



COUNCIL FOR
**THRIVING
CHILDREN**

2021 Year In Review

A Celebration of Early Childhood in the Granite State

Contents

Welcome Letter	3
----------------	---

20 Stories of Our Success

— Goal 1: Positive Learning Experiences	5
---	---

— Goal 2: Healthy Children and Families	11
---	----

— Goal 3: Strong Families	17
---------------------------	----

— Goal 4: Statewide Coordination	23
----------------------------------	----

Crosswalk of Stories	29
----------------------	----

Goals and Strategies Review	30
-----------------------------	----



Welcome.

Dear Friends,

On behalf of the New Hampshire Council for Thriving Children, I am thrilled to share the 2021 Year-In-Review, A celebration of Early Childhood in the Granite State. The report highlights impactful efforts made across the State to ensure all families are afforded comprehensive and responsive support so they are healthy, learning, and thriving now and in the future. We have much to celebrate!

As the state's advisory council on early childhood care and education, the Council for Thriving Children is co-led by New Hampshire's Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Education. Council membership includes family member advocates, early childhood experts, health care leaders, state legislators, and Commissioners from state agencies. The Council, established in 2020 by Executive Order, held its first in-person meeting during the summer of 2021 at the Governor's Mansion.

Similar to last year's report, the 2021 Year-In-Review includes 20 stories illustrating how the Granite State is working towards New Hampshire's Strategic Plan for Early Childhood goals and objectives. The report is organized by four key goals identified within the strategic plan, which include:

GOAL 1: Positive Learning Experiences

Effective learning opportunities are provided in all settings, including the home, child care, and after-school programs, preschools, and elementary schools.

GOAL 2: Healthy Children and Families

Children and families throughout our state have access to the best opportunities for early and life-long health.

GOAL 3: Strong Families

Families have the skills, basic resources, and supports to promote their children's development and learning before birth and continuing through age five and beyond. a bright future ahead.



Welcome
Continued

GOAL 4: Statewide Coordination

NH's young children and their families have the benefit of well-coordinated early childhood programs and services that work effectively together on their behalf.

Following the presentation of the 20 stories, you will find a crosswalk to illustrate how each story aligns with one of the strategic plan goal areas. These stories represent just a snapshot of initiatives happening across the state. We celebrate all early childhood initiatives occurring at the local, regional, and state level.

Please join me in honoring the shared commitment among elected leaders, early childhood professionals, and families working to ensure our youngest residents have a bright future ahead.

Sincerely,

Christina Lachance

Christina Lachance, Director, NH Council for Thriving Children



GOAL 1

Positive Learning Experiences

Effective learning opportunities are provided in all settings, including the home, child care, and after school programs, preschools, and elementary schools.

Expanding Family Choice through Creative Education Models

“It is imperative that we empower individual families by giving them the support they need to get the education that is the right fit for their children. Education Freedom Accounts ensure and support a high quality, flexible, and specialized publicly funded education for New Hampshire students.”

KATE BAKER DEMERS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
CHILDREN'S SCHOLARSHIP FUND NH

Over the past year, the New Hampshire (NH) Department of Education (DOE) spearheaded several new initiatives to meet the individualized needs of students whose learning was disrupted by the pandemic. Aligning with the [New Hampshire Strategic Plan for Early Childhood](#), these efforts further Goal 1: Positive Learning Experiences, recognizing families' dual role as both recipients and providers of services.

DOE's Recovering Bright Futures initiative provides families the opportunity to access small-group instruction through [Learning Pods](#). These small, in-person, multi-age groups of students allow children to stabilize and accelerate learning to encourage parity with their peers. Learning Pods grew in popularity during the pandemic as parents chose to provide students with continued in-person learning and peer interaction in a trauma-sensitive environment outside of remote learning. DOE accessed resources from [Prenda](#) to implement Learning Pods that utilize state-of-the-art online tools and project-based learning. Thus far, 20 community Learning Pods have been established across the state, with approximately 150 students participating.

In November 2021, NH's first round of Education Freedom Account (EFA) funding was made available to eligible families to subsidize customized learning, tutoring, career or technical schools, homeschooling, or other non-public school fees. Families of more than 1,600 children throughout the state accessed this flexible funding, empowering them with greater choice to bolster and personalize their child's academic experience.

Reinforcing Kindergarten Success

“There is no doubt that I have never worked harder, shed so many tears, or learned so much in the last months. What a gift to have the opportunity to be working with [coach] as I began to navigate the unexpectedly challenging role of facilitating learning in my classroom!”

- KINDERGARTEN TEACHER REFLECTING ON HER PARTICIPATION IN THE KINDERGARTEN PLAY-BASED LEARNING COACHING PROGRAM

A key strategy of [New Hampshire's Strategic Plan for Early Childhood](#) is to support young children through the transition to Kindergarten. Staff of NH's Preschool Development Grant initiative assembled a Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA)/ Transition Task Force to evaluate Kindergarten assessment tools and transition best practices. The Task Force members included representatives from the NH DOE and Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), private early childhood programs and family organizations, public school teachers and administrators, policymakers, and parents.

The Task Force ultimately endorsed three assessment tools to measure skill and knowledge development across several domains, aligning with New Hampshire's Kindergarten Readiness Indicators. These assessments include Teaching Strategies GOLD, the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP), and Child Observation Record (COR) Advantage. In addition, the Task Force endorsed nine Kindergarten transition practices that facilitate a child's move from home or early care settings to Kindergarten. These include readiness camps, transferring student records, parent surveys, orientation sessions, classroom observations, information sharing, family visits, supporting Kindergarten enrollment, and home visits by teachers to get to know families.

Another key strategy adopted across NH to support Kindergarten success is practice-based coaching for Kindergarten teachers. This model helps teachers support learning through guided play in their classrooms. This evidence-based practice incorporates how children learn with what they need to learn. Twenty Kindergarten teachers across the state received individualized coaching in 2021, including bi-weekly one-on-one sessions, professional development opportunities, monthly small group meetings with other participating teachers, and three meetings of the full cohort of teachers.



Advancing Social-Emotional Learning

As a component of social-emotional learning efforts targeting early childhood programs, many NH schools participated in [Choose Love](#), aimed at creating safer and more loving schools, homes, and communities. Choose Love is now accessed by 547 schools across the state. The Choose Love at Home Program has expanded, growing from 200 participants in 2020 to 796 in 2021. NH also recently launched the Choose Love for Caregivers program, which will soon be available for professionals and foster parents throughout NH.

In addition, the Choose Love NH Tour was launched in Fall 2021 to nurture mental health and wellbeing through a series of family events held in 17 locations across the state. Also, in 2021, the nation's first Choose Love for Corrections was launched in partnership with the NH Correctional Facility for Women.

In 2021, NH also expanded the number of early childhood programs receiving coaching and training supports, increasing their capacity to implement the [Pyramid Model \(PM\)](#), a framework of evidence-based practices for promoting healthy social and emotional development in young children. A new cohort of seven Master Cadre trainers and coaches were trained to support long-term PM implementation with NH-based experts, bringing the total number to fourteen. The PM is currently being implemented in 24 early childhood centers in NH, with 62 practitioners actively adopting this framework.

Online PM professional development modules are also available at no cost for early childhood programs, thanks to the NH DHHS and the DOE. These online modules provide training on the PM evidence-based practices within various settings (Birth to 5, Infant/Toddler, Preschool). Training modules are also related to trauma-informed care, coaching, wellness, and more.



Responding to COVID-19 Across the Education System

“New Hampshire has implemented a number of initiatives and innovative programs as a result of the federal education funds – dollars that are being used to address missed learning and decreased social engagement... the Recovering Bright Futures program, ReKINDling Curiosity, Yes! Every Student, and other projects all with the focus of supporting our students, families and educators.”

FRANK EDELBLUT,
COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION

As the NH DOE continued to grapple with COVID-19 in 2021, state officials took important steps to combat the effects of the pandemic on teachers, students, and families. Through several separate COVID relief funds, NH schools had access to more than \$650 million to respond to and recover from the impact of COVID on students and learning. Funding was used to implement strategies to meet students’ academic, behavioral, mental, and physical health needs.

In one example, the ReKINDling Curiosity program, DOE partnered with NH summer camps to help low-income students access enrichment programming throughout the state. The program partnered with the [Community Behavioral Health Association](#) to offer mental health training and resources to camp counselors to better support children in their care. Another example of DOE implementing COVID-relief funding is the effort to support professional development for about 1,000 teachers, including offering hybrid/remote teaching training through a partnership with Granite State College.

NH received an additional \$2.3 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to support the often-unique needs of children experiencing homelessness. This funding supported trauma-informed professional development opportunities, increased social worker staffing, and expanded hours for school-based liaisons who identify, outreach to, and support homeless students.

In June 2021, the DOE allocated a portion of CARES Act funding to launch YES! (Yes! Every Student) to provide year-long support to families in need to ensure an uninterrupted educational pathway by means of tuition reimbursement, tutoring, therapy, and services for students with disabilities.

