



*If you can visualize it, if you can dream it,
there's some way to do it --Walt Disney*

2020 Early Care and Education – A New Decade *The Child Care Micro-Center Network* Overview

The **Child Care Micro-Center Network** (Network) is a strategy to introduce scale as a means of reducing the cost of delivering early care and education (ECE) services by small centers and home-based Family Child Care (FCC) providers. The goal is to improve ECE financial stability *and* improve access to quality child care for working and/or student-parents.

A Network co-working facility is designed for small, one-classroom ECE providers and is located in an existing or new building with funding support from business investors, grants, and public subsidies. Each ECE tenant rents space for a minimal cost and agrees to join the Micro-Center Network to participate in tailored ECE cost-saving opportunities and services.

The micro-center approach to centralized administration is not new. Examples of organizations successfully providing ECE support services include:

- Chambliss Center for Children centralized administration (Chattanooga, Tennessee) for child care centers
- Early Connections Learning Center Home Network (Colorado Springs, Colorado) for FCC providers.

To date ECE administrative services have not been paired with co-working facilities. Looking to best practices in other regulated business sectors (e.g. hair stylists, cosmetologists, nail technicians, estheticians, etc.) the Child Care Micro-Center Network is laying the groundwork for a similar business model to support increased scale and reduce costs for ECE providers.

The Micro-Center Network highlights the importance of a quality environment for a child's ECE experience, reduces barriers to entry for new ECE providers and supports best practices for career child care professionals by addressing:

- A convenient location for working and/or student-parents
- Land use/zoning regulations that disallow FCC and small child care centers
- HOA rules that serve as barriers for new FCC entrants
- Costs of converting multiple homes and small buildings to meet licensing requirements
- A high-quality care experience for children
- Operational support for the director or owner
- Curriculum, professional development and training to enhance adult/child interaction
- A peer network for members

The Micro-Center Network serves as the lead organization and fiscal sponsor to attract centralized funding where:

- Grantees are more likely to support a child care collective than small, independent child care centers and FCC providers

- Businesses are likely to consider sponsoring a Micro-Center Network facility if it is available and convenient to its workforce, helping to attract and retain employees
- Local governments recognize child care's influence on available workforce, job creation and economic development

The centralized services provided by the Micro-Center Network includes:

- Business and financial sustainability
 - Financial reporting and analysis, budgeting and bill-payments
 - Tuition pricing, centralized marketing and a parent referral mechanism to maximize enrollment
 - Attendance tracking and billing (subsidies and parent fees)
 - Human resource services for hiring, job descriptions, background checks, salary benchmarking and wage adjustment strategies
 - Personnel credentialing, new staff on-boarding and access to a substitute pool
 - Payroll support and benefits administration
 - Templates for enrollment, handbooks, policies, classroom procedures, etc.
 - Regulatory compliance tools and technologies that save time by linking to governmental systems through an application program interface (API) -- the API connection allows two separate data sources to talk to each other
 - IT support
 - Robust purchasing platform to reduce cost of materials and supplies, professional training, insurance, and benefits
- Pedagogical leadership and training
 - Instructional and teacher supervision
 - Professional development in child development and child assessments
 - Age and culturally appropriate curriculum

The Micro-Center Network serves as a voice for small ECE programs to become more financial viability by:

- Piloting single-purpose ECE facilities for legal and regulatory purposes, requesting waivers when necessary
- Contracting with appropriate ECE vendors to take advantage of existing shared services models
- Developing ECE investment funds for furnishings, equipment, start-up costs and parent fee subsidies

Success of the Micro-Center Network depends on engaged thought-leaders to influence:

- The new normal for early care and education as an **essential service for today's employee and employers**
- A new perspective by ECE professionals and small child care business owners to embrace **technology as an important resource** that allow directors and owners to re-direct time to the classroom and the children served
- Policymakers to **update rules and regulations** that continue to address child-safe environments while recognizing the regulatory challenges that lead parents and children to unlicensed facilities with no oversight.
- The community to invest when **quality ECE costs more than parents can pay**