



## Connecticut Office of Early Childhood

### *At a Glance*

**Connecticut Office of Early Childhood**

**Beth Bye, Commissioner**

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

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

**Central Office – 450 Columbus Boulevard, Hartford, CT 06103**

**Number of employees – 128 Employees – 8 are part-time, and 2 are Durational Project Managers. 25 employees are fully federally funded, 6 are partially federally funded**

**Recurring operating expenses**

State - 233,941,192

Federal - 184,848,592

### **Organizational Structure**

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

## **Vision**

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

## **Mission**

To 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.

## **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, and family support. The OEC consolidates the funding streams, programs, and personnel of numerous early childhood services formerly dispersed across the Departments of Education, Public Health, Social Services, Developmental Services, and the Board of Regents.

The Office of Early Childhood works to:

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

## **OEC Operations and Divisions**

### **Commissioner’s Office**

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

#### **Internal Operations and Support (Fiscal Services and Grants and Contracts Support Unit)**

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 human resources, agency policies and procedures, internal and external audits, and contracts.

Within the last year, the agency has launched a Grants and Contracts Support Unit 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 is tasked with ensuring 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 will play a coordinating role and will provide support with responding to Requests for Proposals and grant opportunities for which the agency applies.

## **Communications**

Communications responsibilities include public information, media relations, public affairs, website, social media, internal communications, 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.
- 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. Legal office attorneys assist the different divisions with advice regarding contracts, grant awards, program administration, discrimination complaints, audits, confidentiality requirements, ethics requirements, records retention, legislation, regulations, and other matters as they arise.

The background check unit processes approximately 12,000 background check requests per year pertaining to child care staff in centers, licensed family child care homes, and youth camps statewide in compliance with federal and state requirements for child health and safety in these settings. The professional and para-professional staff serve as hearing officers in over 100 Care 4 Kids child care subsidy hearings per year. The attorneys represent the agency in approximately 12 child care license revocation hearings per year, with the paralegals serving as administrative staff in those hearings. In addition, staff manages approximately 200 yearly licensing enforcement cases and respond to approximately 50 freedom of information (FOI) requests annually.

## **Research, Planning and Technology**

The Research, Planning and Technology (RPT) Division was formed in 2021. The RPT division brings together strategic planning and information use needed to operate as a data-informed agency and to support agency operations and work. Data-driven decisions hinge on data specialists, technologists, and program specialists working together to solve problems and make policy. This division is led by the Chief Research and Planning Officer and includes research capacity, university research partners, and the IT division. The Chief Research and Planning Officer's role is to marshal the power of evidence and information to understand where and how

OEC can best direct state and federal resources to young children, their families, and communities.

The division is composed of research and planning and technology. The work of the research and planning team builds on the Data & Accountability Coordinator whose main goal was to increase knowledge of OEC data metrics and performances measures. The research specialists in this division support agency learning and training, and engages closely with the Information Technology Team to improve data collection efforts and support new application development. The division partners internally and externally to provide expertise in performance measurement and management, strategic communications, and organizational change.

In addition to the support of the agency, the Chief Research and Planning Officer is engaged with data efforts across the state including the P20-WIN Network and the current IT Optimization effort. The division prioritizes opportunities for intra-agency and inter-agency data sharing and development, and enhancement of integrated data systems. This division seeks ways to make agency data open and transparent to several audiences including legislators, parents, providers, and the public.

The Information Technology section of the division works to improve data systems to increase the agency's ability to use data to inform and improve policy and administration. This work is rooted in common shared data models and a master data index across all divisions creating a single point of agreement among all agency data. The OEC continues to build IT and data service connections between state agencies to support real-time data inquiries. IT operations ensures that all OEC staff have secure and functioning computer and communications technology, along with the knowledge and support to make each individual OEC staff member effective in their work. The development team develops applications that securely collect, process, and give access to child and program data across OEC's divisions and to the public.

### **Head Start State Collaboration Office**

The Director of the Head Start State Collaboration Office facilitates state-level collaboration between Head Start/Early Head Start and state agencies that carry out activities designed to benefit low-income pregnant women, children from birth to school entry, and their families. This office also collaborates with DCF with joint meetings and trainings. Over the course of the pandemic, Head Start Office has played a lead role in bringing various parts of the agency together to plan pandemic relief for collaborative projects, that included Head Start. The Office has also been collaborating with the Department of Housing to make housing vouchers available to Head Start families.

## **Parent Cabinet**

The OEC Parent Cabinet was co-created with a group of parent leaders and the first-ever Cabinet will be seated in September 2021. 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 will raise up and incorporate the expertise of parents with young children throughout the OEC to strengthen family-centered policies and programs.

## **Division of Early Care and Education**

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

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
6. Even Start
7. Child Care Development Fund (including Care 4 Kids Subsidy Program)

## **Child Day Care Program**

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

Enrollment and capacity in Child Day Care programs fluctuated throughout FY 2021 due to number of factors related to the COVID-19 pandemic including group size limitations, local conditions, and family preferences. OEC worked to stabilize these critical programs with enhanced state payments to reduce the impact of low enrollment and help the program survive the pandemic fiscally. Programs had the option to provide remote services if they met specific requirements and additional adjustments were made to ensure that programs were able to continue to safely serve children and families.

<b>CHILD DAY CARE CONTRACT PROGRAM</b> <b>\$33,589,517</b>	
Number of Communities	47
Number of Programs	48
Number of Sites	97
Sites that are also SR (40 PSR; 9 CSR)	46
Sites that are also SHS	17
Infant/Toddler Full-Time	1,335
Infant/Toddler Wraparound	187
Preschool Full-Time	1913
Preschool Wraparound	297
School-Age Full-Time	205
School-Age Part-Time	195

### **School Readiness**

School Readiness is a state-funded initiative that provides access to preschool programs for 3- and 4-year-old children. At least 60% of households serviced must have incomes under 75% of the State Medium Income. 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 particular 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 and capacity in School Readiness programs fluctuated throughout FY 2021 due to number of factors related to the COVID-19 pandemic including group size limitations, local conditions, and family preferences. OEC worked to stabilize these critical programs with enhanced state payments to reduce the impact of low enrollment and help the program survive the pandemic fiscally. Programs had the option to provide remote services for children enrolled in Part-Day spaces if they met specific requirements to ensure that programs were able to continue to safely serve children and families. Some School Readiness programs requested to temporarily convert Full Day and School Day spaces to Part Day in order to provide the remote learning option. This resulted in a significant increase in Part Day spaces and decreases in other space types.

<b>SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAM</b>			
<b>\$93,717,373 SPACES \$90,638,202 ADMIN \$2,186,215 QE \$892,95</b>			
	Priority	Competitive	Total
Number of Communities	21	46	67
Number of Programs	130	67	197
Number of Sites	221	80	301
Number of Children	10,819	1,455	12,274
Full-Day Spaces	7,082	694	7,776
School-Day Spaces	1,842	259	2,101
Part-Day Spaces	1,439	502	1,941
Extended-Day Spaces	456	NA	456

### Smart Start

Smart Start serves children ages 3 and 4 years old in public school settings. It provides local and regional boards of education with funding to establish or expand a preschool program under the jurisdiction of the board of education for the town. Smart Start services are supported through state funds. Enrollment and capacity in Smart Start programs fluctuated throughout FY 2021 due to number of factors related to the COVID-19 pandemic including group size limitations, local conditions, and family preferences. Programs had the option to provide remote services if they met specific requirements and additional adjustments were made to ensure that programs were able to continue to safely serve children and families. In June, the agency expanded Smart Start with ARPA funding, adding XX classrooms.

<b>SMART START</b>	
<b>\$3,250,000</b>	
Number of School Districts	23
Number of Classrooms	44
Children Served	650

### 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, Connecticut provides supplemental



funding to 11 of the 19 federally funded Head Start grantees to increase capacity by 320 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.

<b>STATE HEAD START SERVICES</b> <b>\$5,083,238</b>	
Number of Communities (14 Services & Innovative Enhancement funding options; 23 Innovative Enhancement funding option only)	34
Number of program sites	47
New Full day/full year Spaces Created (Services funding option) in 14 communities	264
Extended day/extended year Spaces (Innovative Enhancement option) in all Head Start programs	994

#### **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 schedule. Families earning up to 50% of the State Median Income (SMI) are eligible to enroll; at the 12-month redetermination, a family can earn up to 65% of SMI.

A combination of state and federal funds supports the Care 4 Kids subsidy program. In FY2021, 5,418 providers served 24,695 children. (Source: ImpaCT Child Care Ad Hoc Report for Paid Services as of 07/03/2021).

#### **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 Care4Kids subsidy program.

<b>EARLY HEAD START - CHILD CARE PARTNERSHIP \$1,339,233</b>	
Grantees	3
Number of Providers	44
Number of Children (Monthly Average)	222

### **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. The following 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; and 5) Home Visits to Support Educational Programs.

<b>EVEN START FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAM \$295,456</b>	
Grantees	3
Number of Families	37
Number of Adults	48
Number of Children	69

### **Division of Quality Improvement**

The Division of Quality Improvement is responsible for advancing the quality of the workforce and early childhood services for young children in family child care homes, centers, and school-based programs. The division's activities include:

1. Workforce Registry
2. Workforce Professional Development
3. Standards, Curriculum and Assessment
4. Data and Accountability

### **Workforce Registry**

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

### **Early Childhood Workforce Development**

Workforce 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 Office of Early Childhood has been engaged in Workforce development efforts working with DSS and SNAP, and the Governor's Workforce Council.

### **Standards, Curriculum and Assessment**

The division's work in the area of Standards, Curriculum and Assessment supports programs, families, providers, and communities to help young children grow and learn using a cycle of intentional teaching in which 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.

### **Streamlined Infrastructure for Continuous Improvement**

To continue to strengthen our continuous improvement system for child care settings, the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood recently partnered with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) to develop structures for licensed programs to move toward accreditation. The accreditation standards address the following areas: relationships among children, families, and the community; staff competencies, leadership and management; health and the learning environment; and curriculum, teaching, and assessment. NAEYC has already completed the hard work and research to develop observable criteria that are strong indicators of program quality. We plan to leverage this work for our state system. Working with national partners will ensure a strong and streamlined infrastructure based on existing, proven approaches to strengthen programs through continuous improvement.

The Connecticut Office of Early Childhood will create a quality improvement system that bridges licensing standards to accreditation standards, including accreditation standards for family child care settings. In our system, we will not rate programs or classrooms, as many states

do. Connecticut programs are licensed, accredited, or moving toward accreditation. Our focus with the new system is on simplicity, accessibility and leveraging existing health, safety, and quality assurance systems. This will reduce state overhead expenses, increase transparency and clarity for families, and offer a supportive structure for programs.

### **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.

### **Connecticut Birth to Three System**

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 in order 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 and concerns and the child's development. In FY21, 19 agencies supported families in all 169 municipalities in Connecticut. On any given day, the families of approximately 5,600 children had IFSPs and over the course of FY21 the families of 11,395 eligible children received supports from Birth to Three.

### **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 state and federally funded home visiting programs:

- State Funded: Nurturing Families Network used Parents as Teachers Model with the addition in 2019: Child First, Nurse Family Partnership, Minding the Baby and Family Check-up.

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

### **Help Me Grow**

Help Me Grow is a program for children up to age 5 experiencing the challenges of growing up. It provides parents and providers access to a variety of community resources that address a child's behavioral or developmental needs. Help Me Grow also provides access to child development monitoring through the Ages and Stages and Ages and Stages- Social Emotional screenings. This year, Help Me Grow is piloting joint regional meetings with Department of Public Health's Connecticut Medical Home Initiative. These meeting will convene early childhood and childhood stakeholders in collaborative opportunities that focus on children's medical, behavioral and development needs.

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 are paid for by Medicaid and some commercial insurance. This year, Mind Over Mood is focusing on increasing the number of bilingual therapists able to provide cognitive behavioral therapy to Spanish-speaking families throughout the state.

- 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*<sup>TM</sup>

*Touchpoints*<sup>TM</sup> 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 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 2020-2021**

### **OEC COVID-19 Response**

The OEC recognizes the important role providers of early childhood services play in the COVID-19 public health emergency. During this pandemic, OEC remained committed to ensuring that the indispensable functions of the agency continue so that children and families were appropriately supported and maintained access to the resources they need. To that end, the agency took actions to stabilize the early childhood infrastructure that so many families rely on through CTCARES relief programs, and initiatives funded by the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA) and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). Connecticut received \$70 million in CRRSAA funding to provide 1) direct child care services, 2) resources, supplies, and/or technical assistance, and 3) stabilization grants to support increased operating expense. That was followed by \$276 million from ARPA funds, of which \$170 million is targeted to stabilize the child care industry and \$106 million to expand child care assistance.

The following are some of the initiatives that the OEC undertook during Fiscal Year 2020-2021 to support the child care industry and the families they serve who were struggling through the COVID pandemic.

### **State Funded School Readiness and Child Care Stabilization**

Working with OPM, OEC adapted the payment rates for state funded early childhood programs to assure that these critical state resources would be available for children and families post COVID. Programs were paid by classroom, versus by child, and also could receive a 25% enhancement up to their appropriated funding amount. This helped preserve these NAEYC Accredited programs serving 12,000 children with affordable child care for families.

### **Child Care Program Stabilization Grant Funding**

The OEC was the first agency in the country to incorporate the [CDC's Social Vulnerability Index](#) (SVI) into its distribution of approximately \$120 million of ARPA Child Care Stabilization funds. The SVI takes into account 15 different variables about the demographics, income, and living conditions of residents of a community, giving each census tract a score from 0 to 1 that is relative only to Connecticut communities. Using this index, OEC directed additional funds to programs located in historically marginalized communities, which are also disproportionately likely to be child care deserts.

In a perfect world, the OEC would have used information about the children that each provider was serving to target additional funding toward those providers enrolling priority populations such as children from low-income families, children experiencing homelessness, and children of

color. Lacking this information, OEC identified the SVI as a data-driven method to target additional funds based on the characteristics of where a program is located. After closely reviewing the data, OEC settled on a two-tiered approach which directed 25% additional funds to providers in a community with an SVI score between .6 and .8, and 35% additional funding to providers in a community with an SVI score greater than .8. This was driven by a recognition that there were significantly steeper barriers to success in the communities with the highest SVI scores. For example, in census tracts scoring between .6 and .8, 12% of residents have incomes below the poverty line, compared to 28% in communities with an SVI greater than .8.

This approach has resulted in OEC directing significant additional funding per child to providers that are:

- Located in census tract with majority people of color residents
- Owned and operated by people of color
- Owned and operated by monolingual Spanish speakers
- Located in the communities with the highest SVI scores, >.8

Through August 9, 2021, OEC has committed to distributing \$103 million to nearly 2,400 child care providers. \$22 million is spent directly on increasing the compensation of early educators. This represents an overall take-up rate of 63% of eligible programs and 87% of total funding, on account of the fact that large programs have applied at a much higher rate and many of the programs yet to apply are family child care homes and small programs. OEC continues to make outreach efforts to further improve take-up rates.

Connecticut was one of the first states in the country to get this funding out to the field and has been recognized as a national leader in developing a fair and simple formula that advances equity and takes into account the varying situations of child care providers. The OEC has been asked to participate in regional and national webinars about this approach and has been contacted by multiple states for specific information.

#### CT CARES for All Young Children

Beginning December 5, 2020, OEC launched a program to reach children who were not engaged with any preschool environment. The program connected providers such as child care settings, family resource centers, and home visiting programs directly with families. The providers recruited over a thousand families in December and continued to provide remote learning opportunities through June. Many families started to return to child care leaving the project ending with about 400 families engaged through June 2021. Families received learning supplies and one-on-one support from provider staff.



### Governor's Education Emergency Relief (GEER)

The Office of Early Childhood was awarded \$4 million from the Governor's Education Emergency Relief funding (GEER), out of the \$27.8 million allocated from the federal Education Stabilization Fund to the state of Connecticut. The \$4 million in GEER funds awarded to the OEC supported the inception of *GEER Up for Learning*, which focuses on offering equitable resources to at risk - yet resilient - Connecticut families with young children who have limited access to remote learning technology and resources. Through GEER, children receiving services through Birth to Three, Home Visiting, Early Care and Education, and Family Child Care, are encouraged to continue exposure to educational opportunities (validated learning platforms) and virtual learning experiences. With efforts to increase developmental screenings, every GEER iPad contains Sparkler, a mobile app which provides access to Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQs) and consultative supports.

With GEER funding, the OEC secured, delivered, and supported the use of nearly 2,000 iPads for children and families, 300 Chromebooks for programs to use to support families, and provided fully funded internet access to all families and providers in need of connectivity. OEC partnered with the Regional Educational Service Centers Alliance (RESC), New England Assistive Technology (NEAT), and All Our Kin (AOK) to provide technical support and learning for children and families. With support from EastConn (a part of the RESC Alliance), iPads have been distributed to families and Chromebooks to providers.

For many providers, provision of virtual learning was a new and/or unfamiliar experience. In response, GEER included ongoing professional development (PD) and support to the field. Through partnership with the Erikson Institute's Technology in Early Childhood Center, PD was offered to GEER providers with implementation support from the RESC Alliance. The Erikson Institute offers professional development by providing a common foundation related to using technology and distance learning to young children. These opportunities leverage existing work and allow Connecticut to follow up with more targeted supports for early childhood programs offering distance learning through communities of practice.

Over time, GEER has progressed from a situationally based initiative in response to a pandemic, to an intentional plan fueled by awareness of unyielding resilience within our young children, families, and community at large. As a result, the OEC is in the midst of shifting into GEER phase II. In this effort, intentional steps are being taken to promote sustainability, where the benefits of GEER are not solely defined by and extend beyond the presence of a pandemic.

### Care 4 Kids Parent Fees

Beginning in April 2021, federal funds were used to cover the cost of parent fees for parents with children enrolled in the Care 4 Kids program. This relieved the burden on working parents

during the COVID pandemic. The parent fees will continue to be covered through November 2021.

#### CT CARES for Child Care Businesses

CT CARES for Child Care Businesses (CCCCB) opened in June 2020 to offer an array of financial supports to open / re-opening child care businesses. The supports identified addressed many of the concerns shared by providers through a needs survey circulated by OEC in May 2020. Supports include funding for core operations, health and safety supplies, fees, and professional development. Child care providers have ongoing access to business coaching, technology acquisition and training, and assistance seeking funding opportunities through the Women's Business Development Council as a longer-term industry support.

#### CTCARES for Workforce Development

With funding from the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD), Workforce Training Innovation Fund (WTIF) established under the Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF), the Office of Early Childhood launched the CTCARES for Workforce Development project. CTCARES for Workforce Development supported the child care needs of Connecticut residents most affected by the public health emergency by providing child care for those who were in workforce training and higher education programs and by increasing the supply and quality of family child care state-wide.

#### *Partnering with Workforce Development Boards*

The impact of training and the resulting increase in wages is multigenerational. Children who grow up in households with a stable income are more likely to experience success themselves throughout school and into adulthood. Yet, child care is one of the biggest barriers to workforce training. With child care supply reduced by nearly 60% during the pandemic, parents had far fewer options for care for their children.

Through this project, OEC secured child care slots for individuals enrolled in training at any one of Connecticut's five Workforce Boards. In addition, seven community college lab schools were also able to connect directly with workforce training participants and provide a child care option. Lab schools offer a unique opportunity to leverage, as they both address child care needs of college students while affording future early childhood teachers practical experience.

#### *Increasing the Supply and Quality of Family Child Care*

*The Get Started Program* connected interested individual who wanted to become a licensed family child care provider with a local Staffed Family Child Care Networks (SFCCN) in their region. The SFCCN helped the individual become licensed through the Licensing Toolkit process. Four virtual Licensing Toolkit session were offered and total of 64 individuals attended. As of December 2020, 106 family child care licenses were issued to providers. This

was increase of child care capacity with 564 new regular child care space and 250 new school-age spaces. Each newly licensed provider received \$800 to offset the cost of licensing.

*The Mini Grants Program* supported licensed family child care providers with funds to expand spaces, boost enrollment, and make physical improvements to their business. 621 licensed family child care providers received a mini grant award of \$575.

#### CT CARES for Family Child Care

CT CARES for Family Child Care ran from May 13, 2020 – September 30, 2020 to support the unique needs of licensed family child care - a subset of providers that shouldered much of the child care burden at the outset of the public health emergency. The program connects providers with a Staffed Family Child Care (SFCC) Network in their region. These SFCC Networks are community initiatives that have paid staff with expertise working with family child care providers. They offer ongoing support services and resources to affiliated family child care providers, including professional development, coaching and consultation, and business and administrative supports.

The program received \$988,000 from local philanthropy, including 4-CT and Early Childhood Funders Collaborative. Seven new SFCC Networks were established with the funds to provide all providers local access to a SFCC Network state-wide. The local SFCC Networks recruited 1,547 home-based providers to affiliate with their local network. The Staffed Family Child Care Networks supported providers to remain open or re-open their businesses. Overall, the number of open FCCs has steadily increased through the program.

#### Child Care Program Accreditation Fee Support

In partnership with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the OEC is funding NAEYC Accreditation fees for Connecticut early care and education programs for the period January 1, 2021 to December 31, 2021:

- a. Programs currently accredited by NAEYC, and
- b. Programs new to NAEYC Accreditation that are also currently under agreement with the OEC's Accreditation Quality Improvement Support (AQIS) project.

The initiative is funded by \$1.3 million from ARPA and CARES funds. The funds provide support for the initial cost of accreditation (\$1,600-\$2,800) or the annual renewal cost of \$550 - \$885.

#### Child Care Workforce Background Check Fees

Since 2019, the OEC has covered the cost of approximately 22,000 criminal background check fees of child care staff. Covering these fingerprinting fees - \$75 state fee and \$13.25 federal fee - has been a tremendous support to providers as they struggle fiscally through the COVID pandemic. Multiple federal funding sources have been used, including ARPA, CARES, and Child Care Development Fund (CCDF). The OEC will cover the fingerprint fees through April 1, 2022.

### Licensing Monitoring and Outreach

Upon the declaration of the COVID civil preparedness and public health emergency, the OEC issued enhanced requirements for licensed and licensed-exempt child care and youth camp providers to prevent the spread of the virus, granted multiple waivers to the licensing requirements to support programs that choose to remain open during the pandemic, and offered ongoing support and guidance to protect the health and safety of children and child care providers. The Licensing staff maintained ongoing communication with child care providers and youth camps by conducting two rounds of outbound calls to all child care providers under the OEC's jurisdiction to review requirements, offer support, and provide resources. Licensing staff also conducted visits to verify program's compliance with enhanced COVID-19 related requirements and modified its procedures for conducting selected investigations virtually.

### COVID Website Section

The COVID-19 section of the website serves as the hub for information on OEC's CT CARES programs, Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA), American Rescue Plan (ARP) funding initiatives, policy memos, waivers and guides focused on policies and guidance for center-based and family home-based providers, and Birth to Three and Home Visitors; and frequently asked questions (FAQs).

### CSCU Workforce Pilot

OEC partnered with the Connecticut Department of Social Services and Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) to improve access to child care services for children of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients actively engaged in approved SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) activities at Connecticut Community Colleges (CCC).

This project was designed to support families with child care needs, removing one of the main barriers to participating in job-focused education and training programs and has the potential to provide proof points and a roadmap for future efforts to support Connecticut's workforce development goals and inform potential policy changes.

SNAP recipients who were parents of children less than 13 years old (or less than 19 years of age, if the child has special needs) and were actively enrolled and engaged in approved SNAP E&T activities at any Connecticut Community College were eligible to participate. Parents meeting the eligibility criteria were eligible for child care services under this agreement for up to 24 hours a week for 20 weeks, provided that the parent continued to participate in a SNAP E&T program at CCC.

### Establishment of the First OEC Parent Cabinet

Critical to ensuring that state systems and policies are efficient and effective for families is the voice of parents who have maneuvered through and have either benefitted from or have been

hindered by the process. The OEC recognizes that the voices of early childhood providers were many times driving the conversation of systems change, and that family voice needed to be more prevalent throughout its work and partnerships. Grounded in best practices of Head Start and 2Gen, the OEC engaged in a co-creation process with parent and community leaders to create the governance, structure, and implementation of the Parent Cabinet. The launch of applications to serve on the Cabinet has resulted in 67 applicants from across the state. Selection committees have been established to score the written applications and interview the final candidates. The first ever OEC Parent Cabinet will be seated in September 2021.

### **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 Pre-school 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

The OEC is currently working with 32 local communities, including home visiting programs, child care, 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 trainings, technical support, materials, and other resources to share with local families.

Connecticut Office of Early Childhood is preparing for a statewide Sparkler campaign to raise awareness for the importance of developmental screening and to promote partnerships between families and early childhood educators.

### **Pyramid Model**

The Pyramid Model represents a comprehensive effort to provide teachers, caregivers, and families the tools and strategies needed to promote and support positive behavior, prevent challenging behavior, and address the social needs of all young children. Connecticut was chosen as one of two states to receive intensive TA on implementation of the model in preschool programs. Implementation began in 12 classrooms throughout the state. With the arrival of

COVID, implementation transitioned to virtual. The leadership team acted quickly and responded with on-line modules specific to Connecticut that taught Pyramid practices and made connections to the CT ELDS and CKCs. The modules were completed by 250 teachers and others during the year. In addition, the leadership team developed resource videos on social emotional development and addressing challenging behavior as well as self-care for the adults. They include:

- Adult Self-Care/Managing Stress—2-Part Series – 55 trained
- Emotional Literacy—3-Part Series – 65 trained
- CT Pyramid Partnership Resource Video: The funnel – 40 trained
- Connecting with Families during Covid -120 trained
- Helping children with Wearing Masks during Covid -137 trained

This year's focus is on developing materials for family child care and supporting the classrooms opening up to get back on track with Pyramid Model implementation.

### **ECE Workforce Registry**

#### **Scholarship:**

- \$1,309,464 awarded
- 130 courses specifically to administrators of programs to meet licensing requirements and competency qualifications.
- Goals:
  - 36 - associate's degree;
  - 155 (up from 80 FY20) - bachelor's degree;
  - 1 (down from 10) - CDA credential work - credits toward training hours;
  - 18 (up from 7) - online CDA credential programs: 5 in Spanish and 13 in English;
  - 33 - CDA credential fees (20 renewals; 13 new: 1 Family Child Care settings; 4 Infant / Toddler Center settings; 8 Preschool Center settings);
  - 4 - school-age Head Teacher Certificate
  - 21 - family child care 12 credits in ECE or business;
  - 12 – Connecticut Director Credential fees

#### **Head Teacher:**

- 371 awarded:
  - 355 center settings; 2 center and group home settings; 14 group home settings
  - 214 Birth to Age 5 certificates; 99 Birth to School Age certificates; 58 School Age certificates

#### **Early Childhood Teacher Credential (ECTC)**

- 45 Awarded
  - 7 Individual Review Route: 38 traditional college degree route
  - 3 Level A (associate degree) Infant/Toddler & Preschool Endorsement

- 1 Level A (associate degree) Infant/Toddler Endorsement
- 17 Level A (associate degree) Preschool Endorsement
- 12 Level B (bachelor degree) Infant/Toddler & Preschool Endorsement
- 3 Level B (bachelor degree) Infant/Toddler Endorsement
- 9 Level B (bachelor degree) Preschool Endorsement

### **Licensing**

The OEC made changes to the family child care home licensing regulations in accordance with the regulation making process outlined by section 4-168 of the Connecticut General Statutes. These changes became effective on March 19, 2021. The changes provide clarity to existing requirements, establish requirements consistent with best practices, reduce overly burdensome requirements, make technical corrections, etc. These changes are supportive of the operation of family child care homes while also ensuring the safety, health and development of children receiving child care in such settings. These changes were fully implemented by giving notice to all licensed family child care home providers and offering technical assistance on the changes.

In November 2020, the OEC made detailed inspection information of child care programs, including youth camps, easily accessible to parents. Partnering with United Way of Connecticut's 211 Child Care, statewide child care resource & referral service, families are now able to find detailed program offerings and licensing and inspection information all in one place. This enhanced search tool, accessible at <https://www.211childcare.org/>, helps parents find and learn more about home and center-based child care providers and youth camps located near where they live or work. For providers, the enhanced search lookup tool will increase their reach and improve their ability to connect with and enroll families. The tool helps families search for a provider/program by name or location, search for programs that serve specific age groups, search for programs with fees, hours, quality indicators etc. that match their needs, see any violations cited by the OEC over the past five years and view OEC inspection reports and provider's corrective action plans.

This past year, the OEC has focused on translating many of its licensing materials and resources into Spanish.

### **Quality Improvement**

OEC's Covid-19 response efforts have enabled the agency to turn its attention to quality improvements that address program stability and quality early learning experiences, even under the dire circumstances of the pandemic. Quality Improvement (QI) efforts have extended business supports, networking of family child care providers, and Accreditation Quality Improvement services to programs in support of their staff and the challenging circumstances of delivering ECE programs remotely and under the social distancing requirements imposed by the

state. Our contracted services address social emotional development, child development using Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) and CT DOTS, and quality assurance for trainers and coaches.

### **Staffed Family Child Care Networks**

The OEC has cultivated a system of geographically defined staffed family child care networks (SFCCN or Networks). These Networks will support the child care system by: increasing the supply of infant and toddler care; improving the quality of licensed home-based child care; expanding the options available to working parents; and alleviating the social isolation, lack of professional training, and inadequate compensation that many FCC providers face.

Under the OEC’s theory of change, SFCC networks add a needed layer of systemic capacity and help cultivate the conditions for providers’ success. As a result, FCC businesses that join a network will be more likely to survive, produce rewarding careers for providers, and expand the supply of high-quality early education and care for young children – especially for infants and toddlers. SFCCNs currently cultivate family child care providers’ success by:

- Supporting existing home-based family child care businesses and assisting new ones to establish themselves;
- Enhancing the ability of providers to address the developmental needs of children in their care and support parents using their services;
- Retaining experienced FCC providers through measures designed to make FCC personally, professionally, and financially rewarding for these early childhood educators; and
- Expanding the range of external resources available to these business owners to achieve these goals.

During state fiscal year 2021, the 12 statewide Staffed Family Child Care Networks had a total membership of 1,882 family child care providers.

### **Whole Family Approach –2Gen**

Connecticut’s [2Gen Initiative](#), structured as an advisory board with policy work groups, represents a diverse collaborative of executive, legislative, and judicial branch leaders; nonprofit and private sector partners; and parent leaders. Despite the unique challenges presented by the pandemic, the 2Gen Initiative advanced work in key areas. Below are the pertinent updates from FY20-21.

#### **Parent Engagement**

As required by C.G.S. [Sec. 17b-112l](#), 25% of the members of the 2Gen Advisory Board are parent leaders with lived experience of poverty. These parents received training on the 2Gen



Initiative, state government, and legislative process, and now participate as equal members in high-level policy discussions. All parents are compensated for their engagement.

In summer 2021, parents received additional training through a three-day 2Gen Parent Academy, co-designed and developed with 2Gen parent leaders. Parents were involved in all aspects of the 2Gen benefits cliffs [CT CLIFF](#) study and policy analysis with the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta (Atlanta Fed). In July 2021, parents received training in research methods and assisted in the University of Connecticut (UConn) evaluation of the CT CLIFF study by conducting key informant interviews.

Two of the parents were elevated in leadership, now serving as co-chairs of two of the work groups. Through a partnership with the Office of Workforce Strategy (OWS), parent leaders now serve on eight of the Governor's Workforce Council (GWC) subcommittees. Over the past seven years, the Connecticut 2Gen Initiative has established a respected framework and infrastructure for parent engagement in state government. 2Gen parents were involved in the design and development of the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) Parent Cabinet. The 2Gen model informed the development of a Resident Advisory Board for the [Preschool through 20 Workforce Information Network \(P20WIN\)](#). 2Gen also provided parent voice in the development of MyCT.

### Benefits Cliffs

The 2Gen Benefits Cliffs Work Group, formed in June 2019, has led statewide efforts to address [benefits cliffs](#) through data collection and analysis and development of policy solutions. These efforts have made Connecticut a national leader in this work. The 2Gen work group is providing support and guidance to Maine, Kentucky, Alabama, and other states as they pursue similar direction. Below are the major milestones from these efforts.

In summer 2020, the 2Gen work group in partnership with the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta (Atlanta Fed) created – at no cost to Connecticut – Connecticut's Career Ladder Identifier and Financial Forecaster (CLIFF). The [CT CLIFF](#) tool illustrates the interaction between wages, public benefits, and tax credits in bringing (or failing to bring) families to economic stability. The CT CLIFF tool also demonstrates the significant taxpayer savings that result from career advancement.

From April to July 2021, the 2Gen work group beta-tested use of the CT CLIFF tool at four sites in Connecticut, including an early childhood education center, high school, and two job centers. UConn conducted the evaluation, showing promising results, and informing a broader adoption of the tool statewide.

The Atlanta Fed, in partnership with the 2Gen work group and GWC, simulated state policy options to the cliff effect. By using the CT CLIFF tool and the [Policy Rules Database](#), the Atlanta Fed was able to simulate state policy proposals along family type, public benefits package, career pathway, and region.

These simulations represent a culmination of several years of research and collaborative decision-making by the 2Gen work group and their many partners. Program experts were consulted at length to provide insight on what would be viable and effective in each program. Policies simulated include changes to cash assistance, housing, child care, and tax credits.

### Workforce

In summer 2021, the Governor signed into law changes to the state's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program that include elimination of the "family cap" and, beginning in Fiscal Year 2024, requiring benefit increases to be provided in years when the program lapses funds, if certain conditions are met. The 2Gen Workforce Work Group played a role in recommending these changes. The work group also worked with state agency partners to implement administrative changes to the jobs element of the program, including but not limited to private vehicle transportation for those in training and employment.

The Fiscal Year 2022 budget implementer legislation mandates that by January 1, 2022, the Chief Workforce Officer must submit state workforce strategy recommendations to the Governor that include those advised by the 2Gen Advisory Board. The 2Gen Workforce Work Group supported this recommendation process to inform a statewide workforce plan that supports families.

### Regional and Federal Partnership

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. Connecticut participated in biweekly calls Whole Family Approach to Jobs calls through the duration of the pandemic and sent delegates to the annual virtual conferences in spring and summer 2021. Connecticut contributed to the ACF publication, [COVID-19 the Family, State and Federal Policy: Lessons Learned in New England](#) that was used nationally and informed the new staff of the Biden Administration.

Connecticut participated in the regional work groups on racial equity, parent engagement, and ARPA, formed in fall 2021. These regional work groups enabled Connecticut to bring a 2Gen lens to ARPA proposals, plans, and eventual implementation.