



CONNECTICUT Early Childhood

Connecticut Office of Early Childhood

Beth Bye, Commissioner

Elena Trueworthy, Deputy 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, Floors 2 and 3, Hartford, CT 06103

Number of employees – 159 employees, 94 who are state funded and 65 who are federally funded.

Recurring operating expenses –

State - \$313,424,740

Federal - \$183,956,990

Steap Grant - \$83,471

Total - \$499,464,990

Organizational Structure

- **Commissioner’s Office**
- **Division of Early Care and Education**
- **Division of Quality Improvement**
- **Division of Family Support**
- **Division of Birth to Three**
- **Division of Licensing**
- **Legal Office**
- **Internal Operations and Support**

Mission

To partner with families of young children to advance equitable early childhood policies, funding, and programs; support early learning and development; and strengthen the critical role of all families, providers, educators, and communities throughout a child's life. We will assertively remove barriers and build upon the strengths of historically disenfranchised people and communities to ensure fair access to OEC resources.

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.

Our Guiding Principles

- Intentionally frame our organization's policies, practices, and resources through the lens of advancing equity and anti-racism
- Partner with families and communities to create family-driven programs that honor diverse languages, values, strengths, and experiences
- Conduct our internal and external relationships to promote respect, collaboration, and team growth
- Inform decisions and policies by utilizing high quality inclusive research and data interpretation
- Deliver excellence and innovation in all aspects of agency work
- Foster an efficient, coordinated, caring and professional culture throughout the agency
- Value early childhood as a critical time of learning through play and positive social and emotional connections to promote optimal development of the whole child within their family and community
- Engage in continuous quality assessment to improve outcomes for children, families, and early childhood providers
- Advocate for funding and promote partnerships to support early childhood services
- Ensure equitable access and respect for parent choice within all early childhood services

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, home visiting, and early intervention for children with developmental delays. 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
- Build and support a high-quality early childhood workforce

OEC Operations and Divisions

Commissioner’s Office

The Commissioner’s Office ensures that agency-wide administrative activities are coordinated and accomplished in an effective and efficient manner. These services are provided across the agency:

Internal Operations and Support (Fiscal Services and Grants and Contracts)

Fiscal staff manage the day-to-day financial functions, budgeting, reporting and year-end responsibilities for both state and federal funds. Other business operations include agency fiscal policies and procedures, internal and external audits, and contracts.

The Grants and Contracts Support Unit is responsible for the development, execution, and maintenance of all Purchase of Service and Personal Service Agreements, and for tracking and ensuring programmatic compliance of all Memoranda of Understanding and Agreement. Rooted in Active Contract Administration and Management, the Unit ensures that staff at every level of the agency have the training and tools to effectively develop and monitor grants and contracts. In addition, the Unit plays a coordinating role and provides support in responding to Requests for Proposals and grant opportunities for which the agency applies.

Communications

Communications responsibilities include public information, media relations, public affairs, agency web content, social media, internal and external communications, community outreach and information, and crisis and emergency risk communications.

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
- Outreach to families with child development and child safety information
- Development and implementation of OEC legislative agenda
- Tracking and analysis of early childhood-related legislation
- Responding to legislative inquiries
- Preparing OEC legislative testimony and reports

Legal Office

Legal office staff are responsible for managing the day-to-day legal functions of the agency. Four attorneys, two paralegals, five processing technicians, one office supervisor and one office assistant support the different divisions with advice regarding background checks and other matters involving the licensing division, freedom of information (FOI) requests, policy drafting and review, contracts (including inter-agency Memoranda of Understanding and inter-agency Memoranda of Agreements), grant awards, program administration, discrimination complaints, audits, confidentiality requirements, ethics requirements, records retention, legislation, regulations, and other matters as they arise. In addition, two of the attorneys and the two paralegals serve as hearing officers for the Care 4 Kids administrative appeal hearings.

During FY24, in compliance with federal and state requirements for child health and safety, the OEC processed 23,066 background checks (of that number, 2,346 applicants also had out-of-state background record checks) for child care personnel statewide. The Connecticut Criminal History Request System (CCHRS), administered by the Connecticut Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP), continues to ensure background check completion is possible within days. The Background Check Information System (BCIS), designed by internal OEC IT personnel for the management of child care background checks, enables child care providers to more actively manage their staff rosters and ensure compliance with background check requirements.

Live Scan technology is used for all electronic fingerprint capture and transmission. The exclusive use of Live Scan technology enables child care providers to spend less time obtaining reprints and more time caring for children because Live Scan fingerprinting is fast, convenient, and has a much lower rate of rejection than traditional inked prints on paper cards. Consequently, paper cards for fingerprints are no longer accepted by OEC. OEC partners with the United Way of Connecticut on this live scan effort.

Effective October 1, 2022, Public Act 21-82, amending Conn. Gen. Stat. section 19a-421, mandated comprehensive background checks for youth camp staff. The summer of 2023 marked the

commencement of background checks for youth camps. There are approximately 500 licensed youth camps, typically hiring approximately 15,000 staff during the summer season. During FY24, the OEC BCIS staff processed 8,319 youth camp background checks. OEC will continue to cover the \$88.25 per person criminal background check fingerprint processing fee through June 30, 2025.

During FY24, two OEC attorneys and one paralegal staff presided over 43 Care 4 Kids child care subsidy hearings. Processing Tech staff also processed more than 632 hearing requests.

During FY24, the OEC resolved 37 enforcement matters – including three licenses revoked by hearing. (This does not include referrals received during this period but not yet resolved). Civil penalties were assessed in 16 cases for a total of \$15,350. In FY24, the legal division responded to 51 FOIAs (this does not include FOIAs received during the time period but not yet responded to with a release or denial).

Head Start State Collaboration Office

Head Start Collaboration Offices (HSCOs), authorized by [Section 642B\(a\)\(2\)\(A\) of the Head Start Act](#), promote partnerships at the local, state, and national levels to strengthen services for the Head Start community and children whose families live in poverty. Appointed by the Governor, the Head Start Collaboration Office (HSCO) Director facilitates state-level collaboration between Early Head Start and Head Start programs, state agencies, and partners to carry out activities designed to benefit income eligible pregnant women, children from birth to school entry, and their families. As Head Start is a critical component to Connecticut's early childhood system, the HSCO Director supports the OEC's strategic planning and the implementation of statewide systemic efforts.

The work of the HSCO and the partnerships are intended to:

- Assist in building early childhood systems
- Provide access to comprehensive services and support for all children living in families with low income
- Encourage widespread collaboration between Head Start programs and other programs, services, and initiatives serving young children
- Augment the Head Start program's capacity to be a partner in state initiatives on behalf of children and their families
- Facilitate the involvement of Head Start programs in state policies, plans, processes, and decisions affecting target populations and other families with low income

OEC Parent Cabinet

The OEC Parent Cabinet is a 15-member advisory body co-created with a group of parent leaders as the first-ever Cabinet for the agency. Members were selected in September 2021 and officially seated in January 2022. The role of the Parent Cabinet is to serve as a vehicle to elevate family voice and build connections among Connecticut families, communities, and the OEC. Through leadership opportunities,

the Parent Cabinet raises up and incorporates the expertise of parents with young children throughout the OEC to strengthen family-centered policies and programs. There are two to three members serving six regions across the state to achieve geographic representation. Regions 3 and 5, as the largest regions, have three members. There is one at-large seat to fill any gaps. Parent Cabinet members are compensated for their monthly duties, serving a minimum of 68 hours a year. This body also connects to local parent ambassadors to be the conduit between local and state level for a communication feedback loop. It also is connected to advisory committees with a member representative on the following: CT Early Childhood Cabinet, The Birth to Three Interagency Coordinating Council, The CT State Inclusion Team, OEC External Steering Committee and Family Bridge Advisory Board.

The Parent Cabinet was added to state statute in the 2023 legislative session (effective July 1, 2023): Sec. 40. Subsection (b) of section 10-500 of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (Effective July 1, 2023): (b) The office shall be responsible for: (27) Establishing a parent cabinet to advise the office on ways to strengthen partnership and communication with families, bring awareness to gaps and barriers to services, increase access to services for families and help make improvements to the lives of young children and families in the state.

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 division is charged with ensuring the funds are administered efficiently and are used for the purposes intended. These funds include:

1. Child Day Care Contract Program
2. School Readiness Grant Program
3. Smart Start Grant Program
4. State Head Start Supplement Program
5. Early Head Start – Child Care Partnership
7. Child Care Development Fund (including Care 4 Kids Subsidy Program)

Beginning in FY25, Child Day Care, School Readiness and State Head Start Supplement will be phased out and Early Start CT will be the new single state-funded program – combining these three. In FY24, the number of children were served in each program: Child Day Care, 5244; Priority School Readiness, 10,233; Competitive School Readiness, 1,897; and State Head Start Supplement, 949; with a total of 18,317 children.

Child Day Care Program

Child Day Care (CDC) programs provide early care and education to infants and toddlers, preschoolers and/or school age children who meet certain eligibility requirements. At least 60% of households served must have incomes at or below 75% of the State Medium Income (SMI). These programs are in towns and cities across Connecticut. Section 8-210 of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S. **Sec. 8-210**)

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. The services provided through the Child Day Care contracts are supported with state funds.

OEC released a Request for Applications (RFA) in FY23 for an expansion of 1,300 new infant/toddler CDC spaces. This RFA was released in three phases: Phase 1 to current CDC contractors, Phase 2 to School Readiness and Smart Start providers, and Phase 3 statewide.

