

Children:

The Bedrock of the Granite State

A Framework for Action for New Hampshire's Young Children

"This framework outlines important steps - related to health, education and family economic stability - that New Hampshire should take to support key areas of childhood development, including a comprehensive analysis of how current programs and policies are functioning to promote the well-being of children and families in New Hampshire, identifying challenges we face as a state, and providing recommendations for how best to move forward." Governor Maggie Hassan



"I understand how important the early years are to ensuring New Hampshire has a prosperous future. The Framework for Action is a new tool that will help us, as policymakers in making critical decisions for New Hampshire's young children and families." Senator Nancy Stiles



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New Hampshire is one of the best places in the nation to live, work and raise a family. Recent advances in developmental science have provided us with a framework for how to ensure a prosperous future for the next generation. By working together today, we can make sure that New Hampshire is one of the best places for all of our citizens tomorrow.

We now know that **early experiences literally shape the architecture of the developing brain**, and the active ingredient is the "serve and return" nature of children's engagement in relationships with caring adults. We also know that some kinds of stress can derail healthy development. **Certain experiences are so severe or chronic that they produce toxic stress in children**, which damages developing brain architecture, leading to lifelong problems in health, learning and behavior.

When communities create conditions that promote healthy brain architecture and reduce toxic stress, they can effectively catch kids before they fall. You can't build something sturdy on a shaky foundation - by focusing on the early years of life, we can build solid foundations for future growth.

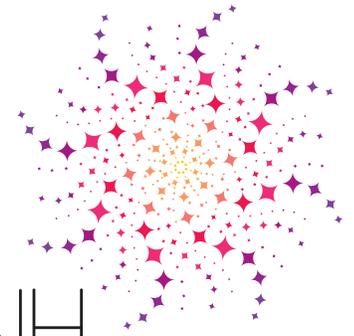


The following policy priorities identified by Spark NH are meant to do just that. Grounded in the science of what children need for health and well-being, these policies are organized according to the **core areas of child development - health, learning and family economic stability** – as well as the systems that serve kids and their families. We must attend to all of these areas when considering how best to promote healthy development.

This Framework for Action will be helpful to business leaders, policy makers and others making difficult choices about how best to invest in New Hampshire's future so that a year from now, ten years from now, and a generation from now, New Hampshire continues to be the best place to be a kid.

Spark NH is the governor-appointed early childhood advisory council created to promote a comprehensive system of early childhood programs and services in New Hampshire. www.sparknh.org

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Spark NH is the Governor-appointed Early Childhood Advisory Council for the State of New Hampshire. These ten recommended actions for New Hampshire's youngest children are the path to realizing its vision:

SparkNH
Early Childhood Advisory Council

All New Hampshire children and their families are healthy, learning, and thriving now and in the future.

Healthy Children and Families

Goal: Children and families throughout our state have the best opportunities for early and life-long health.

- ✓ Ensure access to affordable health care for families.
- ✓ Strengthen New Hampshire's capacity to promote healthy social emotional development of infants, toddlers, other young children and their families and to provide mental health services and supports.
- ✓ Develop/Expand community-based programs targeting sources of toxic stress, such as violence, crime, abuse, neglect, extreme poverty, substance abuse and severe caregiver mental illness, and ensure effective treatment for those who need it.

Positive Early Learning Experiences

Goal: Effective learning opportunities are provided in all settings including the home, child care and afterschool programs, preschools and elementary schools from birth through the primary grades.

- ✓ Expand access to proven and effective early childhood education for all infants, toddlers and other young children through grade three.
- ✓ Increase opportunities for learning outside of the school day, including summer.
- ✓ Ensure all children are screened for developmental concerns and receive the services needed to promote their optimal development.

Strong Families

Goal: Families have the skills, basic resources, and supports to promote their children's development and learning starting before birth and continuing through the primary grades.

- ✓ Ensure housing and energy assistance to low-income families.
- ✓ Expand access to proven and effective home visiting and family support programs.
- ✓ Ensure hard work pays by raising the minimum wage, supporting parents' job readiness and expanding access to higher education.

A Coordinated Early Childhood System

Goal: New Hampshire's young children and their families have the benefit of well-coordinated early childhood programs and services that work effectively together on their behalf.

- ✓ Establish an integrated, cross-agency statewide early childhood data system to improve program effectiveness and child and family outcomes.