The Community Partnerships for Children (CPC) initiative has its origins in the Massachusetts School Improvement Acts of 1985, which established a state-funded early childhood program for young children at risk in the public schools. The CPC preschool program was expanded in 1993 to include all early care and education programs in a community in the planning and delivery of services to young children. Further expansion in 1996 added a focus on services for 3- and 4-year-olds from working families. Scholarships are available to families who earn up to 100 percent of the state median income (SMI), with parent fees determined by a state sliding fee scale. If a community serves all the children from families earning up to 100 percent of SMI it can then serve children from families earning up to 125 percent of SMI. Currently, 65 percent of the families served are below 85 percent of SMI. Programs are required to be inclusive and to serve children with and without disabilities.

Collaboration at the community level is a key requirement of the CPC program. The state distributes funds (through a competitive process) to local CPC councils; these councils plan the expansion and coordination of preschool services based on community resources and needs. Councils include parents; representatives of child care, public school, Head Start and family child care programs; and other community representatives. Councils must address specific funding priorities in their annual proposals, such as increasing the affordability of early childhood programs and improving the quality of programs through accreditation support and training. Programs funded under CPC are required to comply with and use the Early Childhood Program Standards and Guidelines for Preschool Learning Experiences adopted by the Board of Education in April 2003.

In recent years, state budget cuts have had adverse effects on the CPC program, with approximately one-third of the funding eliminated since fiscal year 2001. Cuts in services are determined locally by the CPC councils and have included a broad range of reductions in direct services, quality initiatives, and comprehensive services. With funding of $78,300,000, the CPC program served 17,500 children in 2002-2003.

A separate early childhood initiative provided $6,400,000 in state funds to supplement federal funding for Head Start in 2001–2002. These funds were used for quality enhancement and to provide 440 additional Head Start slots in Massachusetts.