



OEC Blue Ribbon Panel Plan

YEAR ONE PROGRESS

1. workforce & quality

A. Support professional compensation for a strong and stable Early Childhood Education (ECE) workforce in all ECE programs.

- Expanded eligibility for Qualified Workforce Incentives (QWI) to teachers and administrators who hold a bachelor's degree or higher in any field, and at least 12 ECE credits.
- Increased rates for Care 4 Kids providers by 11%, and rates for state-funded preschool (School Readiness and Child Day Care program) by 17%.
- Legislation passed allocating \$9 million for workforce payments to state-funded teaching staff.

B. Pursue strategies that support ECE workforce recruitment and retention.

- Covered the costs for background checks for another year, through June 30, 2025, to remove a financial barrier for child care and youth camp staff.
- Workforce pipeline pilot funded with \$5 million for FY24 and FY25 to recruit, train, and mentor entry-level staff. This will fund training and support for more than 400 recruits.
- Funded the family child care apprenticeship program through CSEA SEIU Local 2001, which will result in family child care home educators earning their Child Development Associate (CDA) and NAFCC accreditation, leading to an increase in wages for these providers.
- Establishing apprenticeship programs at early care and education centers, and for intermediary organizations who will provide training, technical assistance, and wraparound supports for early care and education employers and their apprentices.

C. Simplify the credentialing process. Adopt a three-step career ladder through a collaborative process that aligns compensation and credentials with the Unifying Framework (UF).

- Legislation passed in 2024 to further align current legislative requirements for a state-funded Qualified Staff Member (QSM) within the Unifying Framework.

D. Help ECE programs maximize their fiscal health to support stability, quality, and increased workforce compensation.

- Increased Care 4 Kids and state-funded program rates.
- Funded Women's Business Development Center (WBDC) to provide technical assistance and emergency grants to help stabilize child care programs.

E. Expand strategies to support improved quality of early childhood programs.

- Launched Pyramid work to include family child care providers and to increase awareness of Pyramid resources.

- Engaged and awarded bonuses of \$1,480 to 175 providers who achieved Member+ status through an approved Elevate Program Plan of improvement.
- Elevate staff visited 110 providers to engage them in the system, rewarding them with \$100 vouchers for learning supplies, and providing books and printed materials about resources OEC offers.
- Increased family child care accreditation by 40% through support from Staffed Family Child Care Networks, Elevate, and Accreditation support.
- Increased child care center accreditation by 4% through support from Accreditation Quality Improvement Support (AQIS) and Elevate.

2. equitable & affordable access

A. Expand affordability for low- and middle-income families.

- Updated multiple aspects of the Care 4 Kids system, including:
 - Established 1,500 new Care 4 Kids spaces and capped family fees at 7% of household income (effective January 1, 2025).
 - Reduced the benefit cliff that families enrolled in Care 4 Kids can face by increasing the current household income limit from 65% to 85% of the state median income (SMI). This allows parents to accept a pay increase at work without worry that it will prevent their child from continuing to receive this care.
- Added 900 state-funded spaces in FY25.
- Established a Tri-Share pilot to serve New London County. This is a model where businesses, parents, and the state share the cost of child care for the participating family.

B. Increase the supply of affordable infant and toddler care for families.

- Added 1,290 infant and toddler state-funded spaces in 2023.
- Established a work group to examine licensing regulations and sustainability of Group Child Care Homes.
- Established support for family child care incubator development.

C. Improve access to programs and services to meet the needs of children with special needs and their families.

- Legislation passed in 2024 requiring child care programs to allow Birth to Three providers in the classroom.

D. Increase equitable access to high-quality care, especially for under-resourced families and communities.

- Funded family child care and center-based apprenticeship programs prioritizing models that support speakers of languages other than English and whose families share the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the staff being hired.
- Removed the \$300,000 per community cap for the Smart Start program, allowing local and regional boards of education access to grants needed to establish or expand preschool programs.

3. systems

A. Simplify state-funded systems and better align with federal systems to reduce complexity and increase utility.

- Established Early Start CT combining 3 existing programs — Child Day Care Contracts, School Readiness Grants, and State Head Start Supplement Grants — into 1 program. This new program, effective July 1, 2025, will minimize administrative burdens on programs and simplify parent navigation.

B. Maximize existing resources by strengthening partnerships to identify opportunities for potential alignment and innovation, reduce administrative burdens, and barriers to accessing state systems.

- Reduced administrative burdens with establishment of Early Start CT.
- Reduced administrative burdens with launch of Care 4 Kids Parent Portal.
- Improved ECE reporter, the data system for state-funded programs.
- Established first-in-the-nation, innovative model Head Start on Housing to secure affordable housing for families enrolled in Head Start.

C. Ensure family and representative community voices are central in the ECE system.

- Engaged and supported the OEC Parent Cabinet, local Parent Ambassadors, and 2Gen parents to elevate parent voices to inform early childhood policy and planning.
- Early Start CT prioritizes local governance with community voice.

D. Develop data and information systems to track and improve systems and outcomes, in coordination with other statewide efforts.

- Established Provider 360, a foundational system that brings all of the OEC early childhood systems providers to one platform. Improvements and new features continue to be developed.

4. funding

A. Develop a plan to transition to funding based on the cost of care, starting with infant and toddler care and high need communities.

→ Completed narrow cost analysis; Care 4 Kids is moving toward this model.

B. Develop a flexible fiscal model to support implementation and help to prioritize and stage investments in alignment with system reforms.

→ Awarded \$13 million facilities grants to support child care providers in high social vulnerability index (SVI) communities and / or disproportionately impacted areas (DIA). An additional \$10 million approved by the State Bond Commission for FY25.

→ Collaborating with local Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) to develop strategies for ongoing funding streams for facilities construction, renovation, and quality improvements, including tax incentives and low- to no-interest loan programs for ECE providers.

C. Identify new, dedicated funding streams to support sustained and significant public and private incremental investment in ECE.

→ Legislation passed in 2023 that established the Early Childhood Child Care Education Fund, a non-lapsing fund in which funds may be deposited for investment in early care and education.

→ Legislation passed in 2024 designated members to serve on the Early Childhood Care and Education Fund Advisory Commission.