



# “Inside-Outside” Strategies for Integrating Home-Based Child Care Into Public Preschool: Nuts-and-Bolts Tactics

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## HOME GROWN

Home Grown is a national collaborative of philanthropic leaders committed to improving the quality of and access to home-based child care. We use numerous strategies to better understand and support various forms of home-based child care including regulated family child care, regulation-exempt care, and family, friend and neighbor care. Learn more on our [website](#).

- I. [Introduction](#)
- II. [Nuts-and-Bolts Tactics](#)
- III. [Acknowledgments](#)

# Introduction

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State spending on pre-K has more than doubled in 20 years, reaching nearly \$9 billion in 2021, with localities adding funds through taxes and general city budgets. While 24 states allow home-based child care (HBCC) providers to receive public pre-K funding, participation remains low due to system designs that create barriers to participation. Many parents prefer having their child in a home-based setting because of the smaller, and often more culturally responsive approach. There is also a growing body of research about how to adapt preschool policies to meaningfully include home-based care providers, however, many administrators may become stuck during the planning process.

Ensuring HBCC participation in pre-K requires an “inside-outside strategy”— combining external pressure with internal policy work is key to making systemic changes. This resource broadly supports leaders and administrators of pre-K systems and other early care and education programs to plan to incorporate home-based child care into publicly funded systems. The findings and best practices shared in these briefs can be utilized to help policymakers and those leading implementations of early care and education programs inform strategies for this work. To access the full introduction and additional briefs, [click here](#).

## Nuts-and-Bolts Tactics

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While home-based child care is a vital part of the national early care and education system, the failure to integrate this care setting into publicly funded pre-K systems can threaten the livelihood of providers and deprive families of choices that would serve them better. Many advocates and researchers have made the compelling case for including home-based child care providers in publicly funded pre-K systems, but administrators need tools to make the case internally and externally.

There are powerful examples of successful collaborations from around the country that, taken together, sketch out some of the elements of successful collaboration between home-based child care providers and preschool administrators: Most of them used inside-outside strategies to help drive change in the sector. An “inside-outside strategy” is one that combines outside pressure from advocates and providers with work within government by supportive insiders to change policy.<sup>1</sup> In many of the cases in which localities are able to change their systems to work with home-based providers successfully, advocates and providers both push and work with government administrators to transform systems. These tactics formed parts of some of the most successful strategies across the country. Here are some of the general steps:

### I. **Give providers a seat at every table—we need their voices in planning, implementation, and ongoing operations.**

Seeking provider input is not a one-time activity to check off the to-do list. Providers need to have a seat at the table continuously and to play a meaningful role in conversations about planning, implementation, and ongoing operations. Doing so consistently will help ensure that your program continues to serve families well and equitably; a failure to do so will lead you to miss mission-critical feedback. Furthermore, it is challenging—and in larger or more dispersed locations, virtually impossible—to gather feedback from all providers. For this reason, many policymakers will rely upon a smaller group of providers who can attend advisory board meetings and bring the perspective of others. However, there is vast diversity within the child care provider community and it is important to understand the depth of perspectives before assuming that one provider or group of providers can speak for all.

- **Find a range of providers throughout your geography to consult, with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives.**

To find them, consult organizations such as family child care associations, family child care networks, unions representing family child care homes, Home Grown leaders and initiatives, professional organizations that may include family child care homes like National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) state affiliates or National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC) state affiliate, and/or the state regulatory database of providers.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example “[Governing Together: Layers and Lessons](#),” Sarah Johnson and Elianne Farhat, The Forge, October 2021 and “[Countervailing Powers: Building Bottom-Up Democracy through Co-Governance](#),” Ben Palmquist, The Forge, March 2023 for further explanation of this term in more general use.

- **Schedule meetings when and where providers can attend.**  
Meet on evenings and weekends, when attendance will likely be highest, and ask providers what time frames work best for them.
- **Make meetings accessible.**  
Offer a combination of options, including both virtual and in-person. For in-person meetings, make sure they are in locations accessible to a large number of providers. Always provide translation and interpretation. Explore whether other supports might be needed to ensure attendance, like food or on-site child care.
- **Ensure that timelines for decision-making are flexible** to allow for input, analysis, and careful consideration of multiple points of view.
- **Pay providers for their time.**

## II. **Work with the decision-makers: Promote the importance, quality, and value of home-based care, develop political champions for it, and work actively to dispel myths and misunderstandings.**

Those who hold greater power over ECE policy—those controlling the budget and policy agenda—may not understand the different modes of care and may hold biases against them. On the other hand, a few key leaders in the right places at the right time can help advance the case significantly. As in any campaign, champions are essential to make change, and they can and should be both inside and outside government.

- **Find natural champions** who can be cultivated from within influential seats in government because of their personal experiences; for example, the elected official whose mother was a lifelong child care provider or the budget team leader whose child had a wonderful, nurturing relationship with his home-based provider.
- **Share local and regional data** on the number and quality of home-based child care providers to underscore how essential they are to meeting the real needs of families and communities.
- **Tour home-based child care** with policymakers to educate decision-makers and develop relationships.

Here are a few best practices for tours:

- Start with the educator's story. How and why did they begin the work? How long have they done it? What training have they gotten? Share 1-2 stories about families they have served.
- Help decision-makers "read" the space. Many of us have done the work for so long that we take for granted that everyone knows what a quality early childhood space looks like! Decision-makers will not know what to look for. Take the time to explain why things are where they are, and what children learn from all the objects in the space.
- Emphasize health and safety. This may be front of mind for policymakers. Explain a few of the systems in place and the supports that are available.
- Don't forget food! If you work with a provider who takes special pride in their cuisine, this is an excellent opportunity to show it off. It can act on many levels to convey the comfort and joy of a home care site.
- Highlight "fit" for families. Tell stories that convey how HBCCs uniquely meet the needs of certain families — because of their schedule flexibility, parents' desires for a more intimate setting, linguistic/ cultural familiarity, etc.
- Plan for after the site visit. Ideally, decision-makers can also sit with groups of providers and families to highlight aspects of what they saw, to hear how enthusiastic families are and to hear from providers what they need to succeed.

## III. **Build political power among providers.**

In keeping with an inside-outside strategy, it will often be critical not just to work with decision-makers, but to build power outside the existing decision-making structures to advocate for the best result. In some communities, labor unions can play an essential role and program administrators can work in partnership with them. In communities where child care workers are not unionized, the union is not willing to advocate on pre-K issues, or the union is not aligned with the priorities of home-based care providers, there may be coalitions of organized providers who have influence

with policy makers and politicians and can operate in a similar function as a union. If that group does not yet exist, there may be an opportunity to support the creation of one. For example, a team might provide free leadership training, stipends, and free space to providers in their community.

#### **IV. Work to modify your existing preschool systems so they actually work for providers—don't make providers work around your systems.**

Cities, counties, and states have systems in place to regulate, monitor, provide payments to and support quality improvement of child care providers, including home-based providers. While specifics vary in each state, policymakers can take intentional steps to adapt their systems for HBCCs, rather than asking providers to conform to systems that do not fit their operating model.

This process should begin with a scan of all the relevant systems to discern which systems will support HBCCs and which will undermine their efforts. Program administrators should also look at where these systems are in alignment with each other and where the guidance to providers might be contradictory or out of step with best practice. Specific areas to look at include:

- Regulations: licensing staff qualifications, ratios, and group size
- Public funding systems: rates of payment, ratios, group size, length of day, ages of children that can be enrolled, days per year, absence, payment methodology (based on enrollment vs. attendance), and staff qualifications
- Public data systems: professional development, Quality Rating Improvement Systems, licensing system, data systems for food subsidy programs, interactions with the Head Start system, early intervention, and other data systems that providers must use
- Public quality improvement supports: What is measured, is the feedback clear and consistent, and are the supports actually effective?

As you work through the results with your stakeholders, keep three broad lessons in mind:

- 1.** *Measuring quality matters, but the definition of “quality” varies a lot.*  
Your system should measure what matters to the families you serve. For some, emotional responsiveness may be much more important than the equipment and supplies in the room. For others, linguistic and cultural competence may come before all other measures. Most important is adopting a consistent set of measures and sticking with them over time to get a sense of relative performance and trends.
- 2.** *The supports that help move quality look different in different community contexts.*  
Some localities have well-developed support structures for teacher training, but have little to help providers run their operations successfully, for example. In some cases, local government is actively involved in offering support for home-based providers, and in others, a separate organization and/or labor union provides the support — often to a subset of providers that join. Policymakers must begin by understanding what is in place so they can build on it successfully.
- 3.** *Perception matters.*  
Ultimately, policies will shape the choices available to families, and budgets will depend on ongoing confidence in the system from political leaders. Policymakers will not always be able to shift the system solely on the basis of the latest research. It is critical that we constantly think about how to rally public support for the particular measures and supports for quality we believe are best for children and families. It is also about messaging — policymakers need to understand the nuances and develop narratives that do not define home-based settings only in relation to center-based settings.

Successful inside-outside strategies, like some of those described here, have helped create fairer, more successful programs for children, families, and educators alike. Wherever possible, these groups should seek ways to collaborate in

### **Additional Briefs**

- [“Inside-Outside” Strategies for Integrating Home-Based Child Care Into Public Preschool: the NYC Story](#)
- [“Inside-Outside” Strategies for Integrating Home-Based Child Care Into Public Preschool: The Role of Unions](#)

advocating for more equitable structures and more resources for home-based care. Ideally, these groups can join other stakeholders in the fight for a universal care system that meets everyone's needs.

Over the past years, the early care and education field has made significant advances in lifting up and including the amazing educators in home-based settings, so they are now seen as an essential part of the universal child care system families need and deserve. Careful inside-outside work can play an essential role in making progress toward that goal.

## Acknowledgments

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