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FUNDING FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Commonwealth Committed to Early Childhood Education

Early Childhood Education an Important Component of Community Development

BY ROGER HERZOG AND
THERESA JORDAN

SPECIAL TO BANKER & TRADESMAN



High-quality child care facilities benefit children, their families and society. Facilities with lots of natural light, access to play indoors and outdoors, and space that supports teacher planning and encourages parental involvement are essential to fostering children's health and well-being, especially for children living in low-income neighborhoods.



Over time, policy makers, philanthropists and other public/private financing agencies are increasingly recognizing the importance of early childhood education (ECE) and out-of-school time (OST) facilities to community development.

The most recent – and perhaps most significant – acknowledgement of the role high-quality child care plays in strengthening communities comes from the federal government. In June, the U.S. Department of Treasury's Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) Fund certified the Children's Investment Fund (CIF), an affiliate of the Community Economic Development Assistance Corporation (CEDAC), as a CDFI. This is important because CDFIs invest in neighborhoods that other financial institutions are un-

willing to and expand economic opportunities in those communities by providing organizations with access to financing and technical assistance.

The certification allows CIF to apply for federal funding to offer low-cost lending capital for ECE and OST facility improvements throughout the commonwealth. We were excited to learn in September that the CDFI Fund awarded us a \$300,000 financial assistance grant, one of 302 community development financial institutions to receive a total of \$202.2 million in awards this

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year. Those resources will help expand both financial and technical assistance to child care providers from Boston to Pittsfield.

The Children's Investment Fund is one of a very few organizations across the country with a primary focus on developing child care facilities that has received this certification. We have also become a national leader in integrating child care within community development, in large part because Massachusetts has shown a tremendous amount of vision in this area.

This past spring, Gov. Charlie Baker and state legislators signed the Housing Bond Bill, which reauthorized the Early Education and Out of School Time (EEOST) Capital Fund, a bond pro-

gram created in 2013 that provides capital funds for child care providers planning to renovate or build new child care facilities. CIF co-manages EEOST with CEDAC and the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC). Baker in August announced the most recent awards through the fund – four providers each received \$1 million.

Among the recipients were Holyoke Chicopee Springfield Head Start Inc., which is constructing a high-quality early learning center based on the nationally recognized Educare model to serve 141 infants, toddlers and preschoolers from low-income families within Springfield. The Educare model helps children from birth to age 5 grow up safe, healthy and eager to learn. With more than 20 completed projects across the country, Educare prepares children for success and also helps parents develop skills to champion their child's education.

Educare Springfield, the first in Massachusetts, is the result of collaboration between city and state partners, the region's philanthropic community, and Holyoke Chicopee Springfield Head Start, which worked tirelessly to bring Educare to Western Massachusetts.

At a recent groundbreaking ceremony, Lt. Gov. Karyn Polito noted the strong connection between the impact of this new facility and the city's overall efforts to revitalize this distressed urban neighborhood through public and private investments. It underscored how early education – like housing – is an important component of community development. The 2019 EEOST Capital Fund funding round is now underway.

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Since it was established in 1991, CIF has invested \$56 million in support of 565 capital projects that improved learning environments for 30,500 children. Our comprehensive technical assistance, training and financing model has strengthened nonprofit community-based child care providers in urban neighborhoods like Dorchester, suburban areas like Beverly and rural towns like Granby. In 2017 alone, more than 3,300 children throughout the commonwealth were served in facilities assisted by CIF. Almost

all of these children (93 percent) were from low-income households; 80 percent were children of color; 45 percent were English Language Learners; and 13 percent were children with special needs.

As important as CIF's role is in supporting child care providers, it has been elevated by certification and funding from the federal government. Funding from the CDFI Fund, EEOST and the philanthropic community give us more opportunities to increase lending to the provider

community. As our understanding grows of how early education and care strengthens local communities, it's good to know that public and private resources are available for smart and impactful investments. ◀

Roger Herzog is the executive director of the Community Economic Development Assistance Corporation. **Theresa Jordan** is director of Children's Facilities Finance for the Children's Investment Fund.
