Early Care and Education Action Plan

April, 2018
Through different channels, many issues have been raised by early care and education stakeholders. 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey distributed to all providers in the state</th>
<th>Over 100 early childhood reports and plans reviewed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1,700 families surveyed</td>
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<td>6 facilitated action sessions</td>
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<td>Advised and reviewed by National experts from CLASP</td>
<td>Over 400 community and provider meetings since the creation of the OEC</td>
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<td>Over 200 individual comments incorporated</td>
<td>Analysis of current research and data</td>
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Survey distributed to all providers in the state.
The following priority areas were identified after synthesizing the stakeholder feedback

- Licensing Requirements and Enforcement
- Access and Rates
- Workforce, Technical Assistance, and Training
- Communication, Information, and Collaboration
**Action Areas and High-Level Objectives**

**Licensing Requirements and Enforcement**
- Improve implementation of licensing program and increase support to providers to achieve compliance

**Access and Rates**
- Balance investment between infant/toddler and preschool care to build foundation for 0-5 early care and education system
- Create a coordinated statewide preschool system
- Address the needs of all families with state funding and policies

**Workforce, Technical Assistance, and Training**
- Increase child care rates to ensure providers can afford to deliver high quality care
- Simplify and reduce duplicative or ineffective requirements for providers

**Communication, Information, and Collaboration**
- Build infrastructure for families to get the information they need and provide meaningful feedback to the OEC
- Build infrastructure for transparent communication to lead to collaborative direction setting
Actions Are Underway

- Green checkboxes mean action is already underway with progress made
- Red diamonds mean a legislative solution has already been put forward and is currently under consideration
- Black dots mean action is planned but not yet significantly underway
Action Area: Licensing Requirements and Enforcement

- OEC licensing regulations out-of-date
- Licensing specialists do not consistently provide compliance feedback in a manner in which providers feel supported
- Families are using unsafe care and infants are at higher risk for harm

- **Duplicate channels of monitoring** occur in silos (e.g., reporting lead tests to multiple agencies)
- “OEC licensing **specialists are not consistent** in their feedback regarding compliance” was ranked #4 out of 10 issue areas by providers surveyed (2-1-1 Child Care)
- Since March 2016, there have been six recorded infant and toddler deaths in technically illegal or unlicensed child care
## Action Area: Licensing Requirements and Enforcement

### Pain Points
- OEC licensing regulations out-of-date
- Licensing specialists do not consistently provide compliance feedback in a manner in which providers feel supported
- Families are using unsafe care and infants are at increased risk for harm

### High-level Objective
Improve implementation of licensing program and increase support to providers to achieve compliance.

### Proposed Actions
- Revise licensing regulations and statutes to improve clarity and support high quality practice.
- Improve licensing practices with a focus on enhancing support to providers to achieve compliance.

### Next Steps
- Gather final suggestions on changes to licensing regulations by May. Draft final proposed regulations and launch formal regulatory revision process.
- Introduced legislation to allow Family Childcare Providers to care for additional children during summer months (5169, Section 4)
- Co-convene a workgroup with Office of Child Advocate to improve OEC’s approach to inspection. Goals of workgroup are: maximize safety, increase support to achieve compliance, increase consistency, and minimizing burden. (Focus on communications, training, differential monitoring, complaint process, loans or grants for compliance, logistics.)
- Launch online licensure renewals
- Launch communications campaign by June to reduce infant deaths by increasing use of safe, legal care
- Enact “no more blankets” policy and distribute sleep sacks to support compliance by June.
- Launch outreach campaign to increase enrollment of infants and toddlers in Care4Kids by May.
Action Area: Access and Rates

- There is not enough funding to provide affordable infant and toddler care in the state
- State funding for preschool is disjointed, resulting in uneven access among families with similar circumstances of need
- Some families (children with special needs, teen parents, shift workers, etc.) are not getting the support they need

- **80% of brain development** happens in the first three years and the conditions in which that happens matter greatly
- **10-year low in Care4Kids enrollment**, disproportionately impacts infant and toddler care
- There is a **31,000-infant/toddler space shortage** of financial assistance for families to help pay for infant/toddler care (80% cannot afford care)
- Only **6% of black families and Hispanic families** can afford infant/toddler care without financial assistance*
- 40% providers reported **funding was a major barrier** to enrolling children who are living in poverty, homeless, involved with DCF, survivors of domestic abuse, have developmental delays, or are children of teen parents

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*Note: *and stay within recommended 10% of income.
### Action Area: Access and Rates

#### Pain Points

There is not enough funding to provide affordable infant and toddler care in the state

#### Proposed Actions

Implement a steady, responsible approach to transforming the funding system with an eye to maximize impact, infant/toddler support, and provider stability.

