Identifying Innovative Approaches to Strengthening Social-Emotional Development in Early Education and Child Care
Imagine a world where every child develops into a productive, healthy and happy adult.

Join and inform the dialogue to make this a reality.

In conjunction with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Buffett Early Childhood Institute and Hope Street Group, a diverse group of thought leaders and early childhood experts convened for two days in December at the University of Nebraska Omaha campus to stimulate a community of learning and dialogue on the significance of increasing awareness of a key facet of early education and care: social-emotional development (SED).
“How do we build the strength, the confidence, the resilience to take the risks necessary to try new things, to be creative and to learn, so that we can innovate into the future?”

– Dr. Michael Rich, Center on Media and Child Health

FIRST, we get started.

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THE WHY

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Hope Street Group and the Buffett Early Childhood Institute are working to foster children’s social-emotional development (SED) in early education and care settings as a critical access point to advance greater well-being for children across the U.S. We sought to learn and identify innovative approaches and opportunities for effectively promoting healthy SED within various child care settings. In convening a small group of interested stakeholders, the intention was to gain a better understanding, initiate a conversation on SED with a diverse group of thought leaders, share information across the field and collaboratively brainstorm what is needed to enhance SED integration more efficiently across all child care settings.

THE WHAT

Recognizing the vastness of the early learning landscape and what that means for effective SED integration, as well as the connection points to other indicators of greater economic opportunity, this dialogue required a unique launch event to “stir the innovation pot.”

Utilizing breakout group discussions, illustrations and landscape mapping exercises, example prototypes and identified successful practices, a multi-sectoral group of experts engaged in a thoughtful discussion to address how child care in general is a valuable access point that impacts well-being and the promotion of healthy development for children and their families.

Design thinking steps such as empathy and observation using compelling stories, problem framing, ideation, prototype development and initial testing activities were incorporated to immediately provide a sense of reality and what might be possible within the different child care settings.

This two-day session led to consensus around prioritizing how best to maximize SED integration and enhancement across the full range of early education and care settings.

This dual approach should:

1. Include a national campaign to generate SED awareness and understanding
2. Be multi-sectoral, spanning both policy and practice
THE WHO

Participants ranged from early childhood, health, education, child care, policy and data experts to pediatricians, philanthropists, authors, media and outreach influencers, public leaders, parents and business leaders. While not representative of the early education and care field in its entirety, this convening provided a diverse group of key stakeholders with the opportunity to come together and connect around their shared interest in advancing and enhancing the SED of young children and establishing the foundation for a much wider network. Committed to being inclusive and identifying missing voices, the group provided recommendations for other important stakeholders and leaders as a key next step towards building pathways for amplification.

Participants from across the country attended this session in Omaha, Nebraska, specifically chosen due to the Buffett Early Childhood Institute’s leadership in early childhood and the exciting and innovative work happening there.

SED Convening Participants

All Our Kin
American Academy of Pediatrics
Brookings Institution
Buffett Early Childhood Fund
Buffett Early Childhood Institute
Center on Media and Child Health
Child Care Aware® of America
City of New York’s Administration for Children’s Services
Council for a Strong America
Crittenton Children’s Center
George Kaiser Family Foundation
Dr. Harvey Karp (pediatrician, author of The Happiest Baby)
Hope Street Group
Dr. Laura Jana (pediatrician/author/child care expert)
Mississippi KIDS COUNT
MomsRising
National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC)
Neimand Collaborative
Parents as Teachers
Pennsylvania State University
Primrose Schools
Re-EnvisionED
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
Rosemary Wells (NY Times Bestselling children’s book author)
Save the Children
Too Small to Fail
University of Nebraska Foundation
YMCA
Zero to Three
A COMPLEX LANDSCAPE

The group agreed that while the early education and care field stands to play a critically formative role in children’s SED, it is deeply fragmented; not properly equipped with resources; and inadequately supported by both the public and policymakers, who currently lack the necessary sense of urgency to optimally help children thrive.

Complexities of the early education and care landscape include but are not limited to:

1. Lack of communication or shared understanding of what SED is and how it is/should be applied and assessed
2. Lack of access to affordable, high quality child care
3. Cultural, linguistic and socioeconomic divides between the many primary stakeholders
4. Lack of accountability
5. Lack of adequate integration or coordination of SED efforts between education, health, labor and other various social services and systems
6. Inconsistent policies and compliance procedures at the federal and state level
7. Minimal investment/funding to stimulate long-term change
8. Pipeline and ongoing professional development for the child care workforce
In an attempt to map the current early education and care landscape and the multiple stakeholders involved to maximize SED impact across various settings, the participants identified some of the most critical challenges experienced in the field. Participants shared their own experiences, as well, to demonstrate that each community is rather unique in its infrastructure and supporting services. For example, one participant noted the challenges rural communities often face as they do not have many of the community shared resources, such as a library, that many other places have. In addition, again in rural settings, there is a significant gap or degree of importance placed on fundamental developmental screenings that are usually required in other parts of the country. There was shared agreement that there is a considerable lack of a “how-to” to stimulate dialogue and interactions amongst community stakeholders to leverage resources proficiently.

