

20 STRATEGIC PLAN

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Connecticut Office of
Early Childhood

FROM THE COMMISSIONER

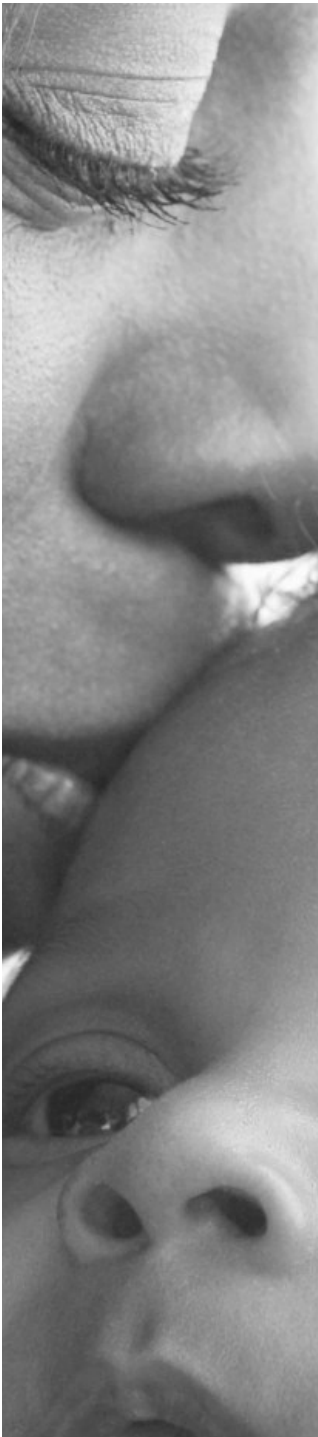
The Office of Early Childhood is committed to helping families with young children thrive because our youngest children deserve a bright future. Even in this time of fiscal uncertainty, this is a moment of possibility, promise and potential for early childhood in Connecticut. Working together, we can accomplish much. The Office of Early Childhood has a laser focus on improving our early childhood system and will continue its work integrating and strengthening that system to support families and children.

This strategic plan was built on research and former statewide plans and was strengthened by public input. It will be the “north star” for the Office of Early Childhood over the next four years. While no one can predict every twist and turn of the state budget, new legislation, or shifting Federal priorities, we will use this document as a guide to plan our annual goals and actions to make and communicate tangible progress each year.

I am proud that this plan highlights our commitment to ensure our decisions are always focused on families and children, our commitment to quality and equity and our acknowledgment that we can do better. This plan reflects our agency's sense of urgency and commitment to delivering on the promise of this agency. I look forward to working closely with the families of Connecticut, our sister agencies and our wide array of partners to help make this vision a reality.

Sincerely,

Linda Goodman
Acting Commissioner





AGENCY OVERVIEW

The Office of Early Childhood is responsible for offering programs and services that strengthen families and support the development, well-being, school success and safety of Connecticut's young children ages zero to five. Our work includes:

Helping ensure safe and healthy learning environments. Our child care and youth camp licensing staff monitor every licensed early care and education setting for health and safety.

Providing family support. We administer a system of home visiting programs that provide supports to increase family stability, support children with developmental delays and prevent child abuse and neglect.

Providing access to high-quality early care and education. We administer a number of funding streams and quality initiatives that provide families access to high-quality early care and education settings.

Supporting the early childhood workforce. We offer training, scholarships and professional development to recruit and retain a highly qualified early childhood workforce.

Providing critical information to families. We fund Child Care 211 and Child Development Infoline to ensure parents statewide have easy access to information they need about care options and developmental screening and referral resources.

The Office of Early Childhood has approximately 140 employees and is structured in four major divisions:

- * Licensing Division
- * Early Care and Education Division
- * Family Support Division
- * Quality Improvement Division



MISSION AND VISION

Vision

All young children in Connecticut are safe, healthy, learning and thriving. Each child is surrounded by a strong network of nurturing adults who deeply value the importance of the first years of a child's life and have the skills, knowledge, support and passion to meet the unique needs of every child.

Mission

To support all young children in their development by ensuring that early childhood policy, funding and services strengthen the critical role families, providers, educators and communities play in a child's life.

Guiding Principles

- * Build family-centered and family-driven systems for all children in Connecticut
- * Prioritize children facing barriers, risks, setbacks or challenges to their healthy development
- * Foster a deep respect for cultural differences in child rearing practices
- * Honor families' diverse languages, values, strengths and needs
- * Consider the whole child, his or her family, and his or her community setting
- * Value early childhood as a time of learning through play and building positive relationships
- * Ensure equal access to and parent choice within all early childhood services
- * Operate in an efficient, coordinated, caring, professional and effective manner
- * Confront and eliminate institutional racism and disparities
- * Engage in continuous and system quality improvement
- * Utilize current best practices, available research and data
- * Nurture and value collaborative partnerships, innovation and self-reflection

Inclusion Statement

The Office of Early Childhood expects that all children and families have a sense of full belonging and are valued, respected and supported.

Office of Early Childhood policies, funding and services address the needs of children and families to ensure the right conditions exist for every child to achieve their full potential. This occurs through full participation in everyday activities at home, school and in the community.

The Office of Early Childhood, providers, communities and schools adopt and promote the culture, practices and relationships necessary to foster inclusion and meaningful access and participation for the benefit of ALL children.

All children, with and without disabilities or differences, their families and caregivers benefit from inclusive environments.

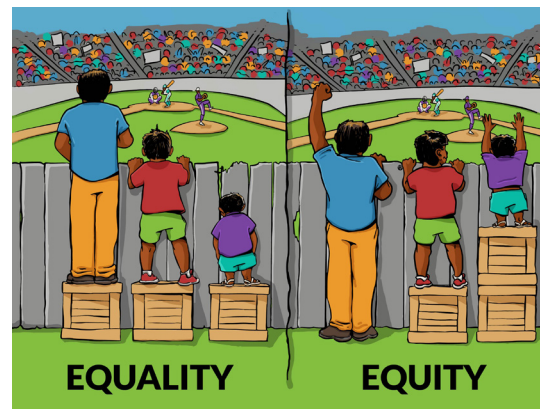
COMMITMENT TO EQUITY AND FAIRNESS

Every family with young children in Connecticut should be able to expect their child will enjoy safety and wellbeing, school success, long-term emotional and physical health and optimal growth and development. Unfortunately, there remain to many longstanding disparities in children's outcomes. The Office of Early Childhood is committed to changing that.

Over the next four years, the Office of Early Childhood will work to ensure that *all* families can expect great outcomes for their child. The Office of Early Childhood will especially work to improve service to families who face the highest likelihood for poor outcomes:

- * Children experiencing unstable housing¹
- * Children with significant developmental delays
- * Children who have experienced trauma
- * Children in families in poverty²

To accomplish this, the Office of Early Childhood will monitor disparities in access and outcomes, make policy changes and provide guidance and support to programs.



¹ McKinney-Vento Definition of homelessness
² Under 100 percent of the federal poverty level

2016-2020 STRATEGIC PLAN SUMMARY



GOAL 1: PLACE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES FIRST

GOAL 2: INCREASE ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY PROGRAMS

GOAL 3: CULTIVATE A SKILLED EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE

GOAL 4: STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS

GOAL 5: INCREASE AGENCY EFFECTIVENESS

GOAL 1: PLACE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES FIRST





GOAL 1: PLACE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES FIRST

Why is this goal important?

State government plays an important role in administering early childhood services, policies and programs, but, in order to be most effective, these supports must be designed in partnership with families. Decisions should reflect and respect the strengths, needs, values, languages and cultures of the generations of families in Connecticut who are raising young children. The Office of Early Childhood's responsibility is to serve *all* families in Connecticut and ensure that every young child and their family is treated equitably. Equity in early childhood is essential for setting a foundation to reduce long-term disparities in outcomes for education, health, development and safety.

OBJECTIVE 1.1 ACHIEVE A FAMILY-CENTERED AGENCY CULTURE

Strategy 1: Ensure
Office of Early
Childhood policies are
family-friendly

- * Ask “*what would families say?*” to ensure policies and practices are developmentally-appropriate and family-focused
- * Use a multi-generational approach to improve policies and practices
- * Build common ground between families' choices and early childhood professional research

Strategy 2:
Communicate with
families

- * Partner with existing organizations trusted by parents to communicate with families
- * Help families learn about available services, screening, child development, high-quality early care and education, home visiting and infant and child health
- * Ensure communication with families is appropriate to parents' language and culture and provides for two-way communication



GOAL 1: PLACE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES FIRST

OBJECTIVE 1.2 REDUCE DISPARITIES IN CHILD AND FAMILY OUTCOMES

Strategy 1: Increase focus on equity

- * Make programmatic policy changes to improve priority families' access to early childhood programs
- * Offer supports to strengthen programs' ability to serve populations challenged by inequity with a particular focus on trauma-informed practice
- * Monitor disparities in early childhood and family outcomes

Strategy 2: Balance investments across children of different ages

- * Increase investment in and support of infant and toddler services
- * Increase investment in the quality of infant and toddler services by promoting infant mental health, attachment, and relationships
- * Provide preschoolers with universal access to high-quality early care and education settings
- * Support connections between preschool and school-aged educational settings to ensure smooth transitions and a continuum of developmentally appropriate practices

GOAL 2: INCREASE ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY PROGRAMS





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Why is this goal important?

Early childhood is a time of unequalled pace in a child's growth and development and can be a socially and financially stressful time for families. Children and families who rely on early childhood services and programs should have peace of mind that they are of the highest quality. Higher quality care and services often come with a higher price tag. The State has the opportunity to set a high bar for programs serving children and families during the most dynamic and vulnerable time of the child's life and commit the necessary funds to see that programs meet these high expectations.

OBJECTIVE 2.1 INVEST ADDITIONAL FUNDS TO IMPROVE PROGRAM QUALITY	
Strategy 1: Secure additional revenue	<ul style="list-style-type: none">* Cultivate public/private and inter-agency funding partnerships* Obtain federal grants* Develop Medicaid funding streams for home visiting services* Ensure full utilization of existing funds* Explore social impact bonds and tax credits
Strategy 2: Increase funding levels to increase program quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none">* Increase program and wage funding levels to support the true cost of delivering high-quality early care and education and home visiting services, including recruiting and retaining a high-quality workforce* Maximize use of available funds by developing a strategic financing system

Example Cost Drivers of High Quality

- * Attracting and retaining a skilled workforce
- * Providing stable, comprehensive trauma-informed services
- * Ensuring continuity of care, low adult/child ratios in early care and education programs and higher quality ratings
- * Implementing multi-generational strategies that move the family toward economic security and stability and improved outcomes

Comprehensive Services Examples

- * Health screening, services and referrals
- * Nutrition
- * Transportation
- * Early childhood mental health specialists
- * Referral services
- * Social services

GOAL 2: INCREASE ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY PROGRAMS

OBJECTIVE 2.2 INCREASE ACCESS TO EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Strategy 1: Increase access to early care and education

- * Ensure statewide, universal access to high-quality preschool with parent choice
- * Develop a funding plan to ensure universal access to infant-toddler care with parent choice within 10 years
- * Integrate state, federal and private early care and education financing systems in Connecticut and align eligibility rules, rates, parent fees, verification requirements and quality requirements

Strategy 2: Increase access to family support services

- * Expand access to a coordinated system of family support programs (including Birth to Three and evidence-based home visiting models) to strengthen adults' resources and skills to nurture a child's health, development, and learning and
- * Increase early promotion, detection (including comprehensive, mid-level developmental and formative assessments), referral and linkage to services for developmental delays
 - » Support early care and education staff, home visitors, parents and medical home staff to participate in screening and referral system
 - » Increase capacity of existing developmental screening, outreach and referral infrastructure (Child Development Infoline/Help Me Grow)



GOAL 2: INCREASE ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY PROGRAMS

OBJECTIVE 2.3 PROVIDE GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT TO IMPROVE PROGRAM QUALITY

Strategy 1: Set standards and monitor quality

- * Complete program quality standards for all early care and education program settings that are simple, connected to child outcomes, and integrate quality standards required by federal funding and state legislation
- * Improve monitoring of early childhood programs by:
 - » Establishing a voluntary Quality Rating and Improvement System
 - » Enhancing licensing and monitoring inspections for all licensed early care and education settings
 - » Improving Birth to Three provider self-assessments and focused monitoring

Strategy 2: Support program improvement

- * Increase access to effective, in-service professional development and technical assistance for all early care and education settings and home visiting programs
- * Collaborate with the State Department of Education to support a continuum of high-quality instructional practices through Grade 3

Example Goals of a Quality Improvement System

- * Help programs:
 - » Meet state and federal requirements (including licensing and accreditation requirements)
 - » Achieve Quality Rating and Improvement System standards
 - » Provide trauma-informed care

Example Quality Frameworks

- * Core Knowledge and Competencies (CKC's)
- * National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Standards
- * Head Start Standards
- * Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)
- * Early Learning Development Standards (ELDS)
- * Infant Mental Health Competencies



GOAL 3: CULTIVATE A SKILLED EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE



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Why is this goal important?

Research shows that early childhood development is complex and children's outcomes are deeply connected to the skills and knowledge of a child's caregivers. Like any other specialized sector, such as nursing, accounting or engineering, the field of early childhood must attract and retain a workforce with specialized skills and training to provide high quality care.

