define public policy roles in strengthening family, friend, and neighbor care, including participation in United Way of America's Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care work and a resource brief on state policy roles in supporting FFN care. The BUILD Initiative has supported both increased attention to improving the standards, quality, and regulation of professional child care while offering voluntary supports and resources to strengthen family, friend, and neighbor care, offering distinctions between professional and voluntary care and the different regulatory and support roles public policy has toward each.

- Quality Rating and Improvement Systems as the Framework for Early Care and Education System Reform
- Quality Rating and Improvement Systems for a Multi-Ethnic Society
- State Policies for Supporting Family, Friend and Neighbor Care

**Linking professional services and voluntary family and community supports to ensure school readiness.** Systems building generally refers to public and professional services in health, early care and education, and human services. These public and professional services are important, but much of a child's healthy development relies upon nurturing parents in a safe and nurturing community, with a density of informal opportunities to play and grow. The BUILD Initiative has begun to articulate the public sector's role in supporting these voluntary support systems. This has included specific examination of possible state policy actions to support family, friend, and neighbor care, through a policy brief specifically on this subject. The BUILD Initiative also co-sponsored a Smart Start preconference dialogue bringing community, state, and national leaders together to discuss new roles for public policy to support such community building as well as provide professional services.

- Thirst to Learn Dialogue Paper: Building an Early Childhood Development System for America's Future
- Thirst to learn Dialogue Summary

**Defining and Promoting the Health Community's Role in Early Childhood Systems Building.** While health, mental health, and nutrition is one of the four recognized components of an early childhood system, the role of the health community in promoting healthy development – beyond health coverage and medical care – is often very limited. The BUILD Initiative partnered with the National Center for Children in Poverty, through an intensive workshop, to describe the different

roles that the health community needs to play in supporting early childhood systems development, ones that include health coverage and medical services, but also include identification and response to developmental concerns and social determinants of health, providing health consultation to non-health early childhood providers, and promoting community health through population-based health prevention and promotion strategies. The BUILD Initiative produced a policy brief for the Colorado Trusts that described the different roles that health practitioners can play in supporting school readiness, citing exemplary state policies and practices to achieve this end.

- The Colorado Trust Issue Brief: Connecting Child Health and School Readiness

**Developing Information Systems to Support Early Childhood Systems Development and Ensure Accountability for Results.** States collect a variety of data about young children and the public programs that serve them, but these often are used solely for monitoring and fiscal accountability purposes. Rarely are they linked to one another or used by states to develop broader reports on the status of young children and services they receive. As states are building their early childhood systems, they also need to ensure they collect and analyze data to determine where service gaps may exist, what impacts services seem to be producing, and where changes to service strategies are warranted. The BUILD Initiative is conducting a series of webinars on different topics around early learning information systems, drawing upon the experiences of state leaders in the field. The BUILD Initiative has produced two papers on state data systems, one related to opportunities to incorporate early childhood data into statewide longitudinal data bases of K-12 students and one on collecting information on race, language, and culture that can ensure information can ensure equity and diversity in early childhood systems development.

- Opportunities to Incorporate Young Child Data into Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) Funding
- Building Public Early Childhood Data Systems for a Multi-Ethnic Society: Issues and Opportunities

