

PRELIMINARY DRAFT

Equity and Access Workgroup



May 2023

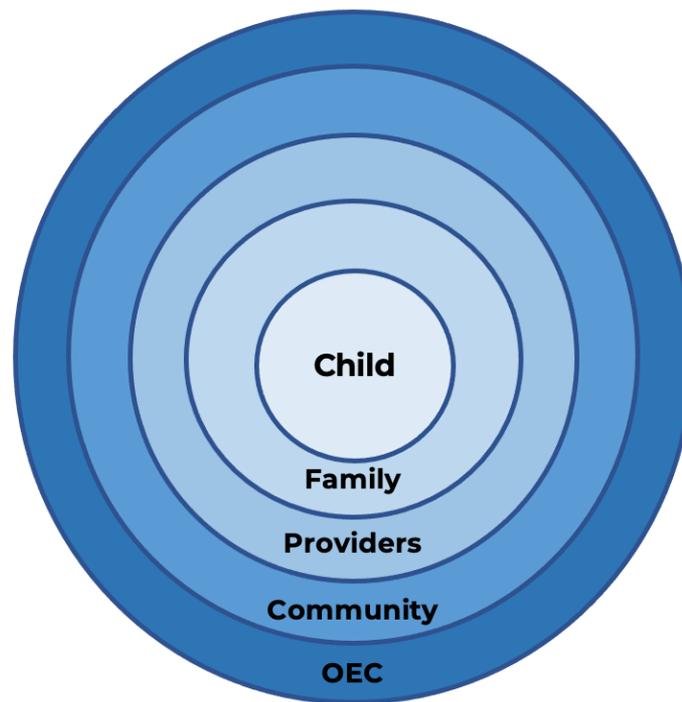
Equity and Access is one of four interdependent workgroups in Blue Ribbon Planning



Equity and Access places children and families at the center of the early childhood care and education (ECE) system

*As we begin this work together, this graphic is a reminder to **keep the child at the center.** As we get to decision points, this will be an important visual to conjure up.*

- Beth Bye, Commissioner



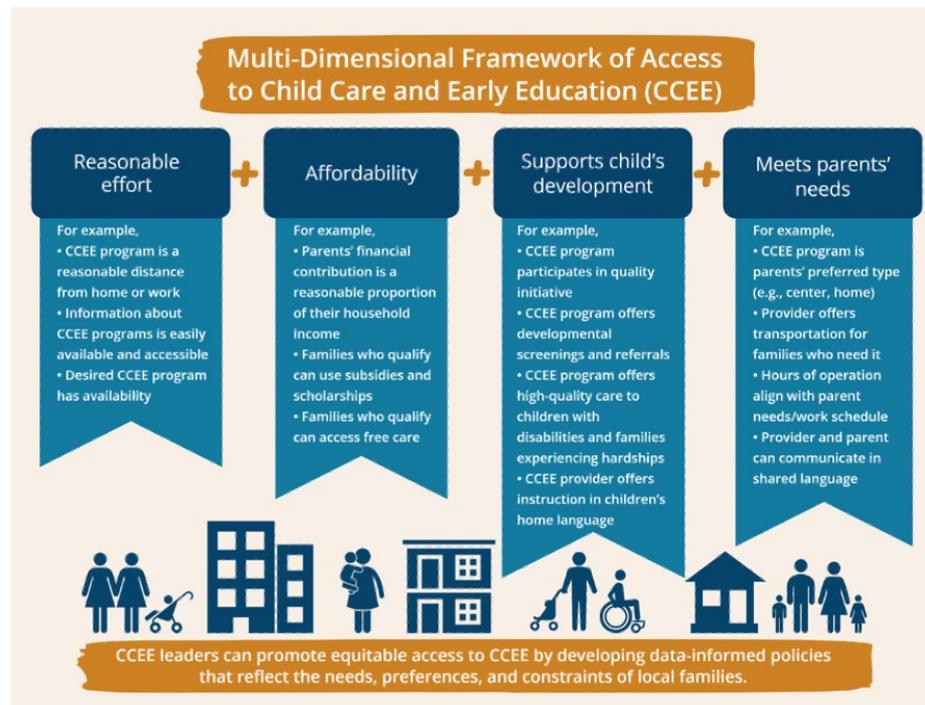
The workgroup also establishes equity as a pillar throughout planning, and defines access broadly

