

Department of Early Education and Care Strategic Plan

Putting Children and Families First

February 2021





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LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Friends and Fellow Citizens of the Commonwealth,

I am delighted to present the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) Five Year Strategic Plan, a demonstration of the exciting potential of early education and care in Massachusetts and an acknowledgement of the terrific work of the fledgling agency during its first three years. Eight months ago, the EEC Board embarked on a strategic planning process to help define and initiate the next chapter in its evolution as an organization that provides critical learning and care opportunities for Massachusetts children of all ages. This process included the collaborative efforts and exhaustive feedback from a dedicated and distinguished group of educators, experts, parents, EEC staff and other stakeholders.

The Blueprint we set forth is by no means the end of what our vision should be, but instead is the beginning of what defines why and how we want to make the lives of children in this Commonwealth more enriched and supported. The Plan lays out aspirations and expectations for ourselves as a workforce and a community; it compels us to engage the larger public more in the work that we do for our youngest citizens; and it challenges us all to be accountable for the successes and failures that we encounter along the way as we chart this new course for children and families. The Plan goes beyond inspirational goals and gives strategic directions and tangible indicators that will help EEC adapt as we face changing times, digest new research and learn lessons so that Massachusetts can be a national leader in the delivery of early education and care.

There is great optimism and momentum in early education and care to be captured here in Massachusetts and across the country, despite our current economic situation. We are grateful to have a Legislature that initiated and continues to support the unification of agencies that educate and care for our children into a streamlined coherent system. We are thankful for an inspirational Governor who has prioritized education and instilled a message that we should not just be getting children ready for school but for enjoying life long health, learning and happiness.

The field of early education and care is always evolving – like the children on whose behalf we are all dedicated. There is increasing diversity in our families seeking care and in the needs of the youngsters receiving early childhood services. The research increasingly tells us that high quality early learning experiences provide the foundation for each child's individual development and lifetime possibilities. Our charge is to use what we know and take concrete action to move forward building a high quality system of early education and care that is accessible to all and achieves positive outcomes for each child regardless of background. Every child deserves the very best start and it is all of our responsibility to make that a reality.

Thank you again to all who participated in this Strategic Plan, and especially to my fellow Board members, the Advisory and Parent Advisory Teams, and the staff, for their invaluable effort and input. It is this collaborative spirit that will drive the achievement of our vision.

Sincerely,

Sharon Scott-Chandler, Esq.
Chairperson, EEC Board

CONTEXT FOR THIS REPORT

EEC: Short History and Overview

In 2005, Massachusetts became the first state in the nation to create one agency to oversee early education and care and after-school services for families. The Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) was created by consolidating the former Office of Childcare Services with the Early Learning Services Unit of the Department of Education. The primary impetus was to create a single, unified, more efficient system of early education and care.

Massachusetts did not just consolidate existing programs, merge departments or simplify organizational charts. EEC was born of a revolutionary, top-to-bottom rethinking of how to orient state resources to support families in a way that is responsive to their needs. The scope is broad and presents an opportunity for sweeping statewide impact, dramatically improving the quality and affordability of programs, and expanding access to hundreds of thousands of children and their families.

EEC was created within the context of increasingly accepted evidence from childhood brain development research showing long-term impact of high-quality early education and its potential return on investment. We know that access to early education and care is crucial, and we know that the *quality* of that care matters- a lot. EEC has been balancing these two priorities since its inception.

Prior to the creation of EEC, the early childhood sector in Massachusetts was a labyrinth of separate bureaucracies and disconnected categorical programs covering four agencies with oversight for services to children ages birth to 14. There was tension between programs that focused on child care as a parental work support and others that saw the education of the child as a focal point. Almost four decades of “silo” funding and programming was consolidated, influenced by a growing focus statewide and nationally on the importance of *high-quality* early education.

