



Connecticut Office of Early Childhood

At a Glance

Connecticut Office of Early Childhood

David Wilkinson, Commissioner

Established – June 24, 2013 by Executive Order No. 35

Statutory Authority – Conn. Gen. Statutes Sec. 10-500 (P.A. 14-39 – An Act Establishing the Office of Early Childhood, Expanding Opportunities for Early Childhood Education and Concerning Dyslexia and Special Education)

Central Office – 450 Columbus Boulevard, Hartford, CT 06103

Number of employees – 118

Recurring operating expenses -

Federal: \$42,101,310

State: \$288,084,934

Organizational structure -

- **Commissioner's Office**
- **Division of Early Care and Education**
- **Division of Quality Improvement**
- **Division of Family Support**
- **Division of Licensing**

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.

Statutory Responsibility

The Office of Early Childhood (OEC) was created through Executive Order No. 35, effective June 24, 2013, and statutorily established through Conn. Gen. Statute Sec. 10-500 (P.A. 14-39 – *An Act Establishing the Office of Early Childhood, Expanding Opportunities for Early Childhood Education and Concerning Dyslexia and Special Education.*) As a cabinet-level state agency reporting directly to the Governor, the OEC is the lead agency for early care and education, workforce development, program quality and improvement, child care licensing, and family support. The OEC consolidates the funding streams, programs, and personnel of numerous early childhood services formerly dispersed across the Departments of Education, Public Health, Social Services, Developmental Services and the Board of Regents.

The Office of Early Childhood works to:

- serve children and families through a two-generational approach;
- coordinate and improve the delivery of early childhood services for Connecticut children;
- ensure that child care and education programs for young children (1) are safe, healthy, and nurturing, (2) appropriately support children's physical, social and emotional, and cognitive development, and (3) are accessible to all children, particularly those at greater educational risk (including those from families in poverty, families with a single parent, families with limited English proficiency, and parents with less than a high school diploma);
- support families raising young children to ensure the children's health, well-being and positive growth and development; and,
- build and support a high-quality early childhood workforce.

OEC Program Divisions and Functions

Commissioner's Office

The Commissioner's Office assures that agency-wide administrative activities are coordinated and accomplished in an effective and efficient manner. The office provides the following services across the agency:

Business Operations

The Office of Childhood manages a large portion of the day-to-day fiscal functions, budgeting, reporting and year-end responsibilities for both state and federal funds. The Office of Early Childhood continues to work closely with the State Department of Education in maintaining OEC fiscal and IT responsibilities.

Communications

Communications responsibilities include: public information, media relations, issues management and public affairs, website and social media, internal communications and crisis and emergency risk communications. These activities serve to support the agency's reputation as the state's leader in early childhood service delivery, policy and advocacy.

Government and Community Relations

The Government and Community Relations arm of the OEC is responsible for legislative and policy information, including:

- Serving as the OEC commissioner's liaison to the General Assembly, Executive Branch and congressional delegation.
- Outreach to early childhood organizations to build communication and collaboration.
- Development and implementation of OEC legislative agenda.
- Tracking and analysis of early childhood-related legislation.
- Ensuring implementation of approved legislation.
- Responding to legislative inquiries.
- Preparing OEC legislative testimony and reports.
- Coordinating OEC participation in legislative workgroups and task forces.

Legal Office

Legal office staff is responsible for managing the day-to-day legal functions of the agency. Legal office attorneys assist the different divisions with advice regarding contracts, grant awards, program administration, discrimination complaints, audits, confidentiality requirements, ethics requirements, records retention, legislation, regulations, and other matters as they arise.

The background check unit processes approximately 12,000 background check requests per year pertaining to child care staff. The professional and para-professional staff serve as hearing officers in over 100 Care 4 Kids child care subsidy hearings per year. The attorneys represent the agency in approximately 12 child care license revocation hearings per year, with the paralegals serving as administrative staff in those hearings. In addition, staff manages approximately 200 yearly licensing enforcement cases and respond to approximately 50 freedom of information (FOI) requests annually.

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning helps identify the organizational needs of the agency and develop solutions to emerging challenges and opportunities. It undertakes organizational assessments, facilitates priority setting and spearheads new organization-wide initiatives. Strategic planning also provides expertise in performance measurement and management, strategic communications and organizational change to help ensure the activities of the OEC are efficient and effective and staff are well managed and supported to accomplish the work of the agency.

Division of Early Care and Education

The Division of Early Care and Education oversees and monitors state and federal grants, contracts and subsidies that support early care and education programs. The unit is charged with ensuring the funds are administered efficiently and are used for the purposes intended. These funds include:

- Child Day Care Program
- School Readiness
- Smart Start Program
- State Head Start Supplement Program
- Care 4 Kids Subsidy Program
- Early Head Start Child Care Partnership Program
- Minor Capital Improvements

Child Day Care Program

Child Day Care programs provide early care and education to infants and toddlers, preschoolers and/or school age children who meet certain eligibility requirements, including incomes below 75% of the state median income. These programs are located in towns and cities across Connecticut. Section 8-210 of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) specifies that the purpose of this funding is for the development and operation of child day care centers for children disadvantaged by reasons of economic, social or environmental conditions pursuant. Effective October 1st, 2017, the services provided through the Child Day Care contracts are supported through state funds. Enrollment is conducted at individual programs.

CHILD DAY CARE PROGRAM	
Number of Communities	47
Number of Programs	51
Number of Sites	107
Infant/Toddler Full-Time	1,306
Preschool Full-Time	2,044
School-Age Full-Time	233
School-Age Part-Time	213

School Readiness

School Readiness is a state-funded initiative that offers a network of school readiness programs to provide open access for children to quality programs. The School Readiness program: 1) promotes the health and safety of children and prepares them for school; 2) provides opportunities for parents to choose among affordable and accredited programs; 3) encourages coordination and cooperation among programs and prevents the duplication of services; 4) recognizes the specific service needs and unique resources available to particular municipalities and provides flexibility in the implementation of programs; 5) prevents or minimizes the potential for developmental delays in children prior to their reaching the age of five; 6) enhances federally funded school readiness programs; 7) strengthens the family through: (a) encouragement of parental involvement in a child's development and education; and (b) enhancement of a family's capacity to meet the special needs of their children, including children with disabilities; and (c) reducing educational costs by decreasing the need for special education.

SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAM		
	Priority	Competitive
Number of Communities	21	46
Number of Programs	145	86
Number of Sites	236	88
Full-Day Spaces	7,121	622
School-Day Spaces	1,791	278
Part-Day Spaces	1,256	483
Extended-Day Spaces	507	NA

Smart Start

Smart Start reimburses local and regional boards of education for capital and operating expenses related to establishing or expanding a preschool program under the jurisdiction of the board of education for the town. Smart Start services are supported through state funds.

SMART START	
Number of School Districts	24
Number of Classrooms	45

Children Served	680
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State Head Start Supplement

Head Start is funded directly by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and provides comprehensive child and family services to low-income families with children ages 3- to 5-years-old. Head Start is federally funded to serve approximately 6,000 children and through the State Head Start Supplement, Connecticut provides supplemental funding to 11 of the 20 federally funded Head Start grantees to increase capacity by 267 preschool-aged children. These funds also support quality enhancement activities in Head Start programs.

STATE HEAD START SUPPLEMENT	
Town	Number of Spaces
Bridgeport	20
Stamford	20
Norwalk	15
Danbury	18
East Hartford	36
Manchester	15
Meriden	18
New London	46
New Haven	29
New Britain	34
West Haven	16

Early Head Start (EHS) is funded directly by the U.S. Department of HHS to provide year-round comprehensive child and family services to low-income pregnant women and families with children birth to 3 years old. EHS settings include center-based, family child care and home-based (home visiting). EHS grantees serve 1,020 families, of which 50 are pregnant women. Through the EHS-Child Care Partnership, 222 additional families are served in center-based and family child care settings.

Care 4 Kids Subsidy Program

The Care 4 Kids (C4K) subsidy program helps low- to moderate-income families in Connecticut pay for child care costs for children birth to age 13. The program is a partnership between the State of Connecticut, the families in the program and the providers who take care of the children.

A combination of state and federal funds supports the Care 4 Kids subsidy program. In FY 17, 30,076 children were served by 7,073 providers.

Early Head Start Child Care Partnership

Early Head Start (EHS) is funded directly by the U.S. Department of HHS to provide year-round comprehensive child and family services to low-income pregnant women and families with children birth to 3 years old. EHS settings include center-based, family child care and home-based (home visiting). Three EHS CT grantees were awarded a federal grant to partner with home-based and center-based child care programs to provide comprehensive services based on the EHS model. The OEC provides state funds to support children in the three federally funded EHS-CC Grant Partnership Programs whose families are not eligible for the Care4Kids subsidy program.

Minor Capital Improvements

Minor Capital Improvements through state bond funding provide facility improvements and repair needs in (that portion of) facilities that house school readiness programs and state-funded child day care centers. Funding priority is given to community-based early care and education programs located outside of public school buildings, although school-based programs may also apply for projects not covered by the state's public school constructions program.

MINOR CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS PROGRAM	
Number of Communities	69
Number of Programs	111
Number of Sites	156
Number of State-Funded Spaces	8,888
Total Funded Amount-FY 17	\$14,765,894

Division of Quality Improvement

The Division of Quality Improvement is made up of five units:

- Workforce Registry
- Workforce Professional Development
- Standards, Instruction and Assessment
- Data and Accountability
- Head Start State Collaboration Office

Workforce Registry Unit

Registry staff housed in this unit are responsible for the Connecticut Early Childhood Professional Registry, including uploading and coding professional development qualifications, administering scholarship funds, processing licensing Head Teacher, ECTC and Technical Assistance Provider applications, providing career counseling, supporting program requirements, and other key functions to support individuals and programs.

Workforce Development Unit

The Workforce Development Unit oversees systems, policies and practices to support the goal of developing a highly qualified and effective workforce for all children birth to age five.

Collaborative partners include higher education institutions, professional development providers and members of the early childhood workforce.

Standards, Instruction and Assessment Unit

The Standards, Instruction and Assessment Unit supports programs, families, providers, and communities to help young children grow and learn using the Cycle of Intentional Teaching as a Framework. Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) provide common language around what children from birth to age five should know and be able to do. Instruction and assessment is composed of planning experiences to support children's development, gathering information about how they are progressing and adjusting what is being done to support them based upon this information.

Data & Accountability

The Data & Accountability Coordinator works to increase the knowledge of OEC data metrics and performance measures. The coordinator is responsible for data reports issued by OEC and works with OEC staff and other state agencies in identifying linkages between programs, required reporting elements and data fields, to help provide direction and perspective in the development of the Early Childhood Information System (ECIS).

Head Start State Collaboration Office

The Director of the Head Start State Collaboration Office facilitates state-level collaboration between Head Start/Early Head Start and state agencies and entities that carry out activities designed to benefit low-income pregnant women, children from birth to school entry, and their families.

Division of Family Supports –

The Division of Family Supports is responsible for the administration of several major state and federally funded initiatives to strengthen the capacity of families to meet the developmental and health related needs of their infants and toddlers who have delays or disabilities, and to prevent child abuse and neglect by helping families and communities be responsive to children, ensuring their positive growth and development. These efforts include contracting with a broad range of organizations to implement evidence-based programs to families and their children; collaborating with community stakeholders; funding innovations in the field and conducting research to assess the effectiveness of programs and developing strategies for improvement.

Programs within the Division of Family Supports include:

- **Connecticut Birth to Three System** - *Birth to Three* supports families in meeting the needs of their infants and toddlers who are eligible due to significant developmental disabilities or delays. Families are coached on methods for fostering learning during daily routines in the home, child care settings or other places that are natural for that child and family. All children referred to *Birth to Three* are evaluated in five developmental areas. Eligible children who are 16 months old or older are also screened for autism. Each eligible child will have a family service plan that is tailored to that child's needs and the family's priorities, resources and concerns. In FY17, 32 programs served children in all 169 municipalities in Connecticut and provided services to approximately 1,000 children.
- **Help Me Grow** - Help Me Grow is a program for children up to age 5 experiencing the challenges of growing up. It provides parents and providers access to a variety of community resources that address a child's behavioral or developmental needs. Help Me Grow also provides access to monitoring of child development through the Ages and Stages and Ages and Stages- Social Emotional assessments.
- **Mind Over Mood Initiative (MoMs) In-Home Cognitive Behavioral Therapy.** The division supports the training of community providers to address maternal depression via in home supports that are paid for by Medicaid and some commercial insurance.
- **Home visiting** programs funded through state and federal funds.
 - State funded: Nurturing Families Network using the Parents as Teachers model.
 - Federally funded by the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) grant program includes four models: Child First, Early Head Start, Nurse Family Partnership and Parents as Teachers.
- **Training Programs:**
 - Family Development Training and Credentialing. The training program teaches students and human service providers a strength-based approach to working with families and communities. In collaboration with the University of Connecticut Center for the Study of Culture, Health and Human Development, the Trust Fund provides this accessible, community-centered family development training that focuses on the skills needed to help families attain healthy self-reliance.
 - TouchPoints - *Touchpoints* is a registered training program from the Brazelton Center. *Touchpoints* builds on existing provider experience and education to enhance practice and service delivery

Division of Licensing

The Division of Licensing is responsible for administering the Child Care Licensing and Youth Camp Licensing Programs. Family child care homes, group child care homes, child care centers and youth camps are required to be licensed. The child care licensing specialists and supervisors, nurses, health program staff, administrative and support staff assure that licensed child care facilities and youth camps operate at or above the required standards established by state statutes and regulations. This is accomplished through technical assistance, application processing, facility monitoring, complaint investigation and enforcement activities. The Division licenses more than 4,000 child care facilities and youth camps.

Improvements/Achievements 2017-2018

Two-Generation (2Gen)

A Two-Generation (2Gen) approach focuses on creating opportunities for and addressing needs of both children and adults together by taking a family-centered, results-oriented approach so that children and families get the education, workforce training, and social supports they need to create a legacy of economic stability that passes from one generation to the next. In the 2017 legislative session, the Office of Early Childhood was designated as the 2Gen coordinating agency for executive branch, which is already engaging local, state and federal partners to achieve better outcomes for families. The Office of Early Childhood is working closely with the Governor's Office, legislators, and the Commission on Women, Children and Seniors on this collaborative initiative.

Connecticut is a member of the Whole Family Approach to Jobs cohort, a six-state group convened jointly by the Administration for Children and Families and the National Conference of State Legislatures, allowing for communication across state lines and with federal officials. Additionally, the Office of Early Childhood is developing partnerships with both the Department of Social Services to ensure more families with young children enter job training programs and the Department of Housing to work with families at risk those of homelessness to avoid the trauma connected with emergency shelter experiences. The Office of Early Childhood is taking an enhanced 2Gen approach to home visiting programs, providing programs with "rate card" bonuses for achieving targeted outcomes benefiting both the caregiver and the child. Connecticut's 2Gen approach strives to provide a stable workforce to Connecticut's economy and healthy children who are ready to thrive.

Licensing

- Adopted a new policy that requires licensed child care programs to remove all blankets from cribs when infants under 12 months of age are placed to sleep. This new policy aligns with the latest research and recommendations of the National Institutes of Health and the American Academy of Pediatrics in regard to safe sleep.
- Received final approval of revisions to the youth camp licensing regulations which became effective September 2017.
- Conducted a survey to collect final input from interested stakeholders on the draft revisions to the child care center/group child care home and family child care home regulations.
- Online videos were created for child care center and group child care home providers designed to assist individuals completing the licensure application process, support

licensed providers in maintaining compliance with the licensing regulations, and support licensed providers with the licensing regulations specific to the administration of medications.

- In coordination with the CT Department of Public Health, State Department of Education and the UCONN Rudd Center, developed a flyer to provide guidance to licensed child care centers and group child care homes that serve meals and snacks of the nutrition standards established by the federal Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).
- Along with the Center for Children’s Advocacy, created guidance for child care providers to facilitate compliance with federal laws pertaining to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Criminal background checks

- Legislation passed this year to align Connecticut's child care background checks with the federal requirements. As a result, there is now portability for child care provider background checks and the checks have gone from once and done to once every five years.
- The OEC was added as a tenant in the already existing background check management system that the Department of Public Health acquired using federal grant fund
- In the last year, OEC legal staff processed close to 10,000 criminal background check applications and several hundred portability inquiries.

Care 4 Kids Hearings

In the last year, OEC legal staff have received and processed over 350 hearing requests. Of those, about 25% went forward to a full hearing. The rest were mediated, cancelled, or the requestor did not show up to the hearing.

Child Care Licensing Enforcement

In the last year, OEC legal staff closed 75 enforcement cases. Resolutions include consent orders, revocation following hearing, and surrender of license.

Early Care and Education

- Under the federal Preschool Development Grant (PDG) OEC provides 740 high-quality preschool spaces in 13 communities across the state; 439 of these spaces are expansion/new spaces, and 301 are existing state funded pre-k spaces that have been

improved. High-quality elements of the pre-k programs funded with this grant include: increased qualifications for teaching staff and salaries comparable to K-12 salaries; early childhood mental health services provided by the Early Childhood Consultation Partnership (ECCP); individualized coaching for instructional staff; increased opportunities for family engagement and comprehensive services for children and their families (i.e. screenings, nutrition, services that enhance family well-being etc.).

- Due to changes in the Federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), Connecticut requires all Care 4 Kids providers to complete a health and safety orientation and ongoing annual professional development. In order to support providers to meet this requirement, OEC provides an online Health and Safety Orientation offered through Child Care Education Institute (CCEI) for family child care and center-based providers. CCEI specializes in providing online training and certificates, childcare registry development, and administrative solutions for the early care and education industry. Once the provider completes the orientation, the provider has access to a training library to continue professional development for one year.
- OEC, in collaboration with the University of CT's NEAG School of Education, has just enrolled the fourth cohort in the Prek-to 3rd Grade Leadership Program. This program is designed to increase the knowledge of pre-service and in-service leaders about this unique developmental period. This ten-month long executive style learning program covers modules on curriculum and instruction, assessment practices with young children and evaluation of teachers and programs and leading for equity, excellent and early success.
- As part of the CCDF Plan, OEC has developed Family Childcare (FCC) Networks which include four key components:
 1. Locate family childcare networks in communities and establish local partnerships to support the work of family child care providers.
 2. Locate Family child care networks in communities and establish local partnerships to support the work of family child care providers.
 3. Deploy specialized-trained individuals to delivers services to family child care providers.
 4. Deliver training for providers in the community and follow-up coaching in the home to improve the provider's practice.
 5. Utilize formal assessments to assess the effectiveness of the consultation provided to participants. Consultation focuses on program improvement which moves family child care providers toward high quality.

In addition, OEC has funded seven new FCC Networks as part of a pilot program.

Improving Quality through Thrive!

Thrive! is the umbrella for Connecticut's Quality Recognition and Improvement System. The Office of Early Childhood contracts with the United Way of CT to provide professional development, technical assistance, and credentialing! Initiatives undertaken through Thrive! are listed below.

- The OEC's Program Leadership Initiative offered (5) courses for the Connecticut Director Credential. Of the (108) participants, (101) individuals successfully completed the courses. All attendees were individuals currently holding leadership positions within Connecticut programs for young children.
- The Accreditation Quality Improvement Support (AQIS) provided individualized on-site support to (136) licensed and licensed-exempt programs actively pursuing national accreditation and assisted (72) programs in achieving accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). (10) NAEYC overview sessions were conducted for (73) participants.

The chart below highlights the percentage of accredited programs in Connecticut for the last four years.

Year	# of Accredited Programs	# of Center-Based Program	% of Accredited Programs
2018	498	2062	24%
2017	492	2091	24%
2016	481	2025	24%
2015	475	2044	23%

- The Provider Orientation Project for family child care providers ran (117) orientation sessions serving (1601) participants throughout the state. Topics including health and safety, child development and child care licensing requirements, process and benefits. These free sessions meet the orientation requirements for Care 4 Kids subsidy providers. At the end of each session, each provider receives a health and safety kits containing a fire extinguisher, carbon monoxide and smoke alarm detectors, first aid kit, and developmentally appropriate program supplies.
- 2-1-1 Child Care assisted (30) family child care programs through the Family Child Care Career Support Project. Early Childhood Specialists provided (12) trainings reaching (123) parents. Topics of the parent trainings included Self Help Skills, Child Growth and

Development, Nutrition and Creative Art. An additional (9) provider trainings, reaching (184) early care and education professionals were conducted on topics such as Developmentally Appropriate Practices and Guiding Behavior.

- Thrive! conducted (73) professional development sessions reaching (687) participants around the topics of Bring out the Leader in You, Code of Ethics, Record Keeping, CT ELDS, Trauma and Housing Insecurity and Pyramid training. Additionally, (16) programs received Nutrition and Physical Activity for Self-Assessment (NAP SACC) trainings with (32) on-site TA visits to participating programs. (38) Family child care providers attended a two- day training on Creative Curriculum for Family Child Care. The training was delivered to help family child care providers design a high-quality program in their home that is responsive to the needs of children from birth to age 12. Providers received a copy of the Creative Curriculum® for Family Child Care System with Daily Resources.
- Health and Safety trainings were conducted, including (106) CPR and First Aid with (917) individuals participating and (94) Medication Administration trainings with (769) individuals participating.
- A cohort of 17 Spanish speaking family child care providers enrolled at Gateway Community College for credit bearing coursework towards a Child Development Associate. This cohort completed (2) three credit bearing classes: PSY 122 Child Growth and Development, ECE 101 Introduction to Early Childhood. This cohort received up to 20 hours of facilitation each month from Thrive facilitator, working to ensure providers received assistance with assignments and in meeting credentialing requirements. ECE 180 Child Development Associate Credential is planned for FY 2019.
- Thrive! managed program data and delivery of technical assistance to (78) child care programs that participated in Connecticut’s QRIS Pilot Program. Programs participating in the QRIS Pilot made commitment to improving quality around CT QRIS pillars; health and safety, workforce development and learning and environment. Programs received an initial visit for an initial rating to be obtained. Programs planned for the areas they wanted to improve in and then requested and received up to four hours of technical assistance from early education consultants. Data related to ratings and TA visits is under current review by the Office of Early Childhood
- Thrive! provided reliability training to a cadre of trainers on ECERS 3, ITERS 3, FCCERS and BAS. Thrive! managed the deployment of reliable trainers to (29) programs that received ECERS 3 with one of those programs also receiving an ITERS 3 rating

- Thrive! responded to (28) requests for License Compliance Technical Assistance for child care programs and (12) requests for Technical Assistance to OEC funded programs.

Other Early Childhood Quality Initiatives

- A total of \$716,496 in scholarship assistance was provided to individuals pursuing competency development, including associate's and bachelor's degree and meeting state and national educator requirements. Scholarship funds are available via the Connecticut Early Childhood Professional Registry.
- Connecticut's Core Knowledge and Competency Framework for the role of teachers across all types of early childhood settings was completed. Frameworks were created for Technical Assistance providers and are almost complete for Home Visitors and Birth to Three consultants.
- The Head Start State Collaboration Office partnered with the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to enroll DCF staff and their Early Head Start community partners in eight days of training in infant mental health from the CT Association of Infant Mental Health. Much of that training has been incorporated in DCF's early childhood practice guide. A partnership with the Department of Public Health (DPH) WIC program resulted in co-location of five WIC offices and Head Start programs to offer easier WIC access to Head Start families. A website has been created as well as tip sheets and a toolkit.

Family Support Services

In 2018, OEC launched a year-long rate card pilot with Social Finance. An outcomes rate card is a procurement tool through which government defines a menu of outcomes it wishes to "purchase" and the amount it is willing to pay each time a given outcome is achieved. OEC is incorporating bonus payments for both state and federal home visiting for the following outcomes:

- Full-term birth
- Caregiver employment
- Safe Children
- Family Stability

Both State funded and federally funded home visiting are incorporating data on home visiting into the OEC Early Childhood Information System (ECIS). ECIS is a secure online data system that enables OEC to collect data and information so we can best make informed program and policy decisions affecting young children and families.