Promoting and Expanding Play-Based Learning

In January of 2021, the University of New Hampshire (UNH) Early Learning Coaching Team, currently funded by the [Preschool Development Grant \(PDG\)](#), convened the NH Play-Based Learning Task Force to support young children's development. The Task Force's work aligns with PDG's goal of *enhancing collaboration within early childhood systems by sharing best practices among early childhood education providers throughout the state*. Also, a key PDG objective is supporting the implementation of play-based learning and evaluating the effectiveness of embedded coaching to support guided play, classroom interactions, and child outcomes. The Task Force was made up of a broad range of early childhood experts, including representatives from The Children's Museum of NH, DOE, and Head Start programs, along with Kindergarten and preschool teachers, among others.

Over the past year, the Task Force met virtually to build a collaborative infrastructure among early childhood professionals and organizations to share play-based learning best practices and opportunities. Task Force members learned about complementary play-based learning projects in the state and shared this information with other interested partners. Also, the Task Force established connections across schools, homes, and communities to promote the practice of play-based learning. Through these efforts, the Task Force identified potential concepts for replication or future expansion of play-based learning models in NH. During the summer, coaches and teachers who participated in the UNH coaching project [see [Reinforcing Kindergarten Success](#)] gathered with NH's First Lady, Valerie Sununu, and state leaders at the Governor's mansion to celebrate the importance of playful learning. Many teachers expressed appreciation of the professional growth gained through this opportunity.



The Task Force's 2021 accomplishments include ongoing collaborations with Family Resource Centers, widespread distribution of play-based learning resources, and the Coaching Team's participation in family-centered community events statewide.



GOAL 2

Healthy Children and Families

Children and families throughout our state have access to the best opportunities for early and life-long health.

Improving Newborn Screening Through Integrated Systems

Every newborn in NH is offered testing to identify a group of health disorders that aren't otherwise found at birth. With a simple blood test, hearing screen, and a quick check of the oxygen in the baby's blood, infants are screened for rare genetic conditions, metabolic disorders, and other conditions that can cause serious health problems.

In 2021, the Maternal and Child Health Section (MCHS) of the DHHS Division of Public Health Services streamlined and integrated data systems for Newborn Screening Programs, ensuring that infants in the Granite State receive screenings and appropriate follow-up necessary to help them thrive.

The data integration projected combined multiple data systems into one central system. The new database offers a comprehensive point of care system for newborn screening (blood spot), hearing screening, critical congenital heart defects, and birth conditions. The data system has the ability to electronically share data between hospital electronic medical records, state data systems, and special screening devices. The goal of this streamlined system is to make it easier to connect infants and their families to specialty care as soon as possible.

In 2021, approximately 11,500 infants received at least one of the three screenings. The integrated system maximizes data to ensure that no infants are missed and that every infant receives necessary follow-up supports if needed.



Bringing Wellness Resources to Manchester Neighborhoods



With funding from the [Community Collaborations to Strengthen and Preserve Families](#) grant through the NH DHHS, Amoskeag Health launched Manchester Wellness on Wheels (MWOW). Led by Amoskeag Health's LAUNCH Manchester initiative, with partnership from Solution Health and Elliot Hospital, MWOW offered community-based events for families with young children.

The MWOW planning team used the [Manchester Community Needs Assessment Map](#), supported through the [Predict, Align, Prevent \(PAP\) program](#). The map uses geospatial risk analysis and strategic alignment of community initiatives to identify protective and risk factors in neighborhoods to strengthen primary prevention programs that keep kids and families safe. Over the summer, MWOW held events at Manchester Housing and Redevelopment Authority's Elmwood Gardens and Kelley Falls housing developments. In addition, events were held at Gossler Park School and Beech Street Elementary School.

Community partners -- ORIS-Fresh Sart Farms, Southern NH Services, WIC nutrition program, UNH Cooperative Extension, Easterseals Child Development Center, NH Food Bank, and YMCA of Downtown Manchester -- attended the event. Representatives from the City of Manchester Health Department, School District, Parks and Recreation, Library, and the Mayor's Office also participated. Providers shared information about available family resources, distributed oral health care kits, and surveyed parents and caregivers to further identify needs. MWOW events also featured a mobile van providing COVID-19 vaccines, access to the Bookmobile, lawn games, and a visit from Patch -- Manchester Police Department's comfort dog.

Amoskeag Health received the [US Department of Drug Enforcement Administration's Operation Engage Excellence in Leadership Award](#) for its meaningful work supporting Manchester families at-risk through MWOW, as well as LAUNCH Manchester, Community Schools, and the Adverse Childhood Experiences Response Team (ACERT).



Addressing Food Insecurity Among Families

In 2021, agencies and service providers across NH took steps to address the growing challenge of food insecurity, which reached crisis levels due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The DOE continued to promote free school meals, available for all children in FY2021-22 as part of the US Department of Agriculture's COVID-19 response. DOE's Office of Nutrition Programs and Services provided guidance to local agencies and schools to help distribute more than 13 million meals to children throughout the state.