Equity

The OEC, the Association for Children and Families and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) all emphasize the importance of equity, which NAEYC describes: *“in practice, equity means all children and families receive necessary supports in a timely fashion so they can develop their full intellectual, social, and physical potential.”*

Specifically, the OEC has pledged to: *“intentionally work to dismantle any systemic racism that may be embedded within policies and practices affecting all aspects of early childhood.”*

Access



Source: https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/opre_defining-measuring-access-highlight_feb2022.pdf

Equity and Access Workgroup Goal

Equity and Access Goal

Ensure that all Connecticut families have expanded access to affordable, high-quality ECE that prepares each and every child for future learning and improved well-being.



Equity and Access Workgroup Sub-Goals

- **Expand supply to address unmet need** by building on existing resources where possible (e.g., expand existing programs, partner with local school districts and Family Resource and Referral Centers and incentivize the creation of programs in deserts and the development of additional infant and toddler slots)
- Formulate strategies to **expand affordable access** to high-quality care
- **Engage all parents** to support children's early learning and development and ensure parents can access early care and education for their children that matches their family needs/preferences (e.g., infant/toddler care, special needs, non-traditional hours, part-time, multilingual, culturally responsive)
 - Design state and local infrastructure to **enhance all families' navigation** of and access to high-quality early childhood education and offer parents information about program differentiation and quality to guide their choice of setting
 - Develop flexible demand and supply tracking that is reflective of family and modern workplace needs
- **Ensure community voice** and data-driven common community needs assessments are factored in the allocation of resources
- **Develop a child and family information and outcomes system** with a focus on access to high quality and equity

The workgroup has drafted initial potential recommended strategies to address problems and opportunities in five areas

Unmet Need

Affordability

Parent
Engagement
and Navigation

Community
Voice

Child and Family
Outcomes

Important note: the recommendations on the subsequent slides are preliminary based on current work and promising practices here and across the country. They will be prioritized and refined based on feedback from the public, guidance from the panel, and key stakeholders. They will then be tested for feasibility and impact.

Questions Related to These Recommendations

- What would you prioritize or deprioritize, and why?
- What is missing?
- What questions do you have?
What details do you want to understand?
- How do you want to be involved as these recommendations progress?



Unmet Need: Problems and Opportunities

- Connecticut's unmet need is geographically dispersed; the Center for American Progress (CAP) estimates about 44% of the state lives in a child care desert
- Connecticut's unmet need is concentrated in infant and toddler child care, which is more expensive to provide
- Some supply is not fully utilized, in part reflecting ECE workforce shortages
- Limited funds are available to expand or build new facilities
- The needs of families are varied and evolving based upon factors such as their work hours, family situation, language and cultural and special needs and the current supply and demand systems do not fully track this
- There are multiple federal, state and locally funded programs, each with its own requirements, and not necessarily responsive to parent needs

Unmet Need: Draft Recommendations

<p>Improve demand and supply tracking systems</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide an evolving, accurate, up-to-date estimate of unmet need that aligns with the range of parent needs and preferences and enables more effective parent navigation
<p>Increase funding options for facility expansion and start-ups</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure additional facility funding (e.g., bond funding) to support expansion or classroom conversion • Subsidize start-up costs to incentivize the development of new community-based family child care homes and child care centers • Expand innovation models, such as family child care incubator model
<p>Expand access in areas of high need by leveraging existing local partnerships</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with public schools to expand access for 3-5 year olds, in combination with other before- and after-school partnerships • Seek donated space from municipalities and public schools
<p>Incentivize the development of additional infant and toddler slots</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider options to expand contracted slots (e.g., potential to convert some C4K subsidy vouchers to contracted infant and toddler slots) • Continue family child care supports to reduce closures and expand reach
<p>Increase the supply of programs equipped to meet the needs of all children</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multilingual and culturally responsive • Children with special needs • Extended hours, overnight and weekend
<p>Change ratios and group sizes and regulations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example: school age ratio > 1:10, toddler ratio >1:4, taking into account if the requirements have been largely met • Use NAEYC Accreditation Standards to guide