With an annual budget of about \$575 Million and approximately 180 full-time staff, EEC provides the following services and programs, touching the lives of more than 275,000 children every day:

- **Financial Assistance** to help eligible low-income working and at-risk families pay for early education and out-of-school time programs. Currently, EEC administers financial aid to almost 60,000 children from birth to 13 years of age. Due to limited funding, however, EEC maintains a centralized waiting list which currently includes more than 20,000 children in families who need financial assistance to afford licensed, appropriate child care and afterschool programs.
- **Licensing and Monitoring** of nearly 12,000 early education and care programs statewide, including after school programs, group child care centers and family child care homes. EEC also licenses adoption placement agencies, foster placement agencies and residential care programs.
- **Information and Resources** for families about choosing early education and care and out-of-school time programs, finding parenting and other resources in their community and applying for child care financial assistance.
- **Early Childhood Special Education** services and resources for pre-school children with special needs and their families. EEC is responsible for overseeing federal IDEA preschool special education funds for young children ages 3 to 5, and working with public schools on special education services.
- **Universal Pre-kindergarten program (UPK) implementation.** EEC is in the third year of implementing the Massachusetts UPK program in the Commonwealth. The UPK initiative promotes school readiness and positive outcomes for children and furthers the long-term creation of a universally accessible, high-quality early education program by providing grant funding directly to pre-school programs meeting specific quality guidelines.

- **Professional Development and Program Quality Advancement** for early education and out-of-school time professionals delivered primarily through community-based and regional organizations as well as institutions of Higher Education. Support is provided to meet basic licensing requirements and teacher certifications, achieve accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and other accrediting bodies, and address children’s behavioral and mental health needs. EEC also administers a number of scholarship programs to help early education and out-of-school time professionals seek higher education degrees.
- **Family Education and Support** including community and home-based family literacy efforts and outreach to and engagement of families with newborn or very young children..

Three years after its creation, EEC is proving successful. The Department is building a strong, integrated infrastructure; promoting consistency in regulations and policies; revamping its technology system to improve the quality and efficiency of services provided; consolidating the waiting list; expanding access to child care for families involved with the Department of Children and Families (formerly the Department of Social Services); and elevating the prominence of the early education and care field.¹ The Gubernatorial-appointed EEC Board is taking hold of its responsibilities to govern and guide.

New Executive Office of Education and the Governor’s “Readiness Project”

In January, 2008, legislation passed creating an Executive Office of Education (EOE) to oversee the Commonwealth’s three Education Agencies (Department of Early Education and Care, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and Department of Higher Education). Governor Deval Patrick proposed this Secretariat to encourage the seamless delivery of education from birth through higher education and beyond. EEC is now a family’s first point of entry to the Commonwealth’s education system and an integral part of the overall continuum, providing the foundation for children’s learning.

In June, the Governor unveiled his Education Action Agenda, a 10-year vision for a comprehensive, child-centered public education system in the Commonwealth. The product of the Governor’s **“Readiness Project”**- an extensive process led by the Secretary of Education and a Leadership Council and involving over 100 experts and practitioners- this report outlines a vision for our public education system that begins at birth and continues through workforce development and lifelong learning. Several of the report’s Readiness Recommendations pertain directly to the early education and care system, including: 1) annual funding to achieve universal pre-kindergarten; 2) the creation of a Birth to School-age Task Force; and 3) the provision of free community college for early childhood educators.

With EOE and the Readiness Project further elevating the prominence of the early education and care field, EEC is well-poised to declare its future and outline its strategic priorities.

It is within this context and in response to this mandate that EEC submits the EEC Strategic Plan: Putting Children and Families First.