Across the settings, the group identified a multitude of stakeholders and barriers to SED advancement. A snapshot follows:

**STAKEHOLDERS**

**PRIMARY**
- Parents
- Children
- Early education and child care providers

**INFLUENCERS**
- Policy makers and regulators
- Researchers
- Technology
- Media
- Culture of origin and community
- Business and community leaders

**BARRIERS**

**NEED FOR**
- Affordable access and availability
- Accountability
- Shared vision, language and goals
- Community and national integration
- Research to support SED long-term impacts

**NEED FOR**
- Inconsistent regulations, funding streams and workforce quality
- Devaluation of low income parents and providers
The group agreed on the need for a broader and bolder national vision in order for all stakeholders to understand what SED is, the enormous impact it can play and how it can be fostered early to ensure that it serves as a foundationally strong component of every child’s life. The declaration of this vision should be a nonpartisan statement that everyone can support.

First, the participants spent some time brainstorming shared vision statements. An example statement is:

**All children can be happy, healthy and productive adults.**

Second, the participants spent some time brainstorming shared mission statements. An example statement is:

**SED is integrated in early education and child care, health care, social services and children’s homes in a manner that is informed, responsive and effective.**

There was agreement that motivating the masses is essential to alter the course of quality and access to both child care and SED. Also essential is the differentiation between what needs to happen at the national level to shift the perception and sense of urgency on the issue of quality child care and what needs to happen within specific sectors and areas that influence child care in some capacity. Accounting for these two needs is critical to define the pathway and action plan to move forward. Given this backdrop, the participants sought to identify viable pathways to stimulate SED and quality child care advancements and understanding within a variety of settings and geographies.

The group ideated starter solutions across four prioritized areas.

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The Sense of the Possible

Let’s create a national vision.

THE SENSE OF THE POSSIBLE: GENERATING A SHARED VISION

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POLICY OBJECTIVES

1. Consider SED advancement in current policy implementation
2. Create new policies to support advancement and integration of SED
3. Leverage resources and existing policy supports in new ways to support SED integration

Necessary for effective policy development and implementation is the need to connect with policy developments across government agencies (e.g. Labor, Education, Health, Social Services). Often policies are implemented with good intention, yet create a fragmented ecosystem for individuals to operate in. Policies and incentives should be structured across the learning to work continuum, with increased resources and recognition in the early child care space.

MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS OBJECTIVE

1. Construct a comprehensive media strategy for a national campaign on SED

Necessary for creating the needed sense of urgency, building accountability and garnering the appropriate resources for long-term change, an effective and targeted marketing and mobilization campaign needs to be implemented with various input from the multiple stakeholders within the early education and care field.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. Source and catalogue the data, research and best practices in an easily digestible manner per audience group (e.g. parents, researchers, providers)
2. Provide a playbook or guide to create more opportunities for dialogue and communication between stakeholders
3. Target and curate more research on the interaction between technology and SED implementation

Necessary for maximized use of the current research in the field is the investment needed to curate, source and codify the research in a manner that would be helpful to the various stakeholders and audiences involved or affected in the early education and care field. Right now, best practices and essential data points are not easily disseminated and most organizations/providers are left to reinvent the wheel. If information was able to be accessed and understood in a manner that was proficient and easy, many stakeholders would become equipped with the resources to replicate best practices and effective SED techniques.

PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP OBJECTIVES

1. Advance SED integration through multi-sectoral efforts and into other aspects of economic mobility and opportunity
2. Build the business case and ROI for private sector engagement and accountability

Necessary to reach these objectives is the investment, demonstrated value proposition and time needed to build diverse community collaboratives across sectors. SED needs to be formally realized as essential to the overall health and economic outcome within localities and regions so that a multitude of investors and partners could become engaged.
INITIATING A BLUEPRINT FOR ACTION

Participant Recommended
Long-Term Action Steps:

SED Community of Practice
The establishment of a trusted and diverse network representing the early education and care field, allowing for further dialogue, convenings and collaborative problem solving, etc., to realize our shared vision and mission.

Research Hub/Portal
The creation of an online, open sourced research hub/portal to disseminate the best information and increase access to effective resources and best practices.

Media Campaign
The mobilization of possible leads to execute the broader campaign and messaging essential to move the masses.

Playbooks for Community Collaborative Relationships
The development of playbooks for local organizations to stimulate and sustain community collaboratives including employers, community based organizations, educators, various providers, etc.

SED Advocacy Coalition
The provision of more resources to support organizations and individuals embarking on SED advocacy.

Policy Sector Integration
The creation of roundtable policy meetings, accommodating different levels of government, to integrate SED and quality child care more effectively and vividly.
Join and inform the dialogue to help build a better future for every child.

Contact Hope Street Group at outreach@hopestreetgroup.org to learn how to get involved.
Hope Street Group is a national organization that works to ensure every American will have access to tools and options leading to economic opportunity and prosperity.

www.hopestreetgroup.org