Unmet Need: Draft Recommendations Continued

<p>Assess the feasibility of extending CT's paid parental leave program</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduce infant care demand• Communicate current program options to fathers to help extend families' leave time with newborns or adopted children (current data shows women are more likely to employ benefit)
<p>Expand access to and ensure better utilization of state funded programs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enhance access to state funded programs by offering more flexible and efficient subsidized state funded spaces to serve more children in varying types of settings in varying day/week parts• Develop an approach to procure new state funded spaces that prioritizes high need areas, and allows for family child care options, while giving preference to current state funded programs and accredited programs• Reduce unused, funded state slots by developing a dynamic system to reallocate empty spaces that communities are unable to fill.• Simplify state funded contracting systems, regulations, and administration• Expand Smart Start preschool program in public schools (state costs are 40% of state funded ECE space due to the local share)• Leverage federal Head Start and public-school systems to braid and layer funding and wrap-around model

Affordability: Problems and Opportunities

- Subsidies only reach about 12% of Connecticut's eligible families
 - Subsidy application denials hover at 40%, typically due to income limits or not being engaged in an eligible activity (e.g., work, job training, residency and education)
 - Federal subsidy guidelines are more generous and not aligned with state regulations
 - State regulations are outdated, complex, and slow to change. Families' needs evolve.
 - Subsidy levels are not tied to cost of providing care and are low relative to market rates (MR); currently at 30-40% of MR
- Free to low-cost public school and state-funded programs are limited with long waiting lists
- Parents do not always understand what supports they might be eligible for (e.g., families with domestic violence and undocumented parents with children born in the US may not be aware that their child or children can be eligible for subsidized child care programs)
- Affordability is still a significant issue for ineligible families, with payments on average exceeding the US Department of Health and Human Service's recommended cap of 7% of income. Many families just miss income guidelines and cannot afford ECE

<p>Ensure subsidy system reaches eligible families and is responsive to parent needs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As Connecticut regulations aren't flexible enough to respond to evolving needs, instead adopt a policies and procedures manual aligned with Final Rule federal regulations • Seek opportunities to reduce complexity of administration and applications to ensure more families can access (e.g., fewer denials) • Improve parent awareness of subsidies as part of new parent information system
<p>Expand child care subsidy funding</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the number of families served • Raise subsidy rates, to reimburse providers based on what it costs them to provide care, rather than limiting them to what they can charge • Avoid potential federal sanction due to current low rates • Broaden eligibility to ensure more families receive subsidies
<p>Increase affordability of child care for middle income families just out of reach of subsidies and unable to access state funded programs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore opportunities to partner with local school systems to expand families' access to low- to no- cost ECE (e.g., public preschool) • Identify ways to partner with business (e.g., Tri-Share) and philanthropy • Consider opportunities to use more flexible state funds to supplement federal subsidies and expand access • Explore opportunities to increase flexible spending accounts
<p>Limit family payments to a recommended amount based on their income level</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building on the OEC's equitable parent co-pay schedule across the system, ensure funding to limit parent pay proportionate to different income levels as it relates to the state median income or federal poverty levels and adjusted for the cost-of-living differences across the state

Parent Engagement and Navigation: Problems and Opportunities

- Parents know their child best and parents are critical partners in the ECE system
- Parents and children have a range of needs (e.g., children with special needs, care in non-traditional hours, part-time care, multilingual and culturally responsive settings of families' choosing)
- The current system is fragmented and complex for families to navigate, which presents challenges for providers as well as families
- The system is designed on an antiquated 9-5 work model and is not flexible or responsive
- Parents would benefit from trusted information and support to find the right match for their families and a high-quality child care setting
- Simpler systems with on-the-ground trusted resources and outreach have been shown to lead to higher enrollment and parent satisfaction in NYC and Portland
- ECE system reforms need to be equitable for all families, addressing historic systemic racism

Parent Engagement and Navigation: Draft Recommendations

<p>Recognize families as key decision-makers in the ECE system at the local and state level</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement new policies to ensure that families' perspectives are included at the program, state, and local level • Increase opportunities for parent leadership training to promote meaningful participation • Provide training, best practices, and coaching for all types of providers to enhance parent engagement and partnership skills • Use Early Head Start/Head Start as a resource to support this work • Conduct an annual statewide parent survey to obtain feedback from families about the ECE system
<p>Develop a parent navigation system that is available in multiple languages, inclusive, and easily accessible that is designed to cater to the diverse range of family needs and preferences and would consist of a technology platform and trusted local resources (e.g., parent ambassadors/navigators)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide parents with information about their options for care and education • Further develop and market materials that give parents information about the programs' licensing and accreditation status as progress and status in the Elevate system demonstrate • Help parents to enroll their child(ren) in care and education programs that fit their needs and preferences (e.g., type of provider, accreditation status, language and cultural competencies, children with special needs, age of children, accessibility, and availability of public transportation) • Ensure there are trusted community navigators to meet parents where they are in their local communities (e.g., churches, community organizations and other community resources), building on existing resource and referral assets