Complementing these efforts, the DHHS enhanced its Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in 2021 to support families in need. First, Emergency Allotment benefits (EA) enabled DHHS to increase monthly benefits to SNAP-eligible households; since 2020, families have received \$135.6 million in EA payments. DHHS also facilitated the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT), which provided benefits to households whose children were at home during the pandemic. During the 2020-2021 school year and summer, the P-EBT program provided approximately \$173 million in funds for NH families whose children were approved for participation in the National School Lunch Program. Finally, DHHS's SNAP office implemented waivers to enable families to apply for benefits by phone, and to shop for food online, limiting the risk of exposure and infection. Approximately \$15.1 million EBT payments have been spent through this program.



Beyond SNAP, DHHS also reduced barriers for eligible participants to access support through Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). Participants could apply or renew their enrollment remotely and participate in virtual nutritional education and breastfeeding support. Efforts are underway to re-instate the WIC farmer's market benefits, allowing families to buy fresh, local produce.

The pandemic catalyzed the creation of several statewide coalitions to address food insecurity. The NH Food Access Coalition and the Manchester Food Collaborative, for example, have gained momentum over the last year by engaging in advocacy and outreach efforts to combat hunger among NH residents.

Increasing Access to Mental Health Services in the North Country

In 2021, as leadership partners in the collective impact work of the Coos Coalition for Young Children and Families, North Country Education Services and Northern Human Services (NHS) identified the need to bolster the region's ability to address children's mental health by training eight clinicians in Child-Parent Psychotherapy (CPP). CPP is an intervention for families with young children who have experienced at least one traumatic event. Northern Human Services, which serves Carroll and Coos counties and 17 towns in Upper Grafton County, provided this training with support from the NH Division of Public Health Services Community Collaborations program for seven of their staff and one private clinician. Bringing CPP to this region has provided families with local access to an evidence-based practice that targets trauma in young children and statistically decreases the number of future involvements with the Division for Children, Youth and Families (DCYF).

CPP is ideal for children birth through age five who are experiencing behavior, attachment, or mental health problems, including posttraumatic stress disorder. The main goal of CPP is to support and strengthen the child's relationship with a parent or caregiver. The fortified relationship helps to restore the child's sense of safety and attachment and improve cognitive, behavioral, and social functioning. This year, NHS served 41 parent/child dyads through this model.

With the COVID-19 pandemic continuing to affect the lives of children and families, the American Academy of Pediatrics and other organizations have declared a national state of emergency in children's mental health. The eight clinicians who completed CPP training have started clinical supervision and will be fully certified in March 2022.



CHILD-PARENT PSYCHOTHERAPY MAY HELP CHILDREN WHO:

- Have been through the loss of a loved person, separation, serious medical procedures, abuse, or violence at home or in the community
- Show difficult behaviors
- Experience a change in placement or caregivers
- Live with a family member with physical or mental health difficulties

ReKINDling Curiosity Through Summer Camp Experiences

“The launch of the ReKINDling Curiosity program marks another step forward in getting back to normal, and in making sure that our kids are equipped with the social, emotional, and educational resources needed to do so.”

– GOVERNOR CHRIS SUNUNU

The DOE launched [ReKINDling Curiosity](#) in summer 2021 to provide every child the opportunity to attend summer camp. ReKINDling Curiosity was created in response to the disruption to children’s mental and behavioral health resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. [Research](#) shows that children of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities benefit from exposure to short-term summer enrichment programs.

For children from low-income families or children with disabilities, summer enrichment opportunities that support social, emotional, and mental health are needed now more than ever. The ReKINDling Curiosity program offsets the cost of summer camps for qualifying students who attended a camp on an approved list. In 2021, 28 camps participated in the program, and 311 students benefitted from the chance to experience a quality camp that may not have otherwise been accessible to them.

Providing an opportunity for a positive childhood camp experience is crucial for improving children’s social, emotional, and mental wellness and aligns with the NH Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Goal 2: Healthy Children and Families. After a successful first summer, ReKINDling Curiosity will continue in the summer of 2022, when even more children are expected to benefit.



GOAL 3

Strong Families

Families have the skills, basic resources, and supports to promote their children's development and learning before birth and continuing through age five and beyond.

Mitigating the Impact of COVID-19 on Families

"My family and I were struggling quite a bit. The stress of our daily lives was starting to take a toll on our mental health and we couldn't get ahead financially. We found ourselves living paycheck to paycheck struggling to afford essentials. The Emergency Rental Assistance gave us a breath of fresh air and the opportunity to have some relief mentally and financially. "

-NH RESIDENT AND RECIPIENT OF
EMERGENCY RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

New Hampshire families benefited from a range of resources to help mitigate the ongoing impact of COVID-19. In February 2021, Governor Christopher Sununu announced the federally funded New Hampshire Emergency Rental Assistance Program through the Governor's Office for Emergency Relief and Recovery (GOFERR). It is administered by NH Housing, in collaboration with GOFERR and the state's five Community Action Partnership agencies. The program provides financial assistance for NH renters who cannot pay their rent and utilities during the pandemic. In the program's first year, over 13,000 households received assistance from this fund.

In March, the DHHS launched the Vaccine & Immunization Network Interface, providing a centralized access point for NH residents to schedule vaccine appointments with greater efficiency.

With support from the DHHS, Division of Public Health Services, New Hampshire Children's Trust (NHCT) partnered with Family Resource Centers (FRC) to launch a COVID-19 Health Disparities Resource Navigation Project across the Family Resource Center network. Fourteen Resource Navigators were trained to identify, engage, and support families challenged by the pandemic. Resource Navigators are embedded in FRCs serving nine of NH's ten counties and are available to help hundreds of families access state benefits, resources, programs, and services and help close gaps and address disparities in health outcomes.

Strengthening Families Across New Hampshire

In 2021, New Hampshire Children's Trust (NHCT) continued work toward a NH where all children are free from child abuse and neglect by promoting strong families, supporting child and family-serving organizations, and engaging in state-level system change. NHCT launched [New Hampshire Family NOW](#), a podcast series featuring frank conversation about the ups and downs of parenting. Co-hosted by NHCT senior staff, over the past year, podcasts have showcased representatives from the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) NH, Friends of Aine (center for grieving children and families), and Waypoint, among others. NH Family Now is accessible on Spotify, Google Podcasts, Amazon Music, Stitcher, and iHeart Radio.

Additionally, in April 2021, NHCT released the [Be Prevention Resource Guide](#) during Child Abuse Prevention Month. This Resource Guide highlighted statewide activities and services to support parents and caregivers, strengthen the family unit, and create stronger communities. NHCT also included tip sheets on helping kids cope with stress and self-care for parents, and a protective factors checklist for families.

To enhance statewide efforts to create a robust and culturally competent child and family well-being system, NHCT has been involved in two major initiatives: leading New Hampshire's efforts as a participant in [Thriving Families, Safer Children: A National Commitment to Well-being](#). This nationwide learning community, launched by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, US Children's Bureau, and Prevent Child Abuse America, endeavors to engage public, private, and philanthropic sectors. Still in the early planning stage, New Hampshire's Thriving Families Leadership Team is working to create a system that benefits all children and families, elevating the voices of parents/caregivers and youth with lived experience in the child welfare system. The second initiative includes leading and supporting local family resource centers to develop a sustainable network of Family Resource Centers of Quality by providing backbone support, a vehicle to direct funding, and training and technical assistance.



Raising Awareness about the Critical Role Family Voices Play

“Meaningful family engagement can be the spark that ignites the potential in all of us — as families, service providers, communities, and systems builders. Family voices build connection and understanding. They make space for families and those who serve them to learn alongside one another and co-create the best solutions possible.”


- ROBIN DEALMEIDA
FAMILY ENGAGEMENT PROJECT DIRECTOR
PARENT INFORMATION CENTER

The Parent Information Center of NH and NH Family Voices have worked with NH families, educators, and providers to build trusting, goal-oriented partnerships for over 40 years. In September of 2021, these organizations combined forces with New Hampshire Children’s Trust to launch the **YOUR VOICE** campaign, promoting statewide dialogue about the power and potential of family voice. Through **YOUR VOICE**, these organizations are building awareness about the critical role family voice plays in early childhood healthcare, education, and family support systems.

The **YOUR VOICE** campaign includes easy-to-understand videos, podcasts, toolkits, and infographics featuring real Granite State families and service providers. **YOUR VOICE** resources explore the importance of family voice and the many ways it improves outcomes for both families and the systems they interact with daily. NH families and early childhood professionals can access **YOUR VOICE** resources as a starting point to build their vision of family engagement together.



Connecting Child Care and Early Learning Providers with Families



"We now have 10 [children on scholarship], which is about 50% of our current enrollment. They have sought us out, I believe at least some are from viewing that we accept a scholarship and our details on the NH Connections provider search tool for families."

-NH CHILD CARE PROVIDER

DHHS launched the **NH Connections** website in 2021 with a grant from the United States Department of Health and Human Services Child Care and Development Fund. NH Connections provides critical information on child care, early learning, and afterschool resources, as well as referrals for families, providers, and communities.