Take first steps to support and enable providers to enroll and serve infants and toddlers (where funds and practicality allow)

#### High-level Objective

Balance investments between infant and toddler and preschool care to build foundation for 0-5 early care and education system

#### Next Steps

- Plan for **increased investment in infant and toddler care** across the system by making adjustments to existing policies
- Support infrastructure development funding to help the field increase infant toddler capacity *(Would be helped by 5449, Section 2)*
- Increase coordination between early care and education system and OEC’s infant/toddler supports such as the Birth to Three, CDI and Home Visiting systems

- **Increase Care4Kids infant and toddler rates** for center-based child care to the extent possible by **July**
- Make modifications to the next round of early care and education RFPs, contracts, grants, and federal award applications (such as CCDF and CBCAP) to increase slots, rates, supports, and incentives for infants and toddlers
- **Introduced policy changes to help providers serve infants and toddlers** (such as changing waitlist rules to ensure infants and toddlers are not disproportionately harmed when there is a Care4Kids waitlist). *(5449 Sec. 1, Sec. 3)*
- Strengthen family child care system through **shared services networks** reducing administrative costs and increasing stability
## Action Area: Access and Rates

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<td>State funding for preschool is disjointed, resulting in uneven access among families with similar circumstances of need</td>
<td>Create a coordinated statewide preschool system</td>
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### Proposed Actions

- Better align and distribute preschool funding, administration, and policies across multiple provider types and funding streams

### Next Steps

- **Work with legislators to build needed structural changes into early care and education legislation to enable the development of a coordinated system** (specifics throughout in red)
- **Embed practical policy changes and incentives in the next round of early care and education RFPs, contracts, grants, and federal award applications (such as CCDF and CBCAP) to create a more coordinated preschool system for Connecticut** (for example, by modifying RFP criteria, increasing access to information, aligning rates and incentives, incorporating best practices from the PDG grant) *(5449 Sec. 2 and 8, 5169 Sec 5)*
- **Convene workgroup to assess and improve family experience applying for and using Care4kids to streamline enrollment and reduce false rejections by August**
**Action Area: Access and Rates**

**Pain Points**

Some families (children with special needs, teen parents, shift workers, etc.) are not getting the support they need

**High-level Objective**

Address the needs of all families with young children, including those with distinct needs

**Proposed Actions**

Reduce the barriers to care for children with disabilities or special education needs

**Next Steps**

- **Assess and address the exclusion of children with developmental delays, disabilities, and children with special healthcare needs from child care** for example:
  - Produce clear guidance on rights of parents
  - Support providers to comply through program rate and eligibility changes, infrastructure grants, and training or consultation support
  - Pilot better ways to surface developmental delays and channel families to appropriate supports
  - Review and modify (Bo6) School readiness policy to allow children to attend special education hours at public schools without penalty

- Communicate the value of early care and education investments, particularly economic impacts, for all children
- Take action to increase equity in access and outcomes for families (for example conduct routine surveys of Birth to Three community on barriers to access, monitor preschool suspension and exclusion, assess statewide efforts to prevent and address trauma, increase providers’ equity in access to training and funding, etc.)
### Action Area: Access and Rates

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<td>Enhance the capacity of the early care and education system to serve families with additional stressors</td>
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<td>✓ Establish partnerships with peer agencies to connect the early care and education to statewide resources to prevent and respond to trauma (such as home visiting and maternal depression supports; supporting providers to help children with behavioral concerns, ECE-based screening, referral and support; homeless diversion; supports to incarcerated parents and substance using parents, and others)</td>
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<td>☑ Embed language in early care and education grants, contracts, applications, policies, and regulations to <strong>incentivize the enrollment of families with additional stressors</strong> (for example, rewarding multilingual providers in RFP points, introduce additional bonus payments, modify eligibility rules, incentivize community partnerships, and invest in proactive outreach) <em>(5449 Sec 2, 3, 8, and 9)</em></td>
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<td>✓ Provide training and resources accessible and translated for all providers to best serve children and families, especially those with additional stressors and in family child care</td>
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<td>☑ <strong>Remove barriers to enrolling in child care for children experiencing homelessness</strong> <em>(5169 Sec 1 and 2)</em></td>
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Action Area: Workforce, Technical Assistance, and Training

- Child care rates are inadequate to cover the full cost of high quality care for children ages 0-5, especially workforce costs
- It is too hard for providers to comply with workforce qualification requirements and program funding requirements

- The average operating cost to run a preschool classroom in a center is $328,000, of which **77% is driven by workforce costs**
- It costs approximately **$24,409 per child per year** to provide quality infant/toddler care in a center
- It costs approximately **$18,910 per child per year** to provide quality preschool care in a center
- “Wages are too low to attract and retain highly qualified staff” was ranked #3 out of 10 issue areas by providers surveyed (2-1-1 Child Care)
- There are 15 steps in the career ladder and different staff requirements for SR, QRIS, Care4Kids, etc.

Note: Cost of care estimates are based on average costs culled from research for the Unmet Need Report.
## Action Area: Workforce, Technical Assistance, and Training

### Pain Points

Child care rates are inadequate to cover the full cost of high quality care for children ages 0-5, especially workforce costs

### High-level Objective

Increase child care rates to ensure providers can afford to deliver high quality care

### Proposed Actions

Make responsible, modest increases to School Readiness, Child Day Care, Early Head Start and Head Start State Supplement, etc. to replicate best practices from Preschool Development Grant and support quality where fiscally possible

Increase Care4Kids rates towards meeting federal benchmark of 75th percentile of market rates for all settings

### Next Steps

- Introduced legislation to allow the OEC to raise School Readiness rates (5449 Sec 8)
- Communicate with stakeholders and public about connection between rates, wages, access, and quality and comparisons to public elementary school costs
- Release rates analysis for child care spaces and propose long term increase plan

- After infant/toddler Care4kids rate increases, **finalize long term Care4Kids rate increase plan** for other age groups
## Action Area: Workforce, Technical Assistance, and Training

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| Improve data systems and reduce redundancies in data collection | ✓ Give programs access to information about the status of criminal justice background checks through a new data system  
✓ Assess and improve existing data systems (registry, ECIS, online coursework system, Care4Kids, etc.) |
| Simplify the workforce requirements and reduce reporting burdens | • **Convene workgroup to assess reporting requirements** to identify near-term and long-term opportunities to streamline, simplify, and reduce redundancy (for examples, improvements to the registry, waivers for lab schools, CCDF training requirements, Bachelor’s degree requirements, etc.)  
✓ Complete QRIS pilot and revise the system based on provider feedback. Complete alignment with licensing, Care4Kids, School Readiness, CDC, Head Start, NAFCC, and NAEYC requirements  
✓ Introduced legislation to reduce unnecessary regulatory burden on providers *(5169, Sec 3, 4 and 7)*  
✓ **Convene workgroup to assess workforce requirements (5450)** |
Action Area: Communication, Information, and Collaboration

- Family voice is not driving decisions
- There is a need for continuous feedback loops between OEC and providers, advocates, and other stakeholders

- There is a lack of infrastructure for OEC to routinely solicit feedback from parents on policy decisions
- The OEC’s website is difficult to navigate
## Action Area: Communications, Information, and Collaboration

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<td>Family voice is not driving decisions</td>
<td>Build infrastructure for direct relationships with and channels for families to get the information they need and provide meaningful feedback to the system</td>
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### Proposed Actions

- Create better resources to communicate with families on program availability, safety and quality, and eligibility requirements
- Ensure racially and culturally diverse representation from communities, families, and providers in discussions around early care and education policies through intentional outreach and inclusion

### Next Steps

- Implement feedback loops with parents (through better communications, family surveys, community meetings, webinars, community liaisons, Childcare 211, QRIS ratings, etc.)
- Conduct family survey on impact of Care4Kids closure/waitlist.
- Rebuild OEC website to be more user friendly
  - Create OEC Parent Cabinet to advise OEC on agency decisions and policies
- Ensure new family voice action items (above) are acted on with racial equity lens
- Develop new community-level partnerships with racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse organizations
  - Conduct racial equity impact assessments on proposed policies
### Action Area: Communications, Information, and Collaboration

#### Pain Points

There is a need for continuous feedback loops between OEC and providers, advocates, and other stakeholders

#### Proposed Actions

Empower stakeholders with compelling information about the impact of early care and education programs and the value of early childhood investments to better tell their story

#### High-level Objective

Build infrastructure for transparent communications that lead to collaborative direction setting

#### Next Steps

- Define shared, meaningful family **outcomes** that are based on shared goals of OEC, providers, advocates, families, and other stakeholders
  - Translate the **outcomes** into measurable metrics that can be tied to existing administrative datasets and shared publicly
  - Communicate the progress early care and education providers are making towards the achievement of family **outcomes**, reinforcing the value of early childhood investments

- Continuously seek feedback on how OEC is doing and what we can do to improve.

- Deliver **progress report** on proposed actions at every Early Childhood Cabinet meeting and hold complementary webinar for broader reach
- Build public report card on progress of Action Plan
- Share **sequence and planned timing** of planned actions
- Hold transparent process on workgroup formation
- Implement **feedback loops** with providers (through better communications, surveys, community meetings, webinars, community liaisons, etc.)
Next Steps

Webinar and Survey → Sequenced Implementation → Cabinet Reporting
Partners

Co-Sponsor

Connecticut Early Childhood
Funder Collaborative
A project of:

Connecticut Council for Philanthropy

Facilitator

CLASP
policy solutions that work for low-income people

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