¹ A Case Study of the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, Rennie Center for Education, Research and Policy



VALUES

- Learning starts at birth.
- We value all children and all families.
- All children can succeed and we have the responsibility to help them do that.
- Families and caregivers are integral to the healthy development of children and must be engaged as partners.
- Our workforce is the backbone of our services; we value and support their skill development, diversity, and fair compensation.
- Families live within communities and must be reached and supported in ways that maximize accessibility.
- We believe in and practice equity and therefore children with the greatest educational and care needs and multiple risk factors come first.
- Providing culturally appropriate services is critical to being effective in the lives of children and families.
- We support the continuum and continuity of every child's education and care.
- A strong, nimble current system exists upon whose assets we will grow services.
- Accountability at all levels is important and we will work together to measure, recognize needs and develop the assets of the field.



GUIDE TO STRATEGIC PLAN

Mission

Defines the purpose of the agency, who it serves and what it does.

Practical 5-Year Vision

Defines what the agency aspires to do over a five-year period.

Strategic Direction

Names the strategic priorities over the next three years that will help move the agency toward its vision.

Indicators of Success

Measures used to mark the agency's progress within each of the strategic directions.

Work of Success (Accompanying Document)

Specific initiatives and actions required to support the agency's progress within each of the strategic directions.



EEC STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

Mission

The Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) provides the foundation that supports all children in their development as lifelong learners and contributing members of the community, and supports families in their essential work as parents and caregivers.

Practical Five-Year Vision

EEC and the whole field of early education and care are highly regarded, publicly recognized and supported, and clearly understood to be a value to the Commonwealth.

EEC's system offers an array of high quality, comprehensive and affordable programs designed to meet the diverse, individual needs of children & families.

The early education and care workforce is respected, diverse, professional, qualified, and fairly compensated.

EEC is an effective, responsive, efficient, and resilient system.

EEC has clear standards for accountability and evidence that those standards are being met.

Families are engaged as partners integral to the healthy development and learning of their children, and they have access to the necessary resources to do so.

All preschool children have access to high quality pre- kindergarten programs that meet family needs.

Children and families experience seamless transitions throughout their early learning and later developmental experiences.

Three Year Strategic Directions

- Create and implement a system to improve and support quality statewide.
- Increase and promote family support, access and affordability.
- Create a workforce system that maintains worker diversity and provides resources, supports, expectations, and core competencies that lead to the outcomes we want for children.
- Create and implement an external and internal communications strategy that advocates for and conveys the value of early education and care to all stakeholders and the general public.
- Build the internal infrastructure to support achieving the vision.

Note: Throughout this plan the term “Early Education and Care Programs” is used to refer to all program types and age groups under EEC’s responsibility, including group child-care, preschool, early education, family child care, after-school, out-of-school time, and residential and placement programs.

QUALITY



Strategic Direction: Create and implement a system to improve and support quality statewide.

Indicators of Success

- Massachusetts' Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) has been developed, validated, funded and implemented with full involvement of EEC's community partners and EEC staff.
- Massachusetts has standards for quality in early education and care programs that are research-based, broadly understood, successfully implemented, culturally appropriate, and aligned with a quality-building support system.
- Programs seeking to improve their quality have access to a range of resources and supports.
- Parents understand and use information about quality to make informed decisions about early education and care programs.
- Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) system design has been finalized and full-scale implementation has begun.
- Massachusetts has a system that collects, analyzes and disseminates program quality and child outcome data to inform policy and program development and implementation.
- Licensing regulations that reflect best practices have been promulgated, translated, clearly communicated to the field, and enforced consistently throughout all regions.
- Comprehensive services, including mental health consultations, are embedded in the delivery of services for families and children.
- All families experience seamless transitions throughout their child's early learning and developmental experiences.
- Children in residential and placement programs receive quality and appropriate services and are placed in the least restrictive settings.



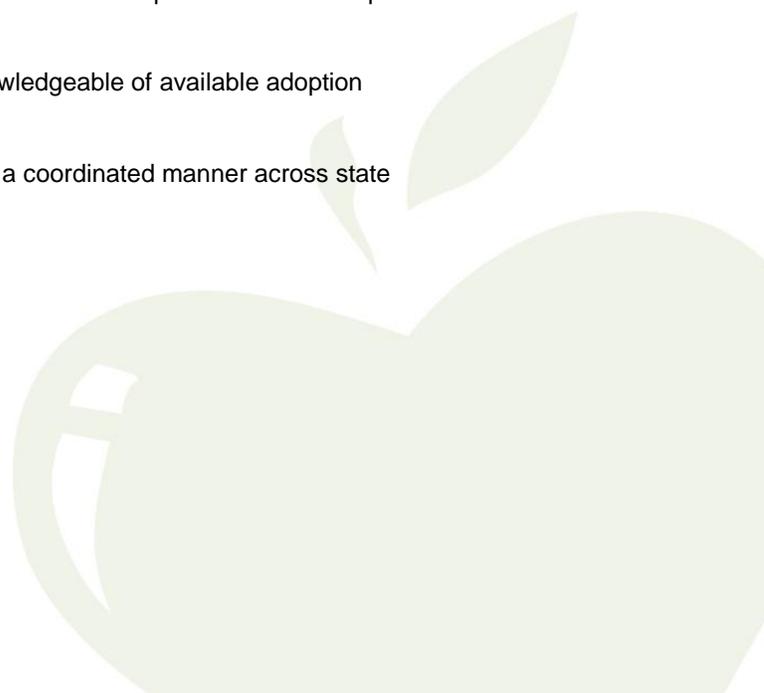
FAMILY SUPPORT, ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY



Strategic Direction: Increase and promote family support, access and affordability.

Indicators of Success

- Families are aware of the mixed early education and care system and have access to affordable, high-quality early education and care services.
- Families are recognized as full partners in the education of their children and are empowered to be involved with the physical, social, emotional and intellectual development of their children.
- Families are informed about child development and aware of family support resources.
- Early education and care services are delivered through a seamless system that is responsive to the needs of all families and provides supports and resources for transitioning children in and out of early education and care programs and services.
- Families of infants have access to programs and services that support the development of healthy attachment between babies and their primary caregivers and promote early brain development.
- Parents are recognized as their child's first teacher and have access to literacy supports that build skills among children and parents.
- Families have access to high quality supports and resources for transitioning children in and out of early education and care programs and services.
- Families that are limited or non-English speaking have access to information about early education and care and the services available.
- Strong partnerships are established between families (parent/caregiver) and educators to maximize high quality early education and care for all children.
- Parents of children in residential and placement programs are aware of and knowledgeable about appropriate placement and treatment options that are compatible with the needs of their children.
- Parents seeking to adopt are aware of and knowledgeable of available adoption resources and state adoption policies.
- Family services are integrated and delivered in a coordinated manner across state agencies.



WORKFORCE



Strategic Direction: Create a workforce system that maintains worker diversity and provides resources, supports, expectations, & core competencies that lead to the outcomes we want for children.

Indicators of Success

- The early education and care workforce has clearly defined education and professional development standards that are understood and embraced by the field.
- The early education workforce has access to affordable education and professional development resources that support core competencies.
- The early education and care workforce has a well-defined career ladder that adequately and fairly compensates educators as professionals.
- Educators are adequately compensated to assure equitable access to high-quality care in all areas of the state, with emphasis on increasing compensation in communities with greatest need.
- Early education and care professionals are respected and complete their professional responsibilities with confidence and competence.
- The early education and care workforce has broad diversity that allows families and children to feel welcomed and comfortable to address the changing landscape and needs of the families and children.
- The early education and care workforce functions collaboratively and effectively among all aspects of the early education and care system.
- A Professional Development Registry and Workforce Management System are in place to observe and measure the efficacy of the workforce and measure the impact of the workforce system on child outcomes.



COMMUNICATIONS



Strategic Direction: Create and implement an external and internal communications strategy that advocates for and conveys the value of early education and care to stakeholders, consumers, and the general public and positions EEC as a national education leader.