CHILD DAY CARE CONTRACT PROGRAM	
\$47,911,631	
Number of Communities	55
Number of Contractors	76
Number of Sites	198
Sites that are also SR (43 PSR; 15 CSR)	58
Sites that are also SHS	21
Infant/Toddler Full-Time Expansion	1,290
Infant/Toddler Full-Time	1,431
Infant/Toddler Wraparound	225
Preschool Full-Time	1,782
Preschool Wraparound	297
School-Age	209

School Readiness

School Readiness is a state-funded initiative that provides access to preschool programs for 3- and 4-year-old children, and legislation passed in 2023 now includes infant and toddler age children. At least 60% of households served must have incomes at or below 75% of the State Median Income (SMI). School Readiness is comprised of both Priority and Competitive Communities as defined in legislation and structured to:

- Promote the health and safety of children
- Provide opportunities for parents to choose among affordable and accredited programs
- Encourage coordination and cooperation among programs and services
- Recognize the specific service needs and unique resources available to municipalities; prevent or minimize the potential for developmental delays in children
- Enhance federally funded school readiness programs
- Strengthen the family through encouragement of parental involvement
- Reduce educational costs by decreasing the need for special education

Enrollment in School Readiness programs continued to increase throughout FY24, however due to staffing shortages some programs were not able to fully open classrooms. Based on community need, programs were able to convert full-day preschool spaces into full-day infant spaces beginning in November 2023. OEC worked to stabilize these critical programs with enhanced state and federal payments to reduce the impact of low enrollment and to support programs in the recruitment and retention of staff. School Readiness and Child Day Care Programs were given the opportunity to seek waivers to modify hours of operation to respond to the workforce issues.

SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAM TOTAL \$94,218,332 SPACES \$93,597,221 ADMIN \$ 2,374,274 QE \$892,956			
	Priority	Competitive	Total
Number of Communities	21	46	67
Number of Programs	136	72	208
Number of Sites	226	85	311
Number of Children	10,300	1898	12,198
Full-Day Spaces Includes Infant Toddler Full Day Spaces (161 total)	6,900	864	7,764
School-Day Spaces	2,042	378	2,420
Part-Day Spaces	902	656	1,558
Extended-Day Spaces	456	NA	456

Smart Start

Smart Start serves 3- and 4-year-old children in public school settings. It provides local and regional boards of education with funding to operate a preschool program under the jurisdiction of the board of education for the town. Smart Start services are supported through state funds. In addition, supplementary ARPA funding was designated to support 16 additional classrooms for FY22 through FY25 under the “Smart Start for Recovery” grant. Smart Start is structured to promote high-quality inclusive preschool services with certified teachers in nationally accredited public school programs.

	SMART START \$3,250,000	SMART START FOR RECOVERY \$1,200,000
Number of School Districts	23	10
Number of Classrooms	44	16
Children Served	650	240

CCDF/Care 4 Kids Subsidy Program

The Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) is the primary federal funding for low-income families who are working or participating in education and training to help pay for child care. The Care 4 Kids subsidy program allows eligible families to select a provider anywhere in the state for care. The subsidy can cover full-time, part-time, quarter-time and summer care, based on the family’s work, training, or education schedule. Families earning up to 60% of the State Median Income (SMI) are eligible to apply; at the 12-month redetermination, a family can earn up to 65% of SMI and changes in income are permitted up to 85% SMI. A combination of state and federal funds supports the Care 4 Kids subsidy program. In FY24, 5,921 providers served 30,079 children. (Source: ImpaCT & ImpaCT Child Care Ad Hoc Report 7/17/2024).

CARE 4 KIDS \$211,260,000	
Number of Care 4 Kids Providers	5,921
Number of Licensed Family Child Care Programs	1,112
Number of Licensed Center-Based Child Care Programs	920
Number of License-Exempt Child Care Providers	94
Unlicensed Relatives	3,795
Number of Children Served	31,564
Number of Families Served	22,247

In addition, 1,374 children received services in 87 Licensed and Licensed-Exempt Youth Camps, through \$1.3 million in non-CCDF State funding.

State Head Start Supplement

Head Start is funded directly by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to community providers that provide comprehensive child and family support services to low-income families with children ages 3 to 5 years old. Head Start serves approximately 6,000 children, and through the State Head Start Supplement. OEC provides supplemental funding to 13 of the 19 federally funded Head Start grantees to increase capacity by 264 preschool-aged children. These funds also extend the day/year of federally funded Head Start spaces and support quality enhancement activities in Head Start programs.

STATE HEAD START SERVICES \$5,083,238	
Number of Communities	27
Number of program sites	36
Full day/full year Spaces	251
Extended day/extended year Spaces	549
School Day/School Year Spaces	133

Early Head Start - Child Care Partnership

Early Head Start (EHS) is funded directly by the U.S. Department of HHS to community-based organizations to provide year-round comprehensive child and family support services to low-income pregnant women and families with children birth to 3 years old. EHS settings include child care centers, family child homes, and family 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 Care 4 Kids subsidy program.

EARLY HEAD START - CHILD CARE PARTNERSHIP \$1,500,000	
Grantees	3
Number of Providers	44
Number of Children (Monthly Average)	222

Division of Quality Improvement

The Division of Quality Improvement is responsible for advancing quality by delivering technical assistance and support for the development of the workforce and improvement of early childhood services for young children in family child care homes, centers, and school-based programs. The division's activities are unified through our emerging Quality Improvement System called Elevate.

Quality Improvement System - About Elevate

Elevate is the Office of Early Childhood's (OEC) quality improvement system for licensed and many license-exempt child care programs in family, group, and center-based settings. The Office of Early Childhood launched Elevate in FY22 to bridge licensing standards to accreditation standards, including accreditation standards for family child care settings. The system focuses on simplicity, accessibility, and leveraging existing health, safety, and quality assurance systems.

Elevate offers three levels of engagement: Member, Member+, and Member Accredited. Licensed and license-exempt child care providers start out as Members. Member+ is for providers who created an Elevate Program Plan to demonstrate their commitment to continuing to improve the care they offer. Becoming accredited is the highest level of engagement in Elevate. Accreditation demonstrates providers meet nationally recognized quality standards, including those from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC), or Head Start approval. With Elevate, providers control their engagement in quality improvement and families have the information they need to make informed choices.

Elevate launched a submission process for Elevate Program Plans in August 2023. In April 2024, the Elevate Program Plan submission process was integrated into the OEC 360 Provider Portal, the online provider portal that shows information from multiple OEC programs and systems in one dashboard. Programs with approved Elevate Program Plans are Member+.

As of July 2024, there are 1,800 family child care providers operating in Connecticut. Of those 1,800 family child care providers, 140 reached the Member + Level of Engagement and 72 are operating at the Member Accredited Level. There are 1,367 licensed centers and group homes operating in Connecticut. Of those licensed centers and group homes, 359 are Member Accredited and 39 are Member+. In addition, there are a large number of license-exempt programs in Connecticut. These programs are governed by school districts, religious organizations, or private agencies. Some license-exempt programs become accredited to receive state funding. Including both licensed and license-exempt programs, there are a total of 539 NAEYC accredited and/or and Head Start approved programs statewide.

As of July 2024, there are 179 family child care homes, centers, and group homes at the Member+ Level of Engagement and 611 family child care homes, centers, and group homes at Member Accredited. The

total number of Member programs is unknown at this time because the license-exempt programs are not all known to the state.

Partnership with NAEYC

In 2021, the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) partnered with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) to build Elevate. NAEYC is the national accreditation system most invested in developing and maintaining high-quality programs for young children. It has a long history of supporting quality improvement in early childhood education, both in the United States and abroad.

To advance the design and development of the system, OEC partners with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The partnership ensures alignment between national standards and OEC's supports for providers. The partnership ensures providers' needs are met by planning data-informed systems and tools and integrating existing technical assistance and workforce supports as critical infrastructure for quality improvement.

Access to the resources of the Quality Improvement System is supported by Service Navigators, who have personal communication with providers who seek resources. Service Navigators, who are OEC or Staffed Family Child Care Network staff, are available to help providers identify needs and next steps in their program improvement efforts. Service Navigators connect providers to resources including these areas of the work described below.

Accreditation Quality Improvement Supports (AQIS) provides access to a team of staff with expertise in continuous program improvement using the NAEYC assessment items as the framework for growth. AQIS supports are open to all child care providers interested in quality improvement, whether the program is actively pursuing or maintaining NAEYC Accreditation. AQIS contracts are with each of the Regional Education Service Centers (RESCS). As of January 2023, OEC is providing Consultation Quality Improvement Support, matching technical assistance providers to child care programs whose compliance with state and national standards is determined to need improvement. Priority for this support is given to programs with multiple/repeated licensing violations, negotiated corrective action plans, or licensing consent orders to support their efforts to regain compliance. Consultants are matched with providers based on the need of the program and the consultant's expertise. Consultation supports help develop systems unique to the program to avoid and overcome repeated violations occurring. This individualized support is implemented by CT Association for the Education of Young Children (CAEYC). The OEC also provides funding to cover the cost of NAEYC Accreditation fees. Through these supports, Connecticut has gained recognition as the state with the most NAEYC Accredited programs. The current number of accredited programs as of July 2024 is 482 representing 520 sites. Including both licensed and license exempt programs, there are a total of 539 NAEYC accredited and/or and Head Start approved programs statewide.