OBJECTIVE 3.1 DEVELOP A PIPELINE TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN A SKILLED WORKFORCE

Strategy 1: Increase appeal of early childhood careers

- * Seek opportunities to increase wages in early childhood professions to attract and retain a high quality workforce that meets required qualifications and is sufficiently large to meet demand
- * Increase workforce supports to employers and remove barriers to success

Strategy 2: Provide guidance and support to improve workforce quality

- * Complete workforce quality standards that are linked to child outcomes and integrate federal and state requirements
- * Monitor compliance with required workforce quality standards (including background checks and compliance with professional development requirements)
- * Increase workforce access to in-service professional development, higher education, and certifications that support child outcomes, are integrated across sectors and aligned with requirements



GOAL 4: STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS





GOAL 4: STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS

Why is this goal important?

The Office of Early Childhood cannot achieve these ambitious goals alone. Other state agencies have large roles to play in the lives of families with young children, including ensuring access to health care, securing the welfare of young children and making living environments healthier. Local partners knit communities together and provide the services and programs families depend on. Researchers, philanthropists and advocates provide insight, resources and leadership. To be most effective, the Office of Early Childhood must act in concert with all of its important partners in the field.

OBJECTIVE 4.1 DEVELOP STRONGER COMMUNITY, STATE AND FEDERAL PARTNERSHIPS

Strategy 1: Strengthen relationships with local, state, and national partners

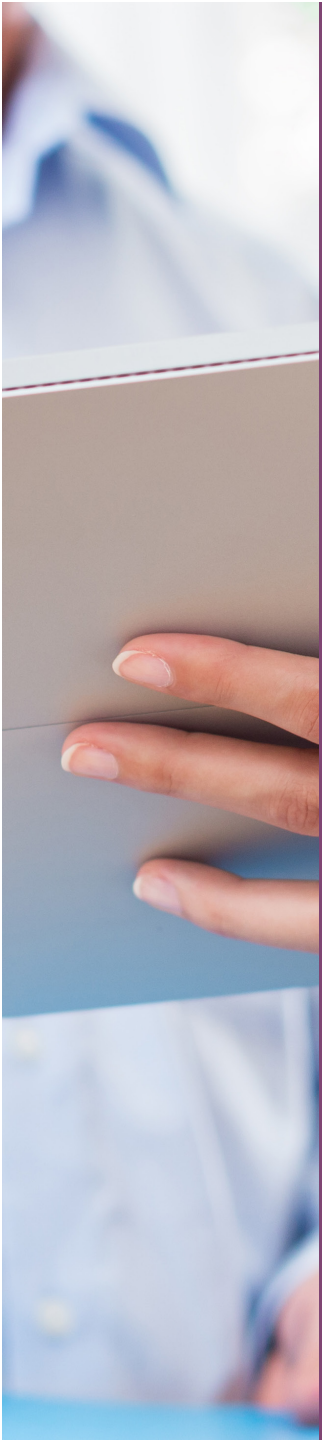
- * Strengthen partnerships and facilitate ongoing, formalized, structured methods for two-way discourse with local stakeholders
- * Develop and enhance partnerships with
 - » Sister state agencies and the legislature to work toward shared priorities
 - » Federal agencies such as U.S. Department of Education Office of Early Learning, Health Resources and Services Administration and the Administration for Children and Families Office of Child Care and Office of Head Start
 - » Statewide philanthropy
- * Establish shared policy agendas through cross-system governing bodies, boards, advisories, cabinets and work groups

Sister State Agencies

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| * Department of Children and Families | * Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection | * Department of Public Health |
| * Department of Corrections | * Department of Housing | * Department of Rehabilitation Services |
| * Department of Developmental Services | * Department of Labor | * Department of Social Services |
| * Department of Economic and Community Development | * Board of Regents | * State Department of Education |
| | * Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services | |

GOAL 5: INCREASE AGENCY EFFECTIVENESS





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Why is this goal important?

The Office of Early Childhood, as a single state agency, can ensure that early childhood programs work in concert with one another to achieve unified policy goals. Increased efficiency and improved administration of programs can ensure that the state's limited dollars stretch the farthest.

OBJECTIVE 5.1 INTEGRATE AND STRENGTHEN ADMINISTRATION OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Strategy 1: Improve Office of Early Childhood operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">* Integrate programs, break down silos, and streamline processes* Increase consistency across OEC programs and services* Maximize use of technology
Strategy 2: Use data and public input to drive continuous improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">* Increase opportunities for public input and transparency* Develop an Early Childhood Information System to help answer key policy questions, inform decisions in real time, support accountability and improvement and improve data collection* Increase oversight and governance of current resources, track performance metrics, and conduct evaluations of programs and provide data for research and data sharing
Strategy 3: Strengthen agency foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">* Formalize agency operations with increased use of regulations, employee handbooks, training and policy and procedure manuals* Improve organizational capacity in critical staffing areas and increase the diversity of the agency's workforce* Increase staff knowledge of equity, racial bias, and institutional racism