Indicators of Success

- The public understands and values the purpose of EEC.
- Families of all languages understand the services and resources offered by EEC.
- All stakeholders in the field and consumers are aware of EEC initiatives, policies and procedures and have access to information to facilitate advocacy.
- State and local leaders understand how EEC initiatives serve and benefit their communities.
- EEC is fully aware of and responds to the type, style and nature of the information needed by external stakeholders and consumers.
- All EEC staff members are knowledgeable of agency initiatives, operations, key staff functions, and the agency's community partners.
- EEC is known among major press outlets and institutions of higher education as the authoritative resource on early education and care issues in the state and for leading developments in the field.
- EEC is known as a national education leader, at the forefront of Universal Pre-Kindergarten and unrivaled in the development of quality standards for all early education and care programs.



INFRASTRUCTURE



Strategic Direction: Build the internal infrastructure to support achieving the vision.

Indicators of Success

- With user input and involvement, EEC has transformed the existing technology infrastructure into a state-of-the-art, unified and comprehensive system.
- The operational roles of EEC's community partners have been clearly defined, aligned to support the agency's vision and accepted by stakeholders.
- EEC regions have the staff, resources and stakeholder partnerships required to achieve the breadth of the agency's readiness vision.
- EEC continues to implement policy initiatives that are backed up by research, developed through stakeholder collaboration and coordinated with agency operations.
- All EEC staff, community partners and families have comprehensive information about educators and early education and care programs.
- EEC staff is diverse, knowledgeable and adequately trained to perform assigned functions and to understand the operations of the agency and its community partners in the field.
- EEC has developed active relationships with other state agencies, community partners, public schools and other stakeholder organizations to meet its mission.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A variety of professionals, both within and without EEC, and parents took part in the development of this plan. Everyone's time, inspirational thinking, and honest feedback is greatly appreciated.

EEC Board

The strategic planning process was chaired and overseen by the Board of EEC which played an integral role in its development. JD Chesloff chaired a Strategic Planning Committee, a subcommittee of the Board, which met separately and put a considerable amount of time and energy to prepare the plan for the full Board's review. The full Board met for three days to establish the foundation for the plan, and then again for a full-day retreat to review a comprehensive draft.

The EEC Board members are:

Paul Reville, Secretary of Education

Elizabeth Childs, M.D

Sharon Scott-Chandler, Esq., Chairperson

Julie P. Culhane, Ph.D.

JudyAnn Bigby, M.D.

Chi-Cheng Huang, M.D.

(Marilyn Anderson Chase, designee)

Orlando Isaza

Lynson Moore Beaulieu

Mary Pat Messmer

J.D. Chesloff

Carol Craig O'Brien

EEC Advisory Team and Parent Advisory Team

Providers and represented associations comprise EEC's Advisory Team, which meets regularly to review EEC policy and program decisions and provide recommendations thereof. The Advisory Team played a key role in providing feedback in this strategic planning process. Their insight and suggestions are greatly appreciated. The voice and perspective of the Parent Advisory Team was also invaluable.

EEC Staff

Thanks to the many hours EEC staff put in to review drafts and provide content and feedback throughout this process.

The Planning Process

In December, 2007, with a legislative mandate to develop a multiyear plan to achieve a well-coordinated system of high achievement in early education and care in the commonwealth, the EEC Board undertook this planning process. The methodology used was inclusive and participatory and built on the successes and assets of EEC's ongoing work and expertise and wisdom provided by a broad range of planning participants. Called Technologies of Participation, the strategic planning methods provided a guide to clarify the mission, create a practical vision, recognize the organization's current reality and roadblocks, develop decision making criteria to be used by the Board, craft strategic directions and indicators of success, and determine tactics over two-three years to meet these benchmarks. The Board and EEC senior staff participated in three days of planning, and many meetings were held with EEC's Parent Advisory Team, Advisory Team, and Strategic Planning committee to provide data, input and feedback. The planning process and writing of the plan was facilitated by Nancy Jackson, GammyBird Consulting.