Through **NH Connections**, DHHS helps families make informed choices among diverse types of child care programs, including center-based and family child care. Through web-based fact sheets on the importance of developmental screening and milestones for a child's growth, NH Connections helps families become more engaged in their child's development. During the last quarter of 2021, NH Connections registered more than 40,000 views from at least 10,000 unique users.

Embedded within the **NH Connections** website is the *NH Connections Information System (NHCIS)*, an integrated data platform that benefits professionals and administrators based on their unique needs. For example, NHCIS connects early childhood professionals with resources for professional development, up-to-date information on licensing requirements, information on available grant funding and how to apply, and access to no-cost online training. To date, NHCIS has served more than 31,800 unique users.

Supporting Incarcerated Parents by Strengthening Families

The [Family Connections Center \(FCC\)](#), a family resource center located within each NH prison, provides incarcerated parents with education and support to strengthen their connection to their families while facilitating ties to their community. Over the past year, the FCC taught parenting education classes, facilitated support groups, and created opportunities for incarcerated parents to have healthy interactions with their children via video visits and participation in a summer camp.

In 2021, Waypoint NH and the NH Department of Justice received a federal grant to create [Family Ties Inside Out](#), which develops a coordinated system to support incarcerated parents, their children, and the parents/caregivers of the child during the period of incarceration. This funding expands the FCC's programming by adding family counseling, family mediation, and increased video visits. Also, the FCC created community support groups for children and their caregivers.

A hand-sewn "hug" created by an incarcerated parent.



An additional full-time staff position, supported by NH Division of Public Health Services, Maternal and Child Health Section, Community Collaborations program funding, was hired for the Northern NH Correctional Facility, permitting programming to be consistent across all the prisons. These funds have also supported equipment purchases to facilitate remote teaching, as well as the creation of audiobooks and hand-sewn "hugs" created by parents that children can wrap themselves in whenever they miss their parents. Finally, the FCC purchased children's books about parental incarceration offered to every elementary school in NH to support the 15,000 children in NH who have an incarcerated parent.

Highlighting the challenges of parenting while incarcerated, the FCC and New Futures hosted four virtual screenings of [Tre Maison Dasan](#) with a final in-person event in October 2021; all screenings were followed by facilitated discussions by young adults who experienced parental incarceration. This documentary explores the impact of parental incarceration in support of the [#breakthestigma](#) movement. These challenges were also highlighted in August 2021 when FCC Administrator Kristina Toth and Resident Tony Hebert, father of three, discussed the challenges of parenting while incarcerated on the NH Children's Trust [NH Family NOW](#) podcast. Most recently, the [NH Chronicle](#) featured a story about how the FCC helps kids remain connected to their incarcerated parents.



GOAL 4

Statewide Coordination

New Hampshire's young children and their families have the benefit of well-coordinated early childhood programs and services that work effectively together on their behalf.

Building a Regional Early Childhood Infrastructure

With PDG funding, NH embarked on creating a regional early childhood system of well-coordinated partnerships that support coordination and collaboration between schools, early childhood care and education, and family support programs, with a goal of better meeting the needs of families and providers.

The regional system was designed by an Early Childhood System Development Workgroup with representatives from NH's DHHS, DOE, and PDG staff. The Workgroup benefitted from expertise from national consultants at the [Preschool Development Grant Birth-5 Technical Assistance Center](#).

In early 2021, the Workgroup explored a range of frameworks to best engage and support families, community partners, and childcare and early education providers, and support communication pathways between regions and State partners. The Workgroup used available data to guide decision-making, including information gathered through extensive surveying of community partners and [interactive community maps](#) developed by Abt Associates and extensive stakeholder input. In April 2021, more than 300 participants joined a Stakeholder Engagement Meeting, and approximately 200 individuals and groups completed a survey to inform the design of the regional structure.

In August 2021, NH rolled out its regional system by awarding \$350,000 grants to each of seven regional leads tasked with building a regional early childhood infrastructure. The Regional Leads were also eligible for additional funding to support region-wide early childhood program enhancements identified by the Regional Lead partnership. With the new regional system established and grant funding in place, Regional Leads are working collaboratively to build sustainable partnerships, implement programs to meet the needs they have identified within their communities, and develop long-term targeted strategies.

REGIONS AND REGIONAL LEADS

1. Monadnock United Way (Greater Monadnock, Greater Sullivan & Upper County)

2. Granite United Way (Capital Area)

3. United Way of Greater Nashua (Greater Nashua)

4. Amoskeag Health (Greater Derry & Manchester)

5. Granite United Way (Central NH, Lakes)

6. Granite United Way/Greater Seacoast Region (Strafford County & Seacoast)

7. Children Unlimited (North Country & Carroll County)



Redesigning the Quality Recognition and Improvement System for Early Childhood Programs

GRANITE STEPS FOR QUALITY VISION:

Caring adults work to build a strong foundation for children's healthy development through a system that recognizes program quality using defined standards and measurable outcomes to ensure future success.

In 2021, the DHHS Bureau of Child Development and Head Start Collaboration embarked on a redesign of the Quality Recognition and Improvement System (QRIS) for licensed early childhood and Out-of-School Time (OST) programs. The resulting [*Granite Steps for Quality \(GSQ\)*](#) supports programs on their path to enhanced quality so that children thrive and succeed in school and beyond.

GSQ promotes programs that optimize each child's development, learning, and health; engage families and communities in partnerships; cultivate life-long learners; and grow NH's future workforce. The four GSQ Quality Steps are defined by criteria specific to program type based on two standards—Staff Qualifications and Learning Environments.

GSQ encourages programs to meet quality early childhood standards by offering coaching, technical assistance, and online training along with generous financial incentives. Programs serving children in New Hampshire's Child Care Scholarship Program receive additional financial incentives. Through the NH Connections Information System, families seeking high-quality care (including center-based, home-based, Head Start, and OST programs) can search for programs that proudly display their Quality Designation on their program profile.

Sustaining Child Care Providers through a Pandemic

NH has taken a multi-pronged approach to support child care providers throughout the pandemic so that they can best support children and families. To date, the State of New Hampshire has received over \$142 million in federal relief funding to assist the child care industry with navigating the COVID-19 pandemic; of these dollars, only \$29 million in APRA Discretionary Dollars and approximately \$2 million in ARPA stabilization funds have not yet been allocated.

Notably, in 2021, early care and education providers across the state received funding through the DHHS Child Care Achieving Stabilization Program (CCASP), which provided grants to child care providers to support operating costs. Information and assistance to access this funding was provided through the newly launched **NH Connections** website.

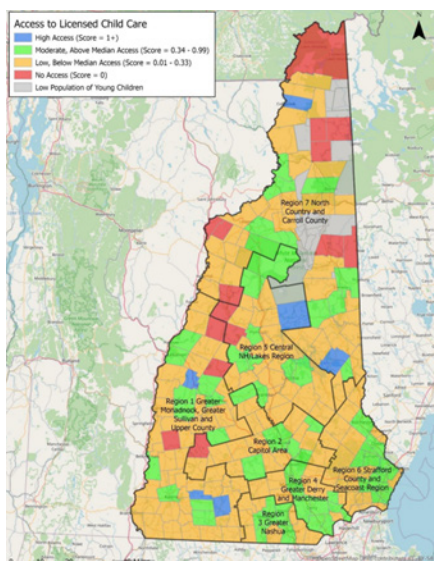
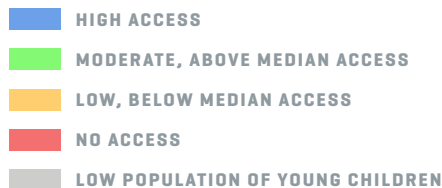
Also available on **NH Connections**, Child Care Aware of NH, powered by Southern NH Services, released a mini video series, [*Voices from the Field*](#), in which child care leaders from across the state shared stories of how they adapted their services to best support young children and families. Videos feature best practices for face mask use, drop off and pick up transitions, and sharing group space, among other topics.

To ensure child care providers have the latest COVID-19 data, DHHS's Division of Public Health Services hosted Education and Child Care Partner calls throughout 2021. During these virtual meetings, DHHS shared epidemiology updates on the number of new cases, percent of positive tests, level of community transmission, and school and child care clusters and outbreaks. These meetings also provided school nurses and child care providers with guidance on operating child care programs during these challenging times.



Using Community Mapping Data for Program Improvement

ACCESS SCORES BY NEW HAMPSHIRE EARLY CHILDHOOD REGION



In 2021, the UNH PDG team and their partners at the DHHS, DOE, and Council for Thriving Children engaged consulting firm Abt Associates to complete a [community mapping project](#). These community maps, which included static maps and an [interactive online map](#), were initially created to identify child care deserts — communities with insufficient child care slots to adequately serve the number of local families with young children.

Among the key takeaways, the maps revealed that, on average, there is one child care slot available per every three NH children, within a 20-minute drive from the family home. Additionally, child care slots are particularly difficult to access in rural areas. Understanding these child care gaps helps fulfill the PDG goal of improving access to quality child care by building a coordinated system.

In addition to the child care deserts, Abt Associates created maps identifying the locations of child and family service organizations across the state. These maps, which can be overlaid with variable data to identify locations of family support programs, home visiting services, child welfare agencies, school districts, and mental health supports, show where catchment areas overlap among provider agencies, and identify coverage gaps where families do not have access to critical services in their communities. These maps were used to inform the creation of a regional early childhood system.

Amplifying Family Voice through the Birth–8 Family and Community Advisory Team

The Birth–8 (B–8) Family and Community Advisory Team is one of four key quadrants that make up New Hampshire’s Early Childhood governance structure; additional quadrants include DHHS, DOE, and the Early Childhood Scientific Advisory Panel. The Family and Community Advisory Team is convened by NH Family Voices and was created to serve as a conduit for family members and community-based organizations to communicate the needs of young children and families to the Council for Thriving Children.

NH Family Voices recruited and established the 16-member group, comprised of 50% parent/family members and 50% representatives from community-based agencies serving children and families. Recruitment efforts targeted under-represented groups, including those living with socioeconomic challenges, parents of children with disabilities, fathers, and others whose lived experience lends valuable perspective. The B–8 Family and Community Advisory Team’s role is to advise the Council for Thriving Children on the strengths, needs, and experience of those “in the field” – either parenting young children birth through age eight or providing services to those families.

The B–8 Family and Community Advisory Team was established in late 2021. In 2022, members will meet monthly and set goals for the coming year. This unique organization will empower families by giving parents a voice in advocating for the needs of young children and families across the state.



2021 Stories Crosswalk

#	STORY	GOAL			
		1	2	3	4
1	Expanding Family Choice through Creative Education Models	X			
2	Reinforcing Kindergarten Success	X			
3	Advancing Social-Emotional Learning	X			
4	Responding to COVID-19 Across the Education System	X			
5	Promoting and Expanding Play-Based Learning	X			
6	Improving Newborn Screening Through Integrated Systems		X		
7	Bringing Wellness Resources to Manchester Neighborhoods		X		
8	Addressing Food Insecurity Among Families		X		
9	Increasing Access to Mental Health Services in the North Country		X		
10	ReKINDling Curiosity Through Summer Camp Experiences		X		
11	Mitigating the Impact of COVID-19 on Families			X	
12	Strengthening Families Across New Hampshire			X	
13	Raising Awareness about the Critical Role Family Voices Play			X	
14	Connecting Child Care and Early Learning Providers with Families			X	
15	Supporting Incarcerated Parents by Strengthening Families			X	
16	Building a Regional Early Childhood Infrastructure				X
17	Redesigning the Quality Recognition and Improvement System for Early Childhood Programs				X
18	Sustaining Child Care Providers through a Pandemic				X
19	Using Community Mapping Data for Program Improvement				X
20	Creating a B-8 Family and Community Advisory Board				X

Summary of NH Early Childhood Strategic Goals and Objectives

GOAL 1: POSITIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Effective learning opportunities are provided in all settings, including the home, child care, and after school programs, preschools, and elementary schools.

OBJECTIVES

- 1.1. Support families as children's primary teachers
- 1.2. Improve the overall quality of early childhood care and education supports and services
- 1.3. Expand access to and availability of early childhood care and education for young children
- 1.4. Create a stable and qualified early childhood learning and education workforce

GOAL 2: HEALTHY CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Children and families throughout our state have access to the best opportunities for early and life-long health.

OBJECTIVES

- 2.1. Improve access to and availability of universal (developmental, social-emotional, cognitive, academic, trauma) screening and services for children to promote optimal development
- 2.2. Support access to affordable health care for families
- 2.3. Support children's social and emotional development through easily accessible services and supports
- 2.4. Increase the capacity of all families to advocate for themselves and their children

Summary of NH Early Childhood Strategic Goals and Objectives

GOAL 3: STRONG FAMILIES

Families have the skills, basic resources, and supports to promote their children's development and learning before birth and continuing through age five and beyond.

OBJECTIVES

- 3.1. Support families in accessing the basic economic resources to support their children
- 3.2. Increase families' capacity to partner in the development, design, and delivery of the services they provide and receive
- 3.3. Connect families and caregivers, starting prenatally, with the supports they need to promote their child's optimal development

GOAL 4: STATEWIDE COORDINATION

NH's young children and their families have the benefit of well-coordinated early childhood programs and services that work effectively together on their behalf.

OBJECTIVES

- 4.1. Strengthen coordinated early childhood governance at all levels
- 4.2. Establish an integrated, cross-agency statewide Early Childhood Data System to improve program effectiveness and child and family outcomes
- 4.3. Support families and children as they transition between services and programs
- 4.4. Strengthen public awareness of the importance of early childhood, and available resources, services, and programs



This report was compiled and edited by Pear Associates.

This document was supported by the Preschool Development Grant, which is sponsored by the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (Award# 90TP0060-01-00). Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of any organization or agency that provided support for the project.