



Annual Report 2022-2023

The Council for Thriving Children presents the 2022/2023 annual report which provides a brief history and updates on current efforts to advise on the state's early childhood governance system.

Vision for New Hampshire's Early Childhood System

All New Hampshire families are afforded comprehensive and responsive supports, so they are healthy, learning, and thriving now and in the future.

Background/History

As the state's advisory council on early childhood care and education (ECCE), the Council for Thriving Children is co-led by New Hampshire's Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education (Patricia Tilley and Christine Brennan). Council membership includes family member advocates, early childhood experts, health and education leaders, philanthropy, state legislators, and Commissioners from other state agencies. The Council for Thriving Children, established in the first quarter of 2020, by Executive Order 2020-03¹, meets the federal Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007, Public Law 110-134, which requires establishment of a state advisory council. The Council's role is to advise and make recommendations to support the state's ECCE governance system. In addition to the Council for Thriving Children, NH's ECCE governance system includes:

Early Childhood Integration Teams (ECITs): Situated within the Department of Education and the Department of Health & Human Services, ECITs serve as the operational hub of the state's Early Childhood Governance Structure.

Birth through Eight (B-8) Family and Community Advisors: Led by NH Family Voices, this group, composed of diverse families, advocates, and early childhood professionals, plays a crucial role in shaping the direction of early childhood initiatives by providing feedback from families utilizing programs and initiatives in New Hampshire.

Early Childhood Scientific Advisory Panel: Under the leadership of the University of New Hampshire, this panel consists of researchers and professionals from across the state. They stand prepared to offer research and feedback upon request from the Departments and other advisory bodies.

¹ <https://www.governor.nh.gov/sites/g/files/ehbemt336/files/documents/2020-03.pdf>

Core Support Team: To facilitate seamless communication across the NH Early Childhood Governance Structure, the Council for Thriving Children's co-chairs, and leaders from each quadrant form the Core Support Team, which convenes regularly to ensure effective coordination and collaboration.

ECCE Coordination and Collaboration

Throughout the reporting period, the Council for Thriving Children convened on a quarterly basis, actively engaging in a multifaceted agenda. In addition to spearheading the development of New Hampshire's Strategic Plan (outlined below), Council Co-Chairs ensured Council Members were provided with an opportunity to delve into a diverse array of state-involved programs and initiatives aimed at bolstering early childhood education and family well-being. Their insights and feedback were helpful to administrators of the following key programs and initiatives:

- [NH's Paid Family Medical Leave Program](#)
- [NH Child Care Scholarship Program](#)
- [Waterford Upstart](#)
- [New Hampshire Loves Reading - a NH ED literacy campaign](#)
- [NH ED's Leaning Into Literacy initiative](#)
- [603 Bright Futures Survey](#)
- [NH State Health Improvement Plan](#)
- [COVID resources for schools and child care](#)
- [Children's Funding Project](#)
- [NH's Child Care Strengthening Plan/ARPA Discretionary Fund Plan](#)
- [Preschool Development Grant](#)
- [Preschool Development Grant Needs Assessment](#)
- [NH's Early Childhood Regional System](#)

This comprehensive list reflects the Council's dedication to staying informed and actively contributing to initiatives that positively impact early childhood education and family well-being in the state of New Hampshire.

In addition to quarterly meetings of the Council, the Core Support Team convened regularly, bringing together the designated leaders from each quadrant of New Hampshire's Early Childhood Governance Structure, namely NH ED, NH DHHS, B-8 Parent & Community Advisors, and the EC Scientific Advisory Panel. This dedicated team played a crucial role in supporting the strategic planning process during this period.

Their responsibilities included actively contributing to the development of a competitive Request for Proposal (RFP) and helping in the selection process for the eventual strategic plan writer. Moreover, the Core Support Team played an integral part in crafting the agenda for Council for Thriving Children meetings. Originally envisioned as a quarterly gathering initiated by the Council for Thriving Children co-

chairs, the team now convenes almost monthly due to the increased demand for communication, collaboration and coordination.

One noteworthy achievement of the Core Support Team during this period was the creation of a concise, one-page graphic (Figure 1) representing NH's Early Childhood Governance System, found below. This visual tool serves as an informative resource for parents and community members interested in understanding the intricacies of the state's early childhood initiatives.



Figure 1

Noteworthy Training and Technical Assistance

New Hampshire actively engages in numerous training and technical assistance programs funded by various federal grants related to early childhood care and education. In this context, we spotlight two specific opportunities focused on governance, finance, and public policy that have effectively involved multiple members of the Council for Thriving Children.

The Hunt Institute- The Hunt Institute Early Childhood Leadership Summit extended a prestigious invitation to New Hampshire in both 2022 and 2023. Founded in 2001 by James B. Hunt, Jr., former governor of North Carolina and education policy advocate, The Hunt Institute operates as an independent, nonprofit entity at Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy. It is dedicated to advancing education policy through research, educational partnerships, and events.

This exclusive summit, was designed to inspire and inform elected officials and policymakers, as well as New Hampshire's early childhood care and education leaders. The gathering, restricted to invitees, assembled a bipartisan group of state teams, including senior elected officials, gubernatorial staff, and influential figures in the early childhood sector. The event boasted the participation of early childhood leadership teams from all 50 states, territories, and the District of Columbia.

The summit and subsequent technical assistance offered a distinctive opportunity for engagement with thought leaders in the early childhood field, fostering connections within New England and nationwide. State teams, including New Hampshire's, pursued three overarching goals:

1. Stay informed on the latest research, innovations, and policy successes related to young children, families, the early childhood workforce, and the economic impact on states.
2. Collaborate closely with state-elected officials and early childhood administrators to analyze data and establish tailored goals addressing the specific early childhood education and policy requirements of each state. Including specific data relative to New Hampshire²
3. Forge valuable connections with elected policymakers and experts in the early childhood arena from across the nation.