Staffed Family Child Care Networks and a Statewide Hub offer family child care providers opportunities to network, learn together, and access community resources. Networks, providing statewide coverage, are operated by CT Association for the Education of Young Children (CAEYC); City of Hartford, and TEAM. These Networks provide coaching and consultation (by phone, email and in person), professional development, and networking through regularly scheduled network meetings. Providers also have access to health consultation provided by nurse consultants under the direction of CT Nurses' Association. The OEC funds a Statewide Hub, operated by the United Way of CT, to serve as the convenor and infrastructure for the regional networks throughout the state. In FY24, the Networks served 912 family child care providers.

Business Supports are offered through a partnership with Women's Business Development Council (WBDC) to provide short- and long-term support to build the health of child care businesses. Offering training, one-to-one advising, grants and business funding, these services address the fragile business side of practices that are less frequently the subject of training or preparation in the early care and education field. WBDC helps providers to strengthen their business practices, enabling expansion, sustainability, and financial security for all types of early childhood programs. WBDC also serves in a review and advisory capacity for the OEC to streamline business related training and technical assistance to providers. WBDC, through OEC funding, provided the following services to programs: 2,439 individuals educated, 10,030 hours of education provided, 7,737 attended classes, 18,823 advising sessions to 638 child care businesses, and 669 grants awarded totaling \$7.2 million.

Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Resources support programs, families, providers, and communities to help young children grow and learn. Using a cycle of intentional teaching, children's learning and development is supported in a purposeful manner based upon each child's unique needs and interests. The Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards (CT ELDS) provide common language around what children from birth to age five should know and be able to do. Instruction and assessment are 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. In FY24, 201 individuals participated in the introductory training on the CT ELDS, 73 individuals participated in the intermediate training, and 36 programs received coaching focused on standards, curriculum, and assessment.

The Pyramid Model is a framework that helps programs implement evidence-based practices that build positive relationships, develop supportive and nurturing environments, and provide individualized supports to address persistent challenging behavior when needed. Social and emotional learning is fundamental to support children's success in school and beyond, building a solid foundation earlier in life is certain to produce benefits seen later in life. Recognizing the long-term benefits social-emotional learning has for children, efforts to expand Pyramid Model's reach within Connecticut grew. In partnership with Pyramid Model Consortium, the Connecticut Pyramid Partnership expanded its efforts

toward building and supporting social emotional growth and development in young children in preschool classrooms and family child care settings. This work was done by planning, developing, and offering training. Additionally, providers had access to information on how to support behavioral health through newsletters (sharing information for families and providers), training sessions, and cohort-based training and coaching. The Pyramid Model stresses the importance of teams, coaching, and data-based decision making. The expansion of Pyramid provided cohort-based support to family child care providers, as well as to the existing two cohorts serving center-based providers. The increased number of Implementation Sites included 49 center-based/Lab School programs and family child care providers. Of those, 22 centers and 18 family child care providers were ready to commit to program-wide implementation as part of this cohort.

Connecticut Early Childhood Professional Registry tracks participation and impact of OEC workforce activities and requirements, develops projections for new initiatives, and reports Connecticut's workforce data nationally. The Registry team staff code professional development qualifications, administer scholarship funds and education attainment incentive payments, process licensing Head Teacher, Early Childhood Teacher Credential (ECTC) and Technical Assistance Provider applications, provide career counseling, advise on program requirements, and other functions to support individuals and programs. Participation in the Registry is required for OEC-funded early care and education programs. In FY24, 6,623 new Registry accounts were created.

Early Childhood Workforce Professional Development activities address 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. The OEC is working closely with our higher education partners through two efforts: 1) a Lab School Investments Initiative to ensure the sustainability of Lab Schools as a delivery mechanism for early childhood services, and (2) to ensure students in early childhood higher education have high quality accredited labs in which to learn their profession. The Lab School Initiative will also ensure that there is strong alignment between Lab School implementation and OEC's Core Knowledge and Competencies, Early Learning and Development Standards, and other resources for teaching young children. Additionally, OEC's Higher Education Accreditation Support Initiative delivers supports to the early childhood academic programs to engage in Higher Education accreditation, to support the developing workforce in their learning and to continue to advance the pipeline of new staff. For higher ed accreditation, CT State comprised of 12 community college campuses delivers associate level coursework. In addition, 7 bachelor-level colleges are working on their initial NAEYC accreditation.

Technical Assistance and Quality Assurance support early childhood settings with training, coaching, and consultation. The OEC contracts with EASTCONN and CT Association for the Education of Young Children (CT AEYC) to support technical assistance providers' professional learning and to provide

coaching learning communities for new technical assistance providers to enhance their skills. A Coaching and Mentoring Framework is under development to provide a foundation for coaches and mentors to base their work. This activity is also helping to build a more diverse cadre of technical assistance providers to support the diversity of the early childhood workforce. OEC also has a group of 60 technical assistance providers working in our Regional Education Resource Centers (RESCs), CT AEYC, and independent sub-contractors to deliver OEC approved content.

ECE Reporter

In early 2023, the Office of Early Childhood assumed full responsibility of the ECE Reporter system with the transitioning of the new data system from external contractors to internal OEC IT Department. The data collected includes children, family, demographics, enrollment, funding, and program information. Since its inception, OEC has continuously made updates, enhancements, and revisions to reflect new state-funded contracts and funding allocations. In addition to the ECE Reporter data system, OEC uses a customer service system that includes a helpdesk ticketing system, annual user surveys, user guides, and video tutorials to assist and support all users.

The ECE Reporter application accounts for the Child Day Care program, School Readiness program, Smart Start program, State Head Start Supplement program, and Infant Toddler Expansion programs. The ECE Reporter Application holds approximately 20,000 child records in a year.

OEC 360 Provider Portal

The OEC developed and launched the OEC 360 Provider Portal in FY24. The 360 Provider Portal is intended to ease the challenging and often confusing experience of child care providers accessing information from OEC data applications with an overall goal of empowering providers to do more with limited time.

This Provider Portal serves as a central location for providers to login and displays relevant information from each of the agency systems as well as allowing access to each of the systems. The OEC 360 Provider Portal is an online web portal created to provide OEC Providers a centralized view of their program information, provider information, child enrollment information, payment information, and background check information. This portal integrates with multiple OEC data systems and consolidates data into a single view for providers. The data systems integrated with this Provider Portal include Birth to Three (early intervention data system), Early Childcare Information System (home visiting data system), ImpaCT (Care 4 Kids data system), ECE Reporter (early care and education data system), eLicense (licensing data system), Registry (program and provider data system), CoreCT (financial data system), BCIS (background check data system), and Elevate (quality improvement data system).

Early Childhood Teacher Credential (ECTC)

The Early Childhood Teacher Credential (ECTC) will be discontinued as of December 31, 2024, due to legislative changes to the state-funded staff qualifications criteria. The following data reflects an overall summary of the 11 years the ECTC was issued.

- 744 ECTCs were issued between 2013 and 2024.
- 80 Level A (associate degree) Infant/Toddler & Preschool Endorsement
- 12 Level A (associate degree) Infant/Toddler Endorsement
- 280 Level A (associate degree) Preschool Endorsement
- 170 Level B (bachelor degree) Infant/Toddler & Preschool Endorsement
- 19 Level B (bachelor degree) Infant/Toddler Endorsement
- 183 Level B (bachelor degree) Preschool Endorsement

The ECTC was awarded in two ways, a traditional college route or an individual review route:

- 160 ECTCs were awarded via the individual review route
- 584 ECTCs were awarded via the traditional college program route

Qualified Workforce Initiative

The Qualified Workforce Initiative is an initiative to help recruit and retain a qualified early childhood workforce by providing funds for achievement of formal early childhood education qualifications. Eligible teaching staff and administrators can receive \$250 to \$2,000, with bonuses up to \$600 based on the early childhood program’s accreditation, location and Social Vulnerability Index rating, and age group served. As of June 30, 2024, 2,473 awards were made to 2,404 individuals totaling \$4,166,450.

Division of Family Supports

The Division of Family Supports administers 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
- 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 with families and their children; collaborate with community stakeholders; fund and support innovations in the field; and conduct research to assess the effectiveness of programs and develop strategies for improvement.

Home Visiting Programs

Home visiting provides voluntary, evidenced-based home-based supports to at-risk parents, both prenatal and with young children. The goal is to promote positive parenting, improve maternal and child physical and socio-emotional health, and promote optimal child development. The OEC administers 18 state and federally funded evidence-based home visiting programs:

- **State Funded:** CT Home Visiting System includes four evidence-based home visiting models; Parents as Teachers, Child First, Nurse Family Partnership, and Healthy Families America.

- Federally Funded: Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) grant program includes four models: Child First, Nurse Family Partnership, Healthy Families America, and Parents as Teachers.

Throughout FY24, the CT Home Visiting system provided support to 2896 families and 2800 children in a hybrid fashion utilizing various virtual platforms to reach families in conjunction with in-person visits. This hybrid approach created a supportive system for families and reduced disruption to services when there was illness such as COVID-19 in the home or variations in a family daily schedule. This hybrid option will continue into FY25. The OEC will continue to work with national model offices to work toward guidance for best practices in hybrid in-person/virtual home visiting.

Sparkler Mobile App

Sparkler is a mobile app-based service brought to Connecticut families by the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood. Sparkler mobile application helps families and early childhood educators monitor children's development milestones and provides ideas to promote learning at home. Parents can download the Sparkler app to complete the Ages & Stages Questionnaires® (ASQ-3 and ASQ-SE), answering questions about their child's development and social emotional growth. Results of the ASQ-3 and ASQ-SE indicate whether further evaluation is needed to determine if a child has a delay or disability and/or qualifies for intervention services such as Birth to Three or Preschool Special Education.

Sparkler app includes the following features:

- ASQ-3 & ASQ:SE-2 evidence-based developmental and social-emotional screening tools
- Digital library containing over 1,000 play activities to promote child development
- Coaching by early childhood experts for families and community partners
- Information, resources, and referrals by accessing 2-1-1 Child Development/CT Help Me Grow
- As of January 2024, Sparkler launched the prenatal component within the application where expecting parents can use the application throughout pregnancy to help them prepare for their babies, support healthy pregnancies, and connect with the system of statewide support for families in Connecticut. Once babies are born, parents can continue using the Sparkler app throughout early childhood to keep learning and growing with their babies.

The OEC is currently working with approximately 90 local communities, including home visiting programs, child care programs, family resource centers, Birth to Three programs, public schools, pediatricians, and others that work with the parents of young children. The Sparkler initiative includes staff training, technical support, materials, and other resources to share with local families. Sparkler continues to reach and engage early childhood stakeholders in recognizing and understanding the importance of early detection. Currently there is an increased demand in 211 Child Development Help Me Grow and Birth to Three.

The Office of Early Childhood completed a statewide roll out of the Sparkler application in October of 2021. This rollout raised awareness for the importance of developmental monitoring, promotion, screening and linking to essential services. Sparkler continues to build trusting collaborative partnerships between families and early childhood educators. Families completed 18,010 ASQ-3 screenings and 5,134 ASQ:SE-2 screenings using Sparkler from May 31, 2022, through May 31, 2024. As of July 1, 2023, to June 30, 2024, a total of 25,347 adults and 28,780 children registered for Sparkler. To date, 27,172 families enrolled in Sparkler mobile app increasing access to developmental screenings, over 5,000 play activities, parent tips, and most importantly direct pipeline to 211 Child Development Help Me Grow point of entry for reliable information, resources, and services.

Additionally, Sparkler launched a prenatal component for that expecting parents can use the application throughout pregnancy to help them prepare for their babies, support healthy pregnancies, and connect with the system of statewide support for families in Connecticut. Once babies are born, parents can continue using the Sparkler app throughout early childhood to keep learning and growing with their babies. Since January of 2024, there has been approximately 220 prenatal enrollments in the Sparkler Application.

211 Child Development is the gateway and access point for caregivers with young children and early childhood providers working directly with families. 211 Child Development Care coordinators are knowledgeable and available to answer caregivers' questions and concerns about children's development, learning, and behaviors to ensure linkages to essential services. The goal is to support caregivers in their parenting journey to access supports to ensure Connecticut children grow healthy and thrive starting from pregnancy. 211 Child Development is a specialized unit of United Way of Connecticut that connects families and providers to the multitude of services offered across the state. It is the single source for connecting families to the Help Me Grow model.

Help Me Grow, a national model, is a statewide program that serves children and their families starting from pregnancy. Services are accessed by connecting with the centralized 211 Child Development helpline. The Help Me Grow model is built upon the idea of connecting families with a system of community resources to help them thrive, like health care, quality early learning experiences, healthy nutrition, and parent support. Connecticut is the founding state of the Help Me Grow model, now reaching 25 states.

Help Me Grow services include:

1. Free developmental screening program to monitor a child's development from birth to age 5, via Sparkler mobile app, online or mailed questionnaire (ASQ). Access on-line at 211.ct.org/program/ages-and-stages/
2. Information about children's typical development and behavior
3. Connections to community-based programs and services
4. Connects community providers with networking and training opportunities

Even Start Literacy Program

Even Start is a program that gives families access to the training and support they need to create a literate home environment and to enhance the academic achievement of their children. Five primary components are integrated to create a comprehensive program, with all families participating in all components. Local programs build on existing community resources to offer educational and support services to help parents and children learn and succeed together. These are the five components: 1) Early Childhood and/or School-Age Education; 2) Adult Education; 3) Parents and Children Learning Together (PACT); 4) Parent Education and Support; 5) Home Visits to Support Educational Programs.

EVEN START FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAM	
\$545,545	
Grantees	3
Number of Families	31
Number of Adults	32
Number of Children	35

The Division of Family Supports also supports training:

- Mind Over Mood Initiative (MoMs): Specialized Therapist Partnership Network, Integrated Model of Home-Based Psychotherapy, Training and Consultation to Home Visiting Program Sites

The division supports training of community providers to address maternal depression via in-home supports that is paid for by Medicaid and some commercial insurance. Mind Over Mood (MoM) is focusing on increasing the number of bilingual therapists able to provide cognitive behavioral therapy to Spanish-speaking families throughout the state. In FY24, the Coordination Center received 227 maternal referrals and 10 paternal referrals. Of those, 34 mothers participated in the MoM Clinical Service, 38 therapists participated in MoM Therapist Partnership training, and 32 parent educators participated in MoM Consultation meetings

- Family Development Training and Credentialing

This model 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 OEC provides this training to help families build skills needed to attain healthy self-reliance.

- Touchpoints™

Touchpoints™ is a registered training program from the Brazelton Center. This model builds on provider experience and education to enhance practice and service delivery.

Division of Birth to Three

Birth to Three supports families in enhancing their child's development and connecting to their communities when infants and toddlers have significant developmental delays or disabilities. Family and other caregivers receive coaching during everyday activities with their child to address priority outcomes that the family has identified. 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. The family of an eligible child is offered an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) that is tailored to address the family's priorities, resources, concerns, and the child's development. In FY 23-24, 19 agencies supported families in all 169 municipalities in Connecticut. On any given day, the families of approximately 7,800 children had IFSPs and over the course of FY23 the families of 14,711 eligible children received Birth to Three supports.

During FY24, one program left the system leaving 18 comprehensive contracted providers, which was a loss to the system. With this, and the increase in children needing support, the system continues to experience a workforce shortage. To address the workforce issue, the OEC is working closely with Institutes of Higher Education (IHE) and contracted providers to sustain student placements to recruit new staff into the field. The OEC also seeks out grant funding opportunities to support and bolster retention of staff. The Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) works to address evidence-based practices and works with programs to scale up staff in the implementation of Evidence-Based Practice to ensure families receive high-quality supports and services.

Division of Licensing

The Division of Licensing administers the Child Care Licensing and Youth Camp Licensing Programs. Licensed settings include family child care homes, group child care homes, child care centers, and youth camps. 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 2024-2025

Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care

Governor Ned Lamont initiated the Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care by Executive Order in 2023. The Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care was tasked with developing a five-year strategic plan that works for families, providers, and Connecticut's economy. Commissioner Beth Bye led this work with help from national and local consultants, The Hunt Institute, Social Venture Partners Connecticut, and Social Finance. OEC staff, across many departments, worked with consultants and partners to create recommendations to the Panel for the plan.

The work was divided into four work groups: Equity and Access, Workforce and Quality, Systems, and Funding and Costs. Work group co-leads presented recommendations to the public to get feedback from stakeholders before presenting them to Blue Ribbon Panel Members. Public review of the proposed plan took place in September 2023. After substantial feedback, panel members went through an extensive review of the plan in November. The plan was submitted to the Governor Lamont's in December 2023.

After the plan was submitted to Governor Lamont, it was published as a public document and online in English and Spanish. The plan was presented at various stakeholder meetings. Printed copies of the Blue Ribbon Panel report were distributed to legislative leaders and chairs of key legislative committees. A copy of the return of investment insert for the report was distributed to all legislators in April 2024.

Two key bills related to the Blue Ribbon Panel recommendations passed in the 2024 legislative session: P.A. 24-78 – An Act Assisting School Districts in Improving Educational Outcomes, Implementing the Recommendations of The Department of Education and the Technical Education and Career System and Establishing Early Start CT, and P.A. 24-91 – An Act Concerning Early Childhood Care and Education. Blue Ribbon Panel recommendations in legislation include, establishment of Early Start CT, expanding the family child care incubator model, maintaining Smart Start For Recovery funds, pay by classroom for state-funded programs, revamping Qualified Staff Member (QSM) requirements for state-funded staff, OEC Commissioner's authority to allocate funds to the Regional Education Services Centers (RESCS), and repealing outdated Care 4 Kids regulations allowing the OEC to adhere to federal requirements. Legislation also establishes the Early Childhood Care and Education Fund and Early Childhood Care and Education Fund Advisory Commission. It establishes a Tri-Share pilot in Eastern Connecticut, a model where business, parents, and the state pay an equal share for the cost of child care. Legislation includes a wage supplement payment program for FY25 for state-funded programs.

Establishment of Early Start CT

Early Start CT (ESCT) is a new state-funded early care and education program that will launch in July 2025. It combines three existing programs — Child Day Care Contracts, School Readiness Grants, and State Head Start Supplement Grants — into one program. The establishment of a single, unified state-

funded early care and education system is a major component of the Governor’s Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care.

The guiding principles of Early Start CT are the following:

- Place children and families at the center of the early care and education (ECE) system
- Invest in and support the ECE workforce by providing greater financial stability to programs
- Develop a high-quality, mixed-delivery early care and education system that is response to Connecticut’s needs and maximizes current resources.

Early Start CT expands child care access. Programs will be able to serve more families in areas that have had limited child care availability by matching spaces to need. Early Start CT prioritizes socio-economic diversity by removing family work requirements and creating an equitable parent co-pay. Early Start CT reduces financial and administrative burdens on providers. By directly contracting with OEC, providers will have reliable, timely payments and a consolidated reporting process. Early Start CT streamlines the early care and education system. Clear accreditation standards and standardized fee scales across subsidies make it easier for families and providers alike to navigate the early care and education system.

Early Start CT will center family and community need by establishing Local Governance Partners, the new governance body that will represent each community receiving Early Start CT. Local Governance Partners will engage families, support programs, and conduct a local needs assessment to understand a community’s needs. Local Governance Partners will serve as the foundation of the community’s early childhood infrastructure grounded in equity and shared leadership.

In the early fall of 2024, OEC will hold stakeholder feedback sessions that include state-funded providers as well as non-state funded providers, families, and community leaders.

Preschool Development Renewal Grant

The OEC secured the federal Preschool Development Grant in 2023 in the amount of \$4.8 million to fund a variety of new initiatives to support families and children. PDG Renewal Grant funding supported: OEC Parent Cabinet, Sparkler, CT Association of Infant Mental Health, Universal Nurse Home Visiting, and Qualified Workforce Incentives. OEC previously secured the PDG Planning Grant, which supported Elevate (QIS) Incentives, OEC Parent Cabinet, Sparkler, Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care, ECE Rate Card, and the development of Early Start CT.

Child Care Facilities Improvement

OEC committed funding to improve the physical spaces used for caring for young children. These included mitigation of safety concerns, increasing the number of infant and toddler classrooms, upgrades to playscapes, furniture, fixtures, and equipment, and updating HVAC systems. There was a total of 719 applications for the grant program with \$73.8 million in requests; \$13.1 million in awards were granted

to 130 sites across Connecticut. Approximately 50% of sites are in child care deserts (four or more children in census for each child care slot licensed in that area) and 88% of grantees accept Care 4 Kids.

Supporting the Provider Workforce

OEC implemented initiatives that gave stabilization bonuses to staff, incentives for free professional development completion, support networks for family child care providers, and increased the capacity for Lab schools to bring in and train new and current ECE staff.

Workforce Development Initiatives

OEC piloted a workforce development program across child care centers using ARPA funds in FY23 that was subsequently funded by in FY24 and FY25. OEC convenes monthly meetings with all pilot sites to share best practices and collect data. OEC has partnered with the CT Department of Housing to include child care workers in the UniteCT rental assistance program, which has been transformational to entry-level staff. In FY23, 144 participants completed the pilot program, in FY24, 179 completed, and in FY25, 125 participants are expected to participate in the program.

In August 2023, OEC contracted with SEIU Education and Support Fund to manage the Family Child Care registered apprenticeship, which allows home-based child care owners to obtain the Child Development Associate and become accredited with the National Association of Family Child Care, which entitles them to a wage increase for Care 4 Kids children in their care. In June 2024, OEC collaborated with the CT Department of Labor to register a center-based, entry-level registered apprenticeship. OEC plans to post an RFP in FY25 to help child care centers establish registered apprenticeship program at their sites. Currently, there are 26 family child care SEIU apprentices.

Universal Nurse Home Visiting – Community Health Worker Pilot: Family Bridge

The Office of Early Childhood (OEC), Office of Health Strategy (OHS), Department of Social Services (DSS), Department of Children and Families (DCF), and Department of Public Health (DPH) continue to collaborate on the implementation of the Universal Nurse Home Visiting (UNHV)-Community Health Worker pilot, named Family Bridge. The pilot adheres to the Family Connects International (FCI) evidence-based UNHV model, which is augmented with community health workers. This model uses Registered Nurses (RN) and CHWs/doulas to strengthen Connecticut's peri/postnatal system of care. Connecticut's program is comprised of two components:

- 1) RNs adhering to the evidence-based UNHV model developed by Family Connects International, and
- 2) CHWs and doulas to identify, intervene and address social determinants of health that use community-based maternal support services (COMSS) to impact maternal/child health to strengthen Connecticut's public health infrastructure.

The Bridgeport pilot has been fully staffed, with seven home visiting registered nurses (RNs) and eight

certified community health workers (CHW), as well as a program administrator, program support specialist, and community alignment specialist, all of whom were hired by Bridgeport Hospital, and will also provide services to St. Vincent's Hospital. All RNs have completed the Family Connects International RN training program, and all CHWs have completed a specific upskilling curriculum created exclusively for Family Bridge by Southwestern Area Health Education Center (SWAHEC) through a subcontract with Bridgeport Hospital.

The pilot was launched in the Greater Bridgeport region in October 2023. Since the launch, Family Bridge has completed over 834 home visits to 747 unique families in Bridgeport, Fairfield, Easton, Shelton, Stratford, Trumbull, Monroe, and Milford. Family Bridge has provided home visits in nine languages, including English, Spanish, Haitian Creole, and Portuguese. Most recently, in May 2024, Family Bridge officially launched at St. Vincent's Medical Center, also in Bridgeport, serving families within the Greater Bridgeport Region. Family Bridge has assisted 495 families with accessing diapers, provided over 185 containers of formula, assisted 121 families with WIC and SNAP applications, completed over 55 lactation consultations, and helped connect to primary care providers and specialists.

OEC has integrated a parent from their OEC Parent Cabinet to the Family Bridge Parent Advisory Board and has incorporated referrals to OEC programs and presentations/trainings on Birth to Three, Sparkler, and Mind over Mood into Family Bridge staff education.

To support the foundation of the programs, the Governance Team has created and awarded two competitive procurement requests for proposals: one for the evaluation of Family Bridge and one for the program's sustainability. The evaluation contractor will provide analysis and assessment of program performance, outcomes, and impact to evaluate the overall benefit and value associated with the pilot. Contracts are in the final phase of execution with the successful bidders and anticipated to be completed by September 1, 2024.

Efforts to support the sustainability and expansion of Family Bridge are focused on working with contractors on diversifying revenue streams and leveraging OEC's existing home visiting system and other agency efforts. OEC is working with OHS, DPH, DSS, DCF as this is a multi-agency effort. The sustainability contractor will support the research and development of reimbursement mechanism for Family Bridge to potentially include federal grants, state funding, Medicaid bundles, and contracts with private commercial insurers.

Norwich was identified in legislation as the rural community OEC would support to assist in planning for implementation based on similar criteria. Through collective impact, Norwich's network of 36 stakeholders created the Eastern CT Health Collaborative (EHC). OEC received funding to include Norwich in the planning process for a Family Bridge Program.

Additionally, Family Bridge has been engaged in planning efforts in the Greater Norwich region, as legislatively directed. In May 2024, an official kick-off and planning workshop event was held in the Norwich region, with more than a dozen local partners represented. ARPA funds will support the implementation of Family Bridge in Norwich, which would include services to Griswold, Lisbon, Norwich, Windham, and Montville, the community inclusive of two Tribal nations.

Additional information regarding Family Bridge can be found on OEC's main web page and accessed at: <https://www.ctoec.org/family-bridge/>.

Recruitment, Selection, and Onboarding of 2nd Cohort of Parent Cabinet Members

The recruitment for the next cohort of Parent Cabinet members was undertaken in early winter 2024 with the assistance of current members. The current members made changes to improve the application and the makeup of the cabinet. This included changing from three to one at-large seat and designating the two other at-large seats to regular seats for regions 3 and 5 to help ensure coverage as they are much larger regions. Terms were also changed to 2.5 years with a staggered approach to help with continuity and retain institutional knowledge. New members will be recruited every other year.

The application for Parent Cabinet launched February 7, 2024, and closed March 24, 2024.

Parent Cabinet members assisted in outreach efforts to recruit new parents for the next cohort of Parent Cabinet. By the close of the application window, the Parent Cabinet had received 144 applications, a significant increase from 68 applications in 2021.

The selection process for new parent cabinet members kicked off in April 2024. The OEC held six trainings for six selection committees that consisted of a mix between OEC staff, parent cabinet members, and community partners. The final members were confirmed and the at-large seat determined by Commissioner Bye and Deputy Commissioner Trueworthy. The final 15 members were selected with eight new parent cabinet members starting in July 2024, followed by starting in January 2025. Those applicants not selected were connected with other opportunities at the OEC.

The OEC achieved the goal of having a minimum of 60% of the parents on the Cabinet currently using OEC services and the other 40% having used OEC service in the past. The new Parent Cabinet includes one male parent, three Bilingual Spanish speakers, and four former Parent Ambassadors.

The OEC also developed a new mentorship process, adapted from the 2Gen mentorship approach, where recent Alumni of Parent Cabinet and remaining members mentor the new members starting July 2024 and January 2025. The intent is to help the new members feel supported, understand their role, and answer any questions they have as they begin their new role.

An Inaugural Parent Cabinet Appreciation luncheon was held June 21, 2024, celebrating the work of the 1st Inaugural Parent Cabinet. The event celebrates and acknowledged the time, dedication and work the parent leaders have done these past 2.5 plus years.

Highlight of Parent Cabinet Impact

The Parent Cabinet worked with a contractor to create an evaluation report and a logic model that shows short- and long-term outcomes of ongoing Parent Cabinet activities, and how they connect to the overall mission of the Cabinet and the OEC.

The Parent Cabinet this past year gave input and their expertise, such as:

- Governor's Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care Report
- Birth to Three Family Survey
- Scoring home visiting awards
- Kindergarten age change memo to families
- Elevate awareness to families
- Care 4 Kids Parent Portal
- Early Start CT: Local Governance feedback on parents at those tables

Parent Cabinet members were newly appointed to serve on the following advisory bodies:

- **Birth to Three System Interagency Coordinating Council:** two parents were appointed to this body that helps shape the state's early intervention system.
- **State Inclusion Team Advisory:** a parent was added to bring parent perspective to the special education system across multiple areas to improve access and inclusion.
- **Family Bridge Advisory:** a parent was added to this body who resides in the area where the Universal Nurse Home Visiting pilot is happening in Bridgeport to bring the parent voice and perspective as well as sharing the resource to families and other parent leader groups.

Nationally, Connecticut is being called upon to present and share this work with other states. Parent Cabinet members are taking an active and public role in supporting the agency's goal of increasing the voice of parents/families at local and state tables. Some of these this past year include:

- Administration for Children & Families (ACF) Lived Experience Panel
- Early Childhood Technical Center (ECTA) Equity in Family Outcomes meeting with Birth to Three, Chapel Hill, North Carolina
- CT Parent Summit
- CT Association of the Education of Young Children (CTAEYC) conference
- Georgia 2Gen Statewide Summit (virtual)
- Governor's CT Blue Ribbon on Child Care closing meeting
- Smart Start Conference, North Carolina
- Child Care Aware Symposium, Arlington, Virginia
- Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) Conference, Arlington, Virginia

Parents Connecting Parents

Parents Connecting Parents is a program that aims to share support for families within six starter communities. In partnership with CT-NCY, the communities, local early childhood collaboratives, and parent ambassadors, we will continue to build upon relationships that already exist through local outreach. This will foster further opportunities to share resources, break down barriers, listen to families, and support children's early childhood educational journey. A training framework has been developed that ensures parents have the tools needed to share valuable information within the local communities such as early childhood spaces for children, access to programs like Sparkler, Help Me Grow, Birth to 3, and local resources. In collaboration with outside organizations, a data collection tool is being developed to ensure a greater understanding of family needs and how well current systems work for families. Parents Connecting Parents will have on-going professional development. Asset Mapping and Outreach within specific communities began in July 2024. In August 2024, the opportunity to share resources will be widespread due to the back-to-school environment. Parents Connecting Parents allows for collaboration among early childhood programs across the state which in turn enables continued partnerships with a focus on families by families.

Local Early Childhood Collaboratives

A Local Early Childhood Collaborative (LECC) provides support and education to parents, caregivers, and child care providers. Together, they form a network called the Connecticut Children's Collective (CTCC) under the CT Network on Children and Youth. The CTCC convenes local and regional early childhood collaborative leaders to improve cross-sector collaboration, support parent engagement, and promote equity and inclusion. With a shared goal to meet local family needs, LECCs work collaboratively with local stakeholders including educators, parents, healthcare and child care providers, family resource centers, and School Readiness Councils.

In 2023, the network welcomed three new LECCs for a statewide total of 37 (of which 24 are funded by the OEC). The growing LECC network now collectively serves 61 cities and towns in the state, representing 56% of Connecticut's population. Together with partners, the CT Children's Collective works to build an effective early childhood system which:

- Involves parents, providers, schools, city/town government, health, and social/human services in governance & planning for services used by local families
- Connects families quickly to the services they need
- Acts as the resource hub building trust and relationships between parents/ providers
- Identifies specific gaps in services needed in their community, and works to fill the gaps
- Engages the public, especially parents, about local priorities and how best to meet them
- Supports improvements in services through professional development and relationship building
- Distributes funding and resources to best fit local needs and priorities
- Provides accountability for local results to state agencies

Parent leadership and representation is a priority for LECCs, which have developed a community-based infrastructure with more than 60 parent leaders, called Parent Ambassadors. These Parent Ambassadors:

- **Foster parent engagement in early childhood policy at the local and state level.** For example, in 2023, the Connecticut Children’s Collective (CTCC) conducted outreach to LECCs about the Governor’s Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care. In collaboration with the OEC, CTCC organized a feedback session with Parent Ambassadors and LECC directors to ensure parent voice informed the final recommendations.
- **Create feedback loops for two-way communication and impact.** Parent Ambassadors are paired with Parent Cabinet members from the same region. They engage regularly to share insights and feedback from local initiatives and the activities planned by their LECC. The regional Parent Cabinet member then relays these updates to the broader OEC Parent Cabinet during their regular meetings.
- **Lead community engagement efforts to bring parent voice and needs to local tables.** Parent Ambassadors have been trained in and conduct Community Cafes, a model consisting of parent-led gatherings where people participate in a series of guided conversations on topics of interest, such as early childhood to spark relationships and action. In addition to the efforts of Parent Ambassadors, LECCs have formal parent advisory committees that help advance their work plan. Their role may include conducting outreach to parents, designing and implementing surveys and focus groups, and undertaking parent-led projects based on identified needs.

LECCs act as trusted messengers while identifying gaps in local services to elevate for policy or programmatic change. Over the past year, LECCs also engaged in the following efforts:

- **Kindergarten Preparedness** - nearly all of the LECCs partner with their local center and home-based providers along with local school districts to ensure that enrollment into kindergarten runs smoothly and is done correctly. Specific efforts focused on new kindergarten age legislative changes and getting the word out to families impacted
- **Promoting the Expansion of Sparkler** - in collaboration with the Sparkler initiative, LECCs provide multiple avenues to present the Sparkler tool. The Collective reports high rates of Sparkler usage and development screenings in CTCC communities.
- **Basic Needs and Emergency Support** - most collaboratives serve as a key local network or resource, such as referring families to services and centralizing coordination efforts to provide needs like food and diapers.

Care 4 Kids Parent Portal

Care 4 Kids successfully launched the new online application in the Parent Portal 1.0 in 2021. The OEC launched Parent Portal 2.0 in November of 2023, to allow for Care 4 Kids redeterminations and interim change requests to be submitted online. It also allows for direct pull of the data entered and edited on the application and renewal to be directly imported to ImpaCT so that the information does not need to be re-typed by Care 4 Kids case managers. Photos of necessary documents can be taken and

uploaded by families' phones, and families will receive regular updates on the status of their applications through text and email.

In FY24, 14,896 applications were submitted online, incoming phone calls related to Care 4 Kids application submissions decreased by over 50%, reducing the application processing time.

CT Head Start on Housing Initiative

A first in the nation effort, the Office of Early Childhood, Head Start Collaboration Office, Department of Housing, State Department of Education, National Center on Housing and Child Welfare, and the CT Head Start Association partnered to provide access to permanent housing vouchers and services for Early Head Start and Head Start families experiencing homelessness.

In FY22, the Connecticut Department of Housing committed 60 housing vouchers for families whose children are participating in CT's Head Start and Early Head Start programs, including an Early Head Start MIECHV program. For sustainability, the Department of Housing wrote into its administrative plan that one out of every three Section 8 housing vouchers that turn over will go specifically to Head Start families.

This initiative builds upon the strengths and resources of each partner. For almost 60 years, Head Start has promoted the school readiness of infants, toddlers, and preschool-aged children from low-income families and offers high-quality comprehensive services that supports both the child and family. Head Start's model partners closely with families and provides in-depth case management to support them in reaching their goals. By working together, this partnership ensures families with young children have stable housing – a critical component to family well-being and healthy child development.

Head Start Collaboration Office Partnership with Department of Social Services (DSS)

The CT Head Start Collaboration Office began a partnership with the State's Department of Social Service (DSS), the agency that administers Supplement Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, to ensure that SNAP recipients were aware of a new federal policy change making them categorically eligible for Head Start services. This policy change allows Head Start programs to reach families better and coordinate benefit programs so that families eligible for multiple programs can more easily participate in services for which they qualify. Recipients were informed through a marketing campaign that included mailings, letters, flyers, and banners displayed in local DSS offices.

The 2022-2023 school year was the first year in which SNAP benefits were included in Head Start eligibility criteria. The new SNAP eligibility criteria resulted in the number of enrollees whose primary type of eligibility was through public assistance to nearly triple, from 414 to 1,588 enrollees. Primary type of eligibility through income at or below the federal poverty line decreased by 24%, meaning that families likely selected the new option of showing eligibility through SNAP.

ECE Workforce Registry

Scholarship:

- \$1,429,630 awarded (\$1,310,965.50 FY23; \$1,482,924 FY22; \$1,309,464 – FY21)
- Goals (Note: individuals typically receive multiple awards toward their goal each year):
 - o 47 associate degrees (37 – FY23; 35 – FY22; 36 – FY21)
 - o 152 bachelor’s degrees (158 – FY23; 170 – FY22; 155 – FY 21 and 80 – FY20)
 - o 29 CDA credential work – online non-credit instructor supported (28 – FY23; 16 – FY22; 18 – FY21)
 - o 68 non-degree courses specifically to administrators of programs to meet licensing requirements and competency qualifications (89 – FY23; 87 – FY22; 130 – FY21).
 - o 66 CDA credential fees (54 – FY23; 31 – FY22; 33 – FY21):
 - 1 renewal (5 – FY23; 8 – FY22; 20 – FY21)
 - 65 new (49 – FY23; 23 – FY22; 13 – FY21): 22 Family Child Care settings (28 – FY23; 13 – FY22; 1 – FY21); 19 Infant / Toddler Center settings (11 – FY23; 3 – FY22; 4 – FY21); 24 Preschool Center settings (10 – FY23; 7 – FY22; 8 – FY21)
 - o 0 (zero) Credits toward the School-Age Head Teacher Certificate (4 – FY23; 1 – FY22; 4 – FY21)
 - o 2 stand-alone (non-degree) business / NAFCC renewal courses for family child care providers (7 – FY23; 8 – FY22)
 - o 20 Connecticut Director Credential fees (8 – FY23; 15 – FY22; 12 – FY21)
 - o 14 Adult Learning Theory 3-credit course – FY24 pilot for Technical Assistance Providers

Head Teacher:

- 462 awarded (535 – FY23; 452 - FY22; 371 – FY21):
- 448 center settings (508 – FY23; 427 – FY22; 355 – FY 21); 14 group home settings (22 – FY23; 23 – FY22; 4 – FY21)
- 254 Birth to Age 5 certificates (299 – FY23; 245 – FY22; 214 – FY21); 150 Birth to School Age certificates (156 – FY23; 143 – FY22; 99 – FY21); 58 School Age certificates (80 – FY23; 64 – FY22; 58 – FY21)

Early Childhood Teacher Credential:

28 awarded (42 – FY23; 39 – FY22; 47 – FY21)

- 1 Level A (associate degree) Infant/Toddler & Preschool Endorsement (1 – FY23; 3 – FY22; 3 – FY21)
- 2 Level A (associate degree) Infant/Toddler Endorsement (2 – FY23; 0 – FY22; 1 – FY21)
- 15 Level A (associate degree) Preschool Endorsement (19 – FY23; 14 – FY22; 17 – FY21)
- 4 Level B (bachelor's degree) Infant/Toddler & Preschool Endorsement (8 – FY23; 5 – FY22; 12 - FY21)

- 1 Level B (bachelor's degree) Infant/Toddler Endorsement (1 – FY23; 1 – FY22; 3 – FY 21)
- 5 Level B (bachelor's degree) Preschool Endorsement (11 – FY23; 16 – FY22; 9 – FY 21)

The 28 were awarded based on the following qualification route:

- 6 Individual Review Route (7 – FY23; 8 – FY22; 7 – FY21)
- 22 Traditional college degree route (35 – FY23; 31 – FY22; 38 – FY21)

Licensing Regulations

Significant changes to OEC licensing regulations for child care centers and group child care homes were proposed for the first time in nearly 15 years. The OEC gave notice to the public about proposed changes to the licensing regulations and held two public hearings in accordance with the regulation-making process outlined by Sec. 4-168 of the Connecticut General Statutes.

The proposed regulations update the standards with which licensed child care centers and group child care homes must comply and establish requirements for programs as follows:

- eliminate the requirement to petition the Office to administer certain medications
- require group child care homes to have a staff on site who is certified in cardiopulmonary resuscitation
- provide clarity of existing requirements
- establish requirements consistent with national recommendations
- identify specific first aid courses that are acceptable
- establish requirements that address childhood nutrition
- change staff child ratio requirements for two-year-olds
- change group size requirements for certain situations, reduce the requirements for school age head teachers
- require employment history checks for new staff
- establish requirements in accordance with P.A.22-81
- establish requirements to satisfy the mandates of the reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG)
- and make technical revisions.

The comment period for the proposed changes to the regulations was reopened twice based on comments received and subsequent changes were made in response to comments. The most recent additions to the proposed regulations include:

- change staff child ratio requirements for school age children to 1:15
- clarify the definition of program staff to include substitutes and volunteers, amend the definition of employment, and add a definition of visitor
- clarify the definition of group child care home
- clarify training for program staff

- add a requirement that a written plan for administrative oversight must be in place which includes who is in charge in the absence of the director
- make clear requirements for education consultants
- clarify requirements regarding availability or posting of the most recent inspection reports
- make clear the posting of Developmental Milestones is not required for programs serving school age children only
- clarified video recordings must be available to the Office by the next business day
- staff hired after April 1, 2025, must complete health and safety training
- clarify requirements for children with valid religious exemptions
- clarify employment history check requirements
- repeal obsolete Department of Public Health (DPH) food regulations and replace with current DPH regulations
- clarify usage requirements regarding indoor and outdoor space not approved by the OEC
- add requirements regarding environmental testing and water sample testing
- add updated regulations adopted by DPH regarding the emergency distribution of potassium iodide for programs within the Millstone Emergency Planning Zones
- add language to clarify that children born in September, October, November, or December who are not enrolled in kindergarten but will turn five (5) by January 1 may attend a school-age program
- clarify that fencing for infant toddler spaces approved after January 1, 2025, must be four (4) feet in height
- and make technical revisions.

These proposed changes are supportive of the operation of child care centers and group child care homes while also ensuring the safety, health, and development of children receiving child care in such settings. The regulations have yet to be adopted through the legislative regulatory review process.

In January of 2024, the regulations for youth camps were updated to be consistent with the mandates of Public Act 22-87. The new regulation clarifies mandated reporter requirements for youth camp staff. The OEC licensing and legal division continue to work on additional changes to the youth camp regulations.

In addition, the Division implemented new policies for youth camp licensing regarding timelines for inspections and the addition of follow-up visits to ensure compliance with the regulations based on the enactment of Public Act 24-49. Additional youth camp inspectors were hired to ensure OEC could meet the requirements of the increased monitoring required by the law. OEC is also working to designate some of the appointments to the Youth Camp Safety Advisory Council and will provide administrative support to the Council to facilitate its activities.

Public Act 21-171 instituted the family child care “incubator model,” which allows the OEC to issue a family child care home license to a person or group of persons outside a private residence. To implement this law, the Licensing Division has developed criteria to inform prospective providers of the additional requirements of this license type. In addition to the requirements, the OEC licensing division has developed new application and inspection forms and configured the licensing data system and mobile platform with these new requirements. The OEC is consulting with three Connecticut cities that are working to support providers as they seek licensure under this model.

To meet the growing needs of the Spanish speaking community, in 2023 the Division of Licensing hired six additional bilingual Child Care Licensing Specialists who are now fully trained field staff who assist in answering calls from Spanish speaking providers on the Help Desk. The OEC hired two License and Applications Supervisors to oversee the child care and youth camp application units and are planning to hire two additional Spanish speaking License and Applications Analysts to support the growing numbers of Spanish speaking providers.

The OEC Licensing Division is using technology to better streamline processes. The Division continues to monitor program compliance with background checks for child care centers, group child care homes, family child care homes, and youth camps using the Background Check Information System. The Division successfully deployed the use of iPads for field staff and launched mobile inspections for child care programs. This not only supports the Governor’s goal of enhancing and modernizing state services by reducing paper, but ensures more consistent documentation of violations, increases staff productivity, and enables the public to have more readily available information concerning inspections as they are posted within a day on the www.ct.gov/childcare.org website. The Division is planning for the launch of mobile inspections for license-exempt centers and license-exempt youth camps in the fall of 2024 and for licensed youth camps in the summer of 2025. The Division continues to work on the configuration of online applications. In addition, the IT Division has worked with Licensing to enhance the agency website, which includes restructuring of the content for ease in use, and by adding fillable forms which enables programs/providers to easily submit changes as well as report accidents, illnesses, injuries, and incidents. Further enhancements are in development, including adding a new section for family child care “Incubator Model” programs.

The Division of Licensing completed the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) triennial audit and implemented changes necessary to comply with the audit findings. This includes posting initial inspection reports for licensed child care centers, group child care homes, and family child care homes on the www.ct.gov/childcare.org website and updating the license exempt health and safety requirements and corresponding inspection forms. OEC is planning to propose changes to the family child care home regulations to complete the outstanding compliance issues based on this audit. OEC also completed the 2023 NARA Child Care Licensing Programs and Policies Survey for the first time since 2017.

OEC Behavioral Health Initiative

In 2022, the Office of Early Childhood created Behavioral Health Initiatives to support and enhance intra-agency communication and collaboration between OEC and state partners about behavioral health. Public Act 13-178 designates the Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF) as the primary state agency responsible for children's mental health needs. Although DCF is statutorily charged with overseeing mental health needs of Connecticut's children, interagency collaboration is essential with respect to areas of expertise and population served within each agency. Recognizing the value of a well-established continuum of care, OEC values the importance of proactively expanding partnerships with state agencies to promote overall wellness for children throughout their development.

OEC's support of behavioral health efforts has been present and evolving since the agency's conception. OEC's goal is to promote overall wellness and strengthen a system where all children and families equitably receive the support they need for success in home, school, and community. To date, there are nine behavioral health initiatives supported by OEC, as well as other state agencies. They include:

- Pyramid Model
- ECCP (Early Childhood Consultation Partnership)
- Insecure Housing Training and Support
- Suspension & Expulsion
- Mind Over Mood (MOMs)
- Connecticut Association of Infant Mental Health (CT-AIMH)
- Help Me Grow/Sparkler
- Doula Project
- Head Start Collaboration

Each initiative has a unique approach regarding behavioral health service delivery that is not mutually exclusive as their purposes are interconnected and benefit one another. The ***Pyramid Model*** is a framework that provides programs with guidance on how to promote social and emotional competence in all children, and designing effective interventions that support young children with persistent challenging behavior. ***ECCP*** is a strength-based mental health consultation program designed to build capacity of caregivers by offering support, education, and consultation. ***ECCP***'s purpose is to meet the social-emotional needs and/or developmental concerns of children birth to five; this includes promoting inclusion to mitigate exclusionary discipline practices. Furthermore, ***Suspension & Expulsion*** is proactively addressed in preschool settings by educating staff and family on the importance of social and emotional learning. Promoting inclusion in early child care settings is fundamental, especially when Black and Brown children are disproportionately impacted by suspension and expulsions.

With OEC's ***Doula*** project, a goal is to reduce low birth weight babies and birth complications involving mothers or their baby, increase initiation of breastfeeding, and increase mother's self-efficacy regarding her own pregnancy outcomes. In support of a continuum of perinatal service delivery, ***Mind***

Over Mood is an initiative that helps a mother transition from birth to postnatal care by addressing maternal mental health within early childhood Home Visitation. This also relates to services provided by **CT-AIMH** and **Sparkler** as they collectively support the social and emotional development of children, while also heightening awareness of overcoming developmental milestones.

Provision of all these services presumes the child and family live in stable and secure housing, however, this is not a reality for many children and families. **Insecure Housing Training and Support** provides training on homelessness and housing instability to increase awareness of McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. Training is intended to increase awareness on how homelessness is a traumatic experience impacting children’s development in lasting ways, including malnutrition, maltreatment, multiple school placements, and exposure to violence. The **Head Start Collaboration Office** supports proactively addressing this matter, as well as other efforts within OEC’s Behavioral Health Initiatives.

As part of OEC’s Behavioral Health Initiatives, monthly webinars were held to highlight various initiatives supported by OEC while drawing attention to the importance and universal presence of mental health. All [webinars](#) were accessible to the community at large and recorded; the recordings can be found on [OEC’s website](#) under [Behavioral Health Initiative](#), as well as on OEC’s YouTube page. Webinars in FY23-24 included:

Webinar Date	Subject Matter	All webinars can be found at: https://www.youtube.com/@CTearlychildhood
September 21, 2023	Suspension & Expulsion	<i>“Taking a Different Path: Supporting Positive Approaches to Addressing Challenging Behaviors in Early Childhood Programs”</i>
October 31, 2023	Insecure Housing Training and Support	<i>“A Place to Call Home: Addressing Housing Instability- Supporting Young Children and Families in Connecticut”</i>
paused in November and December during Holiday Season		
January 23, 2024	Professional Development for Providers: Sharpening the Workplace Toolbox	<i>“Professional Learning: YES! It’s For You”</i>
February 27, 2024	Personal Development for Parents/Caregivers: Sharpening the Self-Care Toolbox	<i>“Nurturing the Nurturer: A Guide to Parental Self-Care”</i>
March 19, 2024	Women’s History Month	<i>“Women in Business in CT - A Reflection of the Past and a Look Ahead”</i>
April 23, 2024	Black Maternal Health - National Minority Health Month	<i>“Do You Hear Me? Do You See Me? Do You Care? Giving Voice to Black Women’s Health and Maternal Health Care”</i>
May 30, 2024	National Mental Health Awareness Month	<i>“The Air We All Breathe: The Essence of Mental Health and How We All Have a Connection to It”</i>
June 27, 2024	Financial Literacy	<i>“Balancing Fun with Fund\$: Creating enjoyable experiences on a budget”</i>

OEC's commitment to invest in the children and families does not end once a child ages out of services provided by OEC. Recognizing children grow up to become adults, investing in healthy growth and development of our youngest of young is paramount to securing a solid foundation propelling further growth into adulthood.

Whole Family Approach –2Gen

A new 2Gen statewide coordinator was hired in early November 2023 to continue the work of Connecticut's 2-Generational Initiative. 2Gen continues to collaborate with its lead local partner, the Office of Workforce Strategy (OWS).

As part of our state's 2Gen strategy, Public Act 19-78 required the Office of Policy and Management to develop an interagency 2Gen plan, which included four key components: 1) development of data sharing infrastructure, 2) coordination of resources to assist families, 3) consideration of innovative approaches based on input of parents and other community members, and 4) shared indicators and goals for interagency collaboration. OPM continued to coordinate with 2Gen in 2023 and made progress in the four areas. Data sharing was expanded to 15 agencies through the state longitudinal data system, P20 WIN, which covered the major whole family datasets and indicators. In addition, OPM, Department of Social Services, and Office of Health Strategy worked to incorporate resident voice into the use and sharing of data, through participation in the Equity in Practice Learning Community, organized by Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy (AISP). The coordination of resources and innovative approaches described in Goals 1 – 6 also reflect the continued active involvement of state agencies in the 2Gen Initiative.

Regional and Federal Partnership(s) - Connecticut is an active member of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) [Whole Family Approach to Jobs](#) public-private partnership across the six New England states and in collaboration with APHSA. Connecticut participated in regional work groups on racial equity, parent engagement, and benefits cliffs. Connecticut is playing a leadership role in the parent engagement, and in the racial equity learning community, through the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity.

2Gen Goals and Outcomes Achieved

As a result of the [landscape study](#) conducted on the 2Gen work to fully support the Whole Family, six goals were established to be implemented over two years (FY23-24).

Goal 1: Develop a 2Gen parent engagement strategy that coordinates engagement efforts and offers parents opportunities for advancement both within and outside of the 2Gen work.

Outcome(s): 2Gen parent engagement strategy efforts and offerings to parents have elevated the 2Gen initiative. The 2Gen Parent Engagement workgroup ensured that the 2Gen Advisory Board parents had access and opportunity to engage in the initiative as well as receive training in areas they identified as

useful to their personal and professional growth and development, and skills useful to their upward economic mobility. 2Gen parents contributed to the benefits cliff workgroup and workforce workgroups and actively participated in the parent engagement workgroup, which are subcommittees of the 2Gen Advisory Board.

Seven new parents were onboarded to the Advisory Board. Parents were offered paid training opportunities. Advisory board parent members have completed upward of 30 hours in training/onboarding in the areas of legislative advocacy, mentor-mentee training, and four modules of the CLIFF tool to support the benefit cliff roll-out. In addition to board and workgroup contributions, employment/economic mobility opportunities for parents working as mentors and consultants were also created. Community engagement strategies were developed in partnership with 2Gen parents to establish feedback loops between parent board members and the community.

Goal 2: Roll out benefits cliffs CLIFF tool statewide and sustain implementation; identify next stage policy options

Outcome(s): 2Gen continues to make progress with the implementation for roll-out using the Atlanta Federal Reserve Bank suite of tools created for CT, [Connecticut's Career Ladder Identifier and Financial Forecaster \(CLIFF\)](#). The 2Gen Benefit Cliff Workgroup, in collaboration with OWS, developed a plan for continued roll-out of the benefit cliff tools through organizations working directly with families. The tools illustrate the interaction between wages, public benefits, and tax credits in bringing - or failing to bring - families to economic stability. The CT CLIFF suite of tools also demonstrates the significant taxpayer savings that result from career advancement. The tool can be used by coaches, case managers, and businesses through workforce training programs (CareerConneCT), and community organizations to understand how increases in earnings impact benefits.

- *Winter '23-* 2Gen and OWS conducted an educational briefing to 25-plus members of the Connecticut General Assembly on the benefit cliff tools available, impacts of cliffs, and potential policy solutions to mitigate benefit cliffs and open economic opportunity for families. The Department of Social Services and the Office of Early Childhood have joined the work to offer their expertise in the benefits that would be considered in a pilot.
- *Spring '24-* 2Gen and OWS began working with the Connecticut Business and Industry Association (CBIA), resulting in inclusion of several questions related to benefit cliffs in the Association's annual member survey. Results indicated that one in four employers reported employees turning down a promotion or wage increase because of benefit cliffs, limiting both their own economic mobility and the ability of employers to fill higher level vacant positions. Additionally, 2Gen and OWS began to explore developing a benefit cliff pilot that would help the state identify additional policy options that would mitigate the cliffs. 2Gen engaged Social Finance, a national nonprofit with expertise in benefit cliffs and in feasibility analyses, to

undertake a study of the design and costs of a pilot. The study was completed with costs identified and was used in a recent educational briefing to the Connecticut General Assembly.

Goal 3: Develop plan for scalable transportation pilot to be implemented in Eastern CT

Outcome(s): 2Gen, in partnership with the Office of Workforce Strategy, worked to develop a transportation pilot as a result of pre-identified barriers from the 2Gen Workforce Workgroup. A Request for Proposals (RFP) was issued in November 2023 for a contractor to develop a feasibility analysis for a pilot program in car ownership and/or repairs that will inform policy and practice changes. 2Gen will participate in an Advisory team that will oversee the development of the feasibility study.

Goal 4: Develop 2Gen Assessment/Framework to be used in legislature and executive agencies and implement with other agencies to improve 2Gen approaches

Outcome(s): 2Gen has gained widespread recognition as a critical strategy to place families at the center in policy, systems, and practice to offer greater economic mobility and well-being for families. 2Gen identified the importance of a concrete set of tools to support state agencies in assessing their policies and systems, as well as a tool for legislators to evaluate whether relevant legislation has incorporated 2Gen considerations.

Goal 5: Engage legislature in 2Gen priorities in legislative session through informational hearing centered on topic areas related to family economic mobility and well-being.

Outcome(s): Recognizing the importance of the role of the Legislature to achieving lasting 2Gen systems and policy change, 2Gen held legislative educational sessions on the benefits cliffs pilot scenarios in late 2023. The 2Gen Advisory Board held an educational forum moderated by the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity at the Legislative Office Building. The educational forum focused on how state agencies and organizations across the state are implementing 2Gen strategies and what resources are available to the community.

Goal 6: Develop mechanisms for 2Gen to add value to initiatives related to family economic mobility and well-being through influence

Outcome(s): Across Connecticut, there are a range of initiatives and advocacy work that is related to 2Gen, though not the main focus of 2Gen. Recognizing that there are areas related to well-being that need to be addressed, 2Gen identified a new subcommittee work group, Family Well-Being. The focus of this subcommittee is housing, health, mental health, and other areas. As parents identify and challenge practices and policies, 2Gen evaluates its capacity and areas of influence to work on these issues, and whether to create another workgroup with a broader set of stakeholders.

**Please note additional Year in Review reports can be found at: <https://www.ctoec.org/2gen/>*