Parent Engagement and Navigation: Draft Recommendations Continued

Ensure information is organized, accessible, and available in multiple languages to engage parents as partners in children's overall development and well-being

- Build families' understanding of the critical nature of the early years
- Help families understand core tenets of healthy child development and age-appropriate expectations and how to support optimal child development
- Ensure equitable access to information and resources that are universally accessible and available in multiple languages
- Build understanding of early learning goals of families and parents' understanding of child development through tools like Sparkler and Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards (CT ELDS)
- Expand marketing and outreach of Elevate, CT early childhood quality improvement system, that can offer families information about program quality and support ECE programs' ongoing quality improvement
- Create an early learning/family partnership hub that includes information about child development, Elevate information about program quality, and possibly linked to MyCT for other benefits like housing, SNAP, and HUSKY

Community Voice: Problems and Opportunities

- Needs vary by geography
- It is difficult to equitably allocate limited resources without community voice
- Currently, there are several local community governance structures, including Local Early Childhood Collaboratives (LECCs), School Readiness Councils, (SR Councils), scattered throughout the state
- These existing community engagement and governance structures have been underfunded and under-resourced
- None of these covers all geographies
- Trying to establish community resources for all 169 towns in the state would be challenging

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Community Voice: Draft Recommendations

Design an appropriately resourced and consistently funded hub-based community resource system in order to raise up community needs and priorities and provide input into resource allocation decisions

- Leverage structure to convene stakeholders around ECE and related areas. Regional geographic coverage to be defined
- Implement a common community needs assessment that can be efficiently updated and used to track progress over time
- Expand geographic coverage of existing local resources (e.g., LECC and SR Councils) and grassroot partnerships to reach all geographies

Child and Family Outcomes: Problems and Opportunities

- There is no statewide system used by all providers to track child development or support conversations and connections about child development with families
- Although many states use a common learning and development assessment platform (e.g., Teaching Strategies, High Scope), there is lack of agreement on what platform to use in Connecticut
- The current CT Documentation and Observation System (CT DOTS) is a platform that:
 - Provides framework for monitoring children's progress on the skills in the CT Early Learning and Development Standards (CT ELDS)
 - Generates snapshot summaries and is currently used by some providers
 - Will be used by State Department of Education for their early childhood outcomes reporting
- The OEC supports the use of the Ages and Stages Questionnaires, including through the Sparkler app, for developmental screening to identify areas of strength and to catch potential delays
 - Norwalk is using Sparkler to screen all children for Kindergarten entry
 - This questionnaire is a tool used nationally and is a Brooks publication. Brooke updates and assures reliability and validity.
- There is also not a system to track how well the ECE system is working for families (e.g., affordability, unmet need, subsidy denials, ability to work)

Child and Family Outcomes: Draft Recommendations

Child Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Implement a statewide system to assess Connecticut’s children early learning and development from birth to age 5 by leveraging an existing platform(e.g., CT DOTS, Teaching Strategies, High Scope) in order to:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Provide snapshots of a child’s holistic development up to kindergarten○ Aggregate data across programs and regions○ Provide a structure for providers to partner with families to help them understand and know how to support their child’s development○ Support early care and education providers in observing children and planning engaging experiences for them○ Provide a structure that fosters smooth transitions from ECE to the PreK-12 public school system○ Collaborate with SDE about role of Kindergarten Entrance Inventory (KEI) in documenting child outcomes○ Meet federal reporting requirements (e.g., for the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), Head Start)
Family Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Design and develop a data and outcomes system to track families’ ability to equitably access affordable care

Opportunities for More Information and Input

- Please visit the Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care website and/or reach out to us directly with additional questions or comments:
 - <https://www.ctoec.org/blue-ribbon-panel>
 - There will be a form added to the website to submit any feedback and questions
- We will incorporate your feedback and continue to keep you updated as these recommendations are prioritized and defined
- Let us know other ways you would like to be able to provide input



Thank you for your participation today!