Notable participants from New Hampshire included Council co-chairs Patricia Tilley, Public Health Director, and Christine Brennan, NH ED Deputy Commissioner, along with Council Members Chris Santaniello, DHHS Associate Commissioner; Rebecca Woitkowski, New Futures Director of Early Childhood; and Senator Rebecca Whitley. Accompanying them were additional early care and education champions, Representative Mary Jane Wallner (2022) and Senator Tim Lang (2023).

The summit emerged as an exceptional platform, facilitating collaboration, knowledge enhancement, and positive transformations in the field of early childhood education and policy. Significantly, New Hampshire legislators demonstrated a keen interest in exploring avenues for expanding early childhood mixed-delivery options and establishing a coordinated Office of Early Childhood, along with Pre-K opportunities within the Granite State.

² https://hunt-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/ECLS_DataPackets_NH.pdf

The Early Childhood Governance and Finance Project (ECGFP)- In 2023, New Hampshire was selected to participate in this philanthropy-supported multi-state initiative. The project strategically invests in organizations committed to enhancing governance and financing structures within their respective U.S. states, territories, and tribal nations. Prioritizing equity, supporting the early educator workforce, and enhancing access to high-quality services for children and families, ECGFP has extended its reach to eight states and territories, including the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, California, Illinois, Louisiana, Minnesota, Alaska, and New Mexico. Notably, Council Member Christina D'Allesandro played a pivotal role in securing this opportunity through her position at the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, with additional contributions from Council members Chris Santaniello, Christine Brennan, and Christina Lachance.

Throughout the year, the dedicated team actively engaged in meetings and various project-related activities, culminating in the national convening held from July 9-11th in California, facilitated by the Build Initiative. New Hampshire made an impact by serving as a panelist in the opening session titled "How We Govern: Strategies to Elevate Family and Provider Voices in Decision-Making." This session provided a platform for New Hampshire to share its progress, highlighting both opportunities and challenges encountered along the transformative journey.

Looking ahead, New Hampshire remains committed to the ECGFP in 2024, expanding its engagement by adding more Council Members to training and technical assistance activities. This ongoing commitment reflects the state's dedication to fostering positive change and contributing to the project's overarching goals.

NH Strategic Plan for Early Childhood

In 2022, the Council for Thriving Children initiated a robust strategic planning process. Following a rigorous Request for Proposal (RFP) process led by representatives from the Core Support Team, Council Members, and Parents in late 2021, Greenway Strategy Group was chosen to guide New Hampshire (NH) through various stages of the process, including stakeholder engagement, needs assessment, framework development, and the ultimate creation of a final report.

Recognizing the importance of this endeavor, the Council voted to establish a dedicated Strategic Plan Subcommittee. This Subcommittee boasted representation from the New Hampshire Child Care Advisory Council and the New Hampshire Wellness and Primary Prevention Council. Co-led by a parent representative and the Birth-8 Parent and Community quadrant, the Subcommittee placed a significant emphasis on engaging all key stakeholders across New Hampshire.

Throughout the summer of 2022, the Council actively involved state legislators, state agency executives, Early Childhood Integration Teams, community nonprofits, advocacy groups, families, parents, philanthropic leaders, and others. This inclusive approach encompassed interviews, focus groups, design sessions, virtual information exchanges, and community feedback sessions to gather diverse input and feedback.³

³ <https://councilforthrivingchildren.org/strategic-plan-resource>

The resulting strategic plan concentrates on five priority outcomes aimed at enhancing the early childhood system for key beneficiaries, namely children, families, and providers. These outcomes address performance trends and stakeholder perceptions, focusing on:

1. Increase families' partnership in, knowledge of, and choices for their child's development
2. Increase families' access to integrated quality early childhood opportunities and services
3. Increase comprehensive wellness of young children
4. Ensure children achieve early childhood developmental and educational goals
5. Increase providers' and educators' knowledge and access to resources for quality programs and services

With consensus on the priority outcomes, the Strategic Plan Subcommittee constructed a comprehensive [Strategic Plan Framework](#), which gained approval from the full Council in November 2022. By March 2023, the Council concluded its engagement with Greenway Strategy Group, leading to the finalization and publication of [NH's Strategic Plan for Early Childhood](#). This report was widely shared with the Core Support Team, Early Childhood Integration Teams, Council Members, early childhood stakeholders and the Governor's office.

Keen on tracking progress, Council members reconvened the Strategic Plan Subcommittee through the summer of 2023. The primary objectives were to gain a comprehensive understanding of and provide valuable feedback on a draft Crosswalk and Meta-analysis of state-level plans, developed in collaboration with Pear Associates and the Early Childhood Integration Teams. Additionally, the Subcommittee aimed to finalize Measures of Success, which were approved by the Council in October 2023.

The full report and recommendations, titled "Opportunities for New Hampshire's Early Childhood System: Recommendations Based on the Analysis of the Crosswalk of NH's Strategic Plan for Early Childhood and Current Plans and Initiatives Impacting the Lives of Young Children and Their Families," can be accessed [here](#).

The initiatives outlined in the strategic plan, coupled with the crosswalk analysis of state plans and recommendations, provide a flexible approach for NH's Department of Education (NH ED) and Department of Health and Human Services (NH DHHS) to create operational/action plans. This collaborative effort aims to enhