



Connecticut Office of Early Childhood

At a Glance

Connecticut Office of Early Childhood

Beth Bye, Commissioner

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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 – 145 employees, 88 who are state funded and 57 who are federally funded.

Recurring operating expenses –

State 335,929,795

Federal 271,431,559

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 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)

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.

In 2020, the agency 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, agency web content, social media, internal and external 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. Three attorneys, one paralegal, four Processing Technicians 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 paralegal serve as hearing officers for the Care for Kids administrative appeal hearings.

During FY 23, in compliance with federal and state requirements for child health and safety, the OEC processed 18,915 background checks (of that number, 1,731 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 and

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. 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. Accordingly, 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.

Using multiple federal and state funding sources (including CCDF, ARPA, CARES), OEC continued covering the \$88.25 per person criminal background check fingerprint processing fee during FY 23 and will continue covering those fees through the current fiscal year (FY 24, ending 6/30/24).

Two OEC attorneys and one paralegal staff presided over 66 Care 4 Kids child care subsidy hearings during FY 23. Processing Tech staff also processed over 676 hearing requests. The one attorney primarily dedicated to enforcement matters also represented the agency in 67 child care licensing enforcement cases (including one superior court injunction); most were resolved via voluntary surrender of license, negotiated corrective action plans, or consent orders, and two revocation hearings from FY23 are currently pending; with the paralegal serving as administrative staff in those hearings. Civil penalties were assessed in approximately 25 enforcement cases, resulting in almost \$20,000 collected in monetary penalties (\$19, 200); this number does not include a \$5,000 superior court contempt judgment. In addition, legal staff responded to 33 FOI requests during FY 23.

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 State 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 CT'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 appropriate programs, services, and initiatives
- 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 was co-created with a group of parent leaders and the first-ever Cabinet were 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 raises up and incorporates the expertise of parents with young children throughout the OEC to strengthen family-centered policies and programs. There are 15 members from across the state serving 6 regions with 2 from each region and 3 at-large to fill gaps amongst 3 regions as needed. They are compensated for their monthly duties, serving a minimum of 68 hours a year. This body also connects to some of the local early childhood collaboratives or School Readiness councils along with the local parent ambassadors to be the conduit between local and state level for a communication feedback loop. The Parent Cabinet was added to state statute in the 2023 legislative session.

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)

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 under 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.) 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 23 due to number of factors related to the COVID-19 pandemic including, staffing shortages, local conditions, and family preferences. OEC worked to stabilize these critical programs with enrollment-based grants to reduce the impact of low enrollment and help the program survive the pandemic fiscally. 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. School Readiness and Child Day Care Programs were given the opportunity to seek waivers for hours of operation and days of closure to respond to the public health emergency and the associated workforce issues.

CHILD DAY CARE CONTRACT PROGRAM	
<u>\$35,131,696</u>	
Number of Communities	52
Number of Contractors	47
Number of Sites	118
Sites that are also SR (43 PSR; 15 CSR)	58
Sites that are also SHS	21
Infant/Toddler Full-Time Expansion	507
Infant/Toddler Full-Time	1421
Infant/Toddler Wraparound	225
Preschool Full-Time	1798
Preschool Wraparound	297
School-Age	169

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 under 75% of the State Medium 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 FY 23, however due to staffing shortages some programs were not able to fully open. 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 associated workforce issues.

SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAM TOTAL \$94,218,332 SPACES \$91,109,597 ADMIN \$2,215,779 QE \$892,956			
	Priority	Competitive	Total
Number of Communities	21	46	67
Number of Programs	136	71	207
Number of Sites	226	85	311
Number of Children	10133	1875	12008
Full-Day Spaces	6802	897	76991
School-Day Spaces	2017	368	2385
Part-Day Spaces	823	610	1433
Extended-Day Spaces	491	NA	491

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 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. In addition, supplementary funding available through ARPA funding was designated to support 16 additional classrooms for FY 22 and 23 through 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 FOR OPERATIONS, \$800,000 FOR ONE-TIME CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS
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 FY2023, 5,714 providers served 31,622 children. (Source: ImpaCT & ImpaCT Child Care Ad Hoc Report as of 06/30/2023).

CARE 4 KIDS SFY22 \$185,700,000	
Number of Care 4 Kids Providers	5,714
Number of Licensed Family Child Care Programs	1,088
Number of Licensed Center-Based Child Care Programs	921
Number of License-Exempt Child Care Providers	109
Unlicensed Relatives	3,596
Number of Children Served	31,622
Number of Families Served	22,206

In addition, 1,454 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, Connecticut 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 (16 Services & Innovative Enhancement funding options; 23 Innovative Enhancement funding option only)	25
Number of program sites	26
New Full day/full year Spaces Created (Services funding option) in 16 communities	264
Extended day/extended year Spaces (Innovative Enhancement option) in all Head Start programs	667

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 \$1,339,233	
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

The Office of Early Childhood launched the foundation for Elevate, our quality improvement system in FY 22. The system is designed 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. This system intends to reduce state overhead expenses, increase transparency and clarity for families, and offer a supportive structure for programs. In our system, we do not rate programs or classrooms, as many states do. Elevate recognizes that programs are at three levels of engagement, member (licensed or license-exempt), member+ (having an approved Elevate Program Improvement Plan), and member accredited (meeting national standards including Head Start, NAFCC Accreditation, or NAEYC Accreditation).

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 Connecticut's 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. 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. This individualized support is implemented by CT

Association for the Education of Young Children (CAEYC). AQIS contracts are with each of the Regional Education Service Centers (RESCS).

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 (CTAEYC); City of Hartford, and TEAM, and 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.

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.

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.

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. The Pyramid Model stresses the importance of teams, coaching, and data-based decision making. Through a contract with Pyramid Model Consortium, providers have access to information on how to support behavioral health through newsletters (for families and providers), training sessions, and cohort-based training and coaching. This year Pyramid has expanded to provide cohort-based support to family child care providers in addition to the existing two cohorts serving center-based

providers. The model was created by a team of researchers, who continue to examine data and update materials.

Connecticut Early Childhood Professional Registry unit 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. Data from the Registry is used to track participation and impact of OEC workforce activities and requirements, develop projections for new initiatives, and report Connecticut’s workforce data nationally.

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 Office of Early Childhood 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.

Technical Assistance and Quality Assurance support early childhood settings with training, coaching, and consultation. The OEC contracts with EASTCONN to support technical assistance providers’ professional learning, the development of quality assurance criteria, and to provide coaching learning communities for new technical assistance providers to enhance their skills. This activity is also helping to build a more diverse cadre of technical assistance providers to support the diversity of the early childhood workforce.

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 FY 23, the CT Home Visiting system provided support to families 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 FY24. The OEC will continue to work with national model offices to work toward Home Visiting 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

The OEC is currently working with 32 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 trainings, technical support, materials, and other resources to share with local families.

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 screening and to promote partnerships between families and early childhood educators. Sparkler Learning Inc., has partner with many early childhood providers and parents across the state. Families completed 5,182 ASQ-3 screenings and 3,660 ASQ:SE-2 screenings using Sparkler from Oct. 1, 2021 to Sept. 30, 2022. To date we have 16,571 Adults and 18,531 children enrolled in Sparkler.

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 CT 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. 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.

EVEN START FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAM	
\$295,350	
Grantees	3
Number of Families	32
Number of Adults	35
Number of Children	42

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. 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*TM
*Touchpoints*TM 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 and concerns and the child's development. In FY 23, 19 agencies supported families in all 169 municipalities in Connecticut. On any given day, the families of approximately 7,000 children had IFSPs and over the course of FY 23 the families of 14,164 eligible children received Birth to Three supports.

During FY 23, the Connecticut Birth to Three system supported families through Remote Early Intervention (EI) and through in-person Early Intervention. Remote EI provided Early Interventionists the option to support families remotely in the event of illness or the family's request. Since the pandemic, the field has transitioned back to in-person supports as a primary way of serving families. However, Remote EI provides an option for families in the event of illness or preference.

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 2022-2023

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 is tasked with developing a five-year strategic plan that works for families, providers, and Connecticut's economy. Commissioner Beth Bye is leading this work with help from national and local consultants, The Hunt Institute, Social Venture Partners Connecticut, and Social Finance. OEC staff, across many departments, have worked with consultants and partners to create recommendations to the Panel for the plan.

This work is divided into four work groups: Equity and Access, Workforce and Quality, Systems, and Funding and Costs. The work group co-leads presented recommendations to the public to get crucial feedback from stakeholders before presenting them to the Blue Ribbon Panel Members. Public review of the proposed plan will take place in September. Panel members will then go through their extensive review of the plan before it's submitted to Governor Lamont's office in December 2023.

OEC COVID-19 Response

During the COVID-19 public health emergency, the OEC recognized the important role providers of early childhood services played in the lives of children and families. Throughout the 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 field 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 expenses. 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 access to child care.

OEC's goal has been consistent in using this funding as effectively and strategically as possible to stabilize the field, accelerate recovery, and advance early child care systems across the state. While this goal has been consistent, OEC has moved from a focus of immediate stabilization and recovery to focus on advancing early childhood through the implementation of initiatives, distribution of funding, and tracking and reporting.

Throughout the stages of the pandemic, OEC relied on the agency's System Vision to guide decisions and provide a roadmap for how funding should be allocated and distributed. The System Vision focuses on six pillars that are key to supporting children, families, and providers:

- **Increased Access:** Expand capacity and affordability to high-quality settings to meet needs of eligible Connecticut families
- **Equitable System:** Work toward eliminating disparities in access to high-quality care across racial and socioeconomic lines
- **Provider Stability:** Funding and quality improvement technical assistance support to providers in delivering high-quality programs that meet family needs
- **Community Voice:** Responsive to community and workforce needs; accountable to families, more information to families about quality
- **Invest in ECE Workforce:** ECE workforce highly trained and high-quality; compensated appropriately; expanded access, create new jobs
- **Outcomes-Oriented:** Collective accountability for child outcomes and high-quality programming; communication between OEC and communities to respond to needs; innovative quality rating and improvement system

OEC has been advancing this System Vision through CTCARES, CRRSA, and ARPA funding in the following ways:

Increasing Access and Stability: OEC implemented initiatives to support the workforce, expanded access to technology, and updated the Care 4 Kids Parent Portal. The agency also expanded access to Care 4 Kids subsidies and supplemented parent fees for children enrolled in 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.

Enhancing Quality: OEC implemented initiatives that rolled out Elevate, a new Quality Improvement System along with supports for providers. The agency also paid accreditation fees, added third party support for completing the accreditation process, and provided bonuses and celebrated success stories of accreditation.

As OEC implements these efforts, the agency is also implementing ways to track the impact of this funding on the ECE system, including the challenges and successes that have already been identified. In FY24, OEC will continue to collect data and monitor launched initiatives.

Universal Nurse Home Visiting-Community Health Worker Pilot of Greater Bridgeport

Connecticut, with leadership from the Governor and legislature and in a unique partnership with five state agency Commissioners, has invested \$14 million toward the creation and implementation of a Universal Nurse Home Visiting-Community Health Worker (UNHV-CHW) Pilot in the Greater Bridgeport catchment area. Five Connecticut agency Commissioners (OEC, DSS, DPH, OHS, and DCF) invested three years into researching, planning, securing funding and legislation, and identifying community criteria to create an innovative evidence-based model of care, Family Bridge. This model utilizes 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 universal nurse home visiting (UNHV) model developed by Family Connects International (FCI), and
- 2) CHWs and doulas to identify, intervene and address social determinants of health that utilize community-based maternal support services (COMSS) to impact maternal/child health to strengthen CT's public health infrastructure.

OEC launched Family Bridge with its contractor Bridgeport Hospital, selected through a Request for Proposal process in August 2022, in Bridgeport and its 13-town catchment area. Bridgeport was selected by the five-agency governance team and Family Bridge State Area Collaborative (FBSAC) using criteria based on maternal/newborn morbidity and mortality data, the strength of its COMSS resources and network of successful collaborations, their financial and programmatic expertise implementing and administering other OEC programs, and expertise in data collection, analysis, and evaluation. The inclusion of CHW/Doulas and FCI RN advocates provides the opportunity for improved health outcomes and cost savings. In addition to the intended outcomes associated with Family Connects Model, Family Bridge's statewide five-agency approach is intended to create a seamless system of care to address such Social Determinants of Health as:

- Increasing connections to community resource
- Reducing child maltreatment investigations and substantiations
- Reducing emergency department use of new mothers and newborns
- Improving the quality and safety of the home environment
- Increasing positive parenting behaviors

Utilizing the evidence-based Family Connects model, Family Bridge offers 1-3 RN home visits within six weeks of birth to all new mothers, regardless of income. RNs perform physical and mental health risk assessments, identifying Social Determinants of Health Needs and, unique to CT, coordinate with CHWs/doulas to advocate and connect families, creating a seamless system of referrals to essential COMSS resources. DSS has committed funding to create a curriculum to train and certify CHWs/doulas to include focus of FCI RNs to ensure a more seamless process of

referral. Baseline data for anticipated outcomes is currently only available for the Family Connects model as no other state has augmented Family Connects with CHWs/Doulas, which include:

- 30% reduction in mothers experiencing postpartum depression or anxiety
- 44% reduction in rates of abuse/neglect investigations
- 50% reduction in ER visits/hospital overnight stays
- Cost savings of \$3 for every \$1 invested

FBSAC has developed 2 Request for Proposals each for \$1 million over four years to hire contractors to address plans for sustainability and evaluation. The RFP to provide an evaluation of Family Bridge was released July 5, 2023; the sustainability RFP will be released in late June 2024.

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 (ECHC). OEC received funding to include Norwich in the planning process for a Family Bridge Program. An opportunity to apply to the Office for Minority Health for \$4.8 million in funding over four years arose to support expansion into Norwich. The grant was written and submitted on July 18, 2023; awards announcement is expected in September 2023.

Establishment of the OEC Parent Cabinet in Statute

The OEC recognizes that family voice needed to be more prevalent throughout its work and partnerships to make state system and policies more efficient and effective for families. 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 OEC Parent Cabinet.

The OEC Parent Cabinet was established in state statute (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.

Parent Cabinet members were selected in September 2021 with 12 parents representing the regions of the DCF map to align with OEC Home Visiting and Birth to Three programs, and 3 At-Large members. The Parent Cabinet has met monthly virtually along with Commissioner Bye

since January 2022. Over a year, members of the Parent Cabinet will spend an estimated 68 compensated hours on these activities:

- Monthly meetings
- Monthly Subcommittee meetings
- Quarterly meetings with full local ambassadors
- Local community outreach
 - Attending community meetings
 - Small group or one on one meetings with individuals/families to share about their role and to hear the needs and wants of families.

Many have connected with their local early childhood collaboratives or School Readiness councils along with the local parent ambassadors to be the conduit between local and state level. The Parent Cabinet members have continued to spread the news about OEC services for families such as Sparkler, 211 Child Care, Birth to Three, and more.

Parent Cabinet members provided guidance and expertise on a variety of issue areas, such as:

- **Child care hours and fees** – Feedback informed the OEC Commissioner about hours and availability that parents need for child care. Members also provided input into proposed changes to the state funded sliding fee scale.
- **OEC Parent Survey co-design and outreach** – The Parent Cabinet co-designed a statewide parent survey in 2022 with the OEC to better understand parent needs, wants related to child care, employment, and mental health. This partnership led to the OEC receiving 2.5 times the number of responses compared to the last survey in 2020. The survey results will inform and help shape policies at the OEC.
- **Formula shortage** – When families were experiencing formula shortages, Parent Cabinet members provided real-time information to the OEC on what parents were experiencing, what they needed, where supplies were being found, etc.
- **Access to Early Care and Education programs** – Feedback helped inform the Commissioner about their experience and those of families around to access to Early Care and Education programs in February 2023.

Parent Cabinet members serve on different advisory bodies, such as:

- **OEC Strategic Planning** – The Parent Cabinet is an active member of the OEC Strategic planning effort.
- **Early Childhood Cabinet** – The OEC Parent Cabinet has an appointed seat at the table and makes a direct connect between these two important advisory bodies.
- **Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care**– A Parent Cabinet member was appointed to the Governor’s Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care.

Nationally, Connecticut is being called upon to present and share our 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 include:

- CT Parent Summit (2022)
- Presenting at the CT Council on Women and Girls (2022)
- Presented at the National Association of the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) conference (2022)
- Preschool Development Grant (PDG) national convening (2022)
- Georgia 2GEN statewide summit (2022)
- CT Blue Ribbon on Child Care opening kickoff (2023)
- CT Together We Will Conference (2023)
- East Coast Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) plenary session (2023)

Care 4 Kids Parent Portal

Care 4 Kids successfully launched the new online application in the Parent Portal 1.0 in 2021. The OEC Care 4 Kids Parent Portal experienced an 82% adoption rate by families. Families have created over 25,000 Parent Portal accounts. Incoming phone calls related to Care 4 Kids application submissions decreased by over 50%, reducing the overall application processing time. Our OEC Care 4 Kids Parent Portal was a NASCIO Government-to-Citizen Award Finalist for 2022. The OEC is preparing to now launch Parent Portal 2.0 so all Care 4 Kids redeterminations can be submitted online. 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.

CT Head Start on Housing Initiative

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

In FY 22, 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 has written into its administrative plan that going forward 1 out of every 3 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.

Pyramid Model

The Pyramid Model promotes young children’s healthy social and emotional development and provides tools, strategies, and resources for teachers and caregivers to support children and families. Social emotional learning and development is fundamental to children’s success in school and beyond, building a solid foundation earlier in life is certain to produce benefits seen later in life.

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 was done by planning, developing, and offering training for Connecticut preschool classroom teachers, family child care providers, and others on Pyramid-related topics including modules, Practice-based coaching, Program Leadership Teams, Cultural Responsiveness, and other topics as required by OEC. This framework and resources help guide programs and providers to think about what supports are in place for building social and emotional competence in young children. Such an approach focuses on fostering responsive relationships and creating high-quality, supportive environments that are especially important during the early years of development.

As expansion was underway, response from the family child care community was favorable with a significant increase in the anticipated number of participants. Furthermore, the number of Implementation Sites increased to 50 programs (22 child care and Lab Schools and 28 family child care homes).

ECE Reporter

Beginning November 2022, OEC took full IT ownership of the ECE Reporter, the data system used by the state-funded programs to submit state-funded child enrollment data and monthly attendance data. There was considerable effort put in to refactor vendor code to match state’s standard code development practices, as well as to ensure high data integrity standards were maintained for children, family, demographics, enrollment, and program information.

The ECE Reporter application accounts for the Child Day Care Contract Program, School Readiness (Competitive and Priority) Grant Program, Smart Start Grant Program, State Head

Start Supplement Program, and Infant Toddler Expansion Programs. The ECE Reporter Application approximately holds 20,000 child records in a year.

ECE Workforce Registry

Scholarship FY 23:

- \$1,310,965.50 awarded (\$1,482,924 FY22; \$1,309,464 – FY 21)
- 89 non-degree courses specifically to administrators of programs to meet licensing requirements and competency qualifications (87 – FY22; 130 – FY 21).
- Goals (Note: individuals typically receive multiple awards toward their goal each year):
 - o 37 associate degrees (35 – FY22; 36 – FY 21)
 - o 158 bachelor's degrees (170 – FY22; 155 – FY 21 and 80 – FY 20)
 - o 1 CDA credential work - credits toward 120 content hours (27 – FY22; 1 – FY 21)
 - o 28 CDA credential work – online non-credit instructor supported (16 – FY22; 18 – FY 21)
 - o 54 CDA credential fees (31 – FY22; 33 – FY 21):
 - 5 renewals (8 – FY22; 20 – FY 21)
 - 49 new (23 – FY22; 13 – FY 21): 28 Family Child Care settings (13 – FY22; 1 – FY 21); 11 Infant / Toddler Center settings (3 – FY22; 4 – FY 21); 10 Preschool Center settings (7 – FY22; 8 – FY 21)
 - o 4 school-age Head Teacher Certificate (1 – FY22; 4 – FY 21)
 - o 7 stand-alone (non-degree) business / NAFCC renewal courses for family child care providers (8 – FY22)
 - o 8 Connecticut Director Credential fees (15 – FY22; 12 – FY 21)

Head Teacher:

- 535 awarded (452 - FY22; 371 – FY 21):
- 508 center settings (427 – FY22; 355 – FY 21); 5 center and group home settings (2- FY22; 2 – FY 21); 22 group home settings (23 – FY22; 4 – FY 21)
- 299 Birth to Age 5 certificates (245 – FY22; 214 – FY 21); 156 Birth to School Age certificates (143 – FY22; 99 – FY 21); 80 School Age certificates (64 – FY22; 58 – FY 21)

Early Childhood Teacher Credential:

42 awarded (39 – FY22; 47 – FY 21)

- 1 Level A (associate degree) Infant/Toddler & Preschool Endorsement (3 – FY22; 3 – FY 21)
- 2 Level A (associate degree) Infant/Toddler Endorsement (0 – FY22; 1 – FY 21)
- 19 Level A (associate degree) Preschool Endorsement (14 – FY22; 17 – FY 21)

- 8 Level B (bachelor degree) Infant/Toddler & Preschool Endorsement (5 – FY22; 12 - FY 21)
- 1 Level B (bachelor degree) Infant/Toddler Endorsement (1 – FY22; 3 – FY 21)
- 11 Level B (bachelor degree) Preschool Endorsement (16 – FY22; 9 – FY 21)

The 39 were awarded based on the following qualification route:

- 7 Individual Review Route (8 – FY22; 7 – FY 21)
- 35 Traditional college degree route (31 – FY22; 38 – FY 21)

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 section 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:

- exclusively serve school-age children
- 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 these proposed changes to the regulations was reopened based on comments received and the subsequent changes made in response to such comments. The most recent additions to the proposed regulations include:

- change staff child ratio requirements for school age children to 1:12
- define non-program staff and volunteer and amend the definition of employment

- clarify requirements regarding availability or posting of the most recent inspection reports
- clarify employment history check requirements
- repeal obsolete Department of Public Health (DPH) food regulations and replaces such 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
- clarify that fencing for infant toddler spaces approved after January 1, 2024, 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.

This past year, the OEC has continued to focus on translating many of its licensing materials and resources into Spanish, including the recent translation of the Family Child Care Regulations. To meet the growing needs of the Spanish speaking family child care home provider community, the Division of Licensing hired six additional bilingual Child Care Licensing Specialists.

In addition, the agency’s vision to use technology to better streamline our processes has been successful as the Licensing Division has implemented routine monitoring of 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 of Licensing continues to work toward the launch of mobile inspections and is in the planning stages for online applications.

The Division of Licensing completed the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) triennial audit as well as an in-depth survey of the Child Care Aware Ranking of States.

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. During 2022, 2Gen developed a theory of change through a consensus building process across executive and legislative branches, parent leadership, and nonprofit stakeholders to ground the work and support strategy development. The theory of change is: “By placing parents at the center in voice, policy and practice; by engaging a diverse set of stakeholders to advise on needed policy and program changes; and by engaging stakeholders with the authority to change policy, family economic mobility and family

well-being will improve in Connecticut.” From this, FY22-23 goals and strategies outlined below emerged.

Parent Engagement

In the summer of 2022, the number of active parents on the 2Gen Advisory Board decreased from 9 to 6, leading to the recruitment of 6 additional parents to meet the requirements of C.G.S. Sec. 17b01121. Parents received training on the 2Gen Initiative, state government, and legislative processes, and participate as equal members in high-level policy discussions. The 2Gen Parent Engagement Workgroup presented the 2Gen model of parent engagement to an audience of administrative leaders from Georgia interested in learning about integrating parent voices into their operations at the University of Georgia’s 2Gen Academy in October 2022. In February 2023, parents led a 2Gen Advisory Board sponsored informational forum at the state capitol, highlighting the impact of benefits cliffs on career advancements and offered practical policy solutions. Parent leaders emphasized housing, transportation, and child care as crucial to economic mobility and wellbeing, with panelists providing recommendations for improvement.

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

Parents devised an expanded engagement approach for the next two years, including increasing the number of trained and engaged parents in 2Gen and other state agencies, new parent leadership training, a potential program offering paid internships at state agencies to embed parent voices, expanding engagement with more state agencies, and developing a mentorship program. This work is led by a parent consultant, funded jointly by the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) and 2Gen.

Benefits Cliffs

The 2Gen Benefits Cliffs Workgroup has led statewide efforts to address benefit cliffs through data collection, analysis, and policy solutions, making Connecticut a national leader. In summer 2022, the Co-Chairs presented their work with the Atlanta Fed to develop the CLIFF tool at an APHSA conference. The CT CLIFF tool illustrates the interaction between wages, public benefits, and tax credits in achieving economic stability. The presentation was attended by state-level leaders, focusing on the creation, pilot, and evaluation of the tool for future implementation. 2Gen staff continued to serve as a liaison between the Atlanta Fed and state agencies to model and understand program impact on benefits cliffs for families.

Goal: Roll out CLIFF tool statewide and sustain implementation; identify next stage policy options. 2Gen, in collaboration with Office of Workforce Strategy (OWS), will roll out CLIFF tools through organizations working with families, including CareerConneCT providers, community colleges, and community action programs. 2Gen will identify state and federal policy options to alleviate cliffs, exploring a benefit cliff pilot to manage cliffs for families. 2Gen will

also explore how training and parent stipends impact their benefits with the aim of producing policy recommendations.

Workforce

In 2022, the 2Gen Workforce Workgroup identified transportation as a critical barrier to workforce participation for families. Following a UConn report on transportation options, 2Gen and potential funders began discussions to pilot a program for car ownership, repair, or loan to support participants graduating from training programs. These discussions led to an RFP to study the feasibility of the pilot in Connecticut to inform policy and systems change. In summer 2023, the Governor signed additional changes to the state's TANF program, including increased asset limits and assistance duration. The 2Gen Workforce Workgroup played a role in recommending these changes, including through the legislative informational session held in February 2023.

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

2Gen will finalize plans for a transportation pilot that can demonstrate if and how car-based solutions offer families greater mobility – both to retain work and to manage child care, school, and other responsibilities. Following the results of the transportation feasibility study RFP led by OWS, a pilot focused on car ownership or repair will be developed and implemented.

Infusing 2Gen Throughout the State

The landscape process of 2022 led to the identification of three new goals focused on infusing 2Gen through the executive and legislative branches.

Goal: Develop 2Gen Assessment to be used in executive agencies

The first draft of an executive assessment has been developed and disseminated for feedback. 2Gen will work with executive branches to roll out the assessment for testing during summer, expecting finalization in fall 2023. 2Gen staff and consultants will offer technical assistance. The goal is to identify a few administrative policy changes implementation in 2023 or 2024.

Goal: Organize a 1-day 2Gen convening for commissioners

Building upon the development of the assessment, 2Gen, in partnership with OEC, will hold a one-day convening of commissioners of relevant state agencies in September to introduce the assessment, elevate parent voice and advise on improvement of systems and policies, and support state agencies in exploring avenues for improvement. As a result, 2Gen anticipates an increase in cross-agency partnerships to address family economic mobility and well-being, informed by parent priorities.

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

Across Connecticut, there are a range of initiatives and advocacy work that is related to 2Gen. 2Gen parents, staff, and consultants will work together to identify where 2Gen can add value to existing work, including through parent engagement/voice, which could lead to new workgroups or a revised workgroup structure.

Regional and Federal Partnership

Connecticut is an active member of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and APHSA Whole Family Approach to Jobs (WFAJ) public-private partnership across New England. Connecticut participates in regional work groups on racial equity, parent engagement, and benefits cliffs. In November, Connecticut sent delegates to and was featured on the agenda at the annual WFAJ convening to share best practices and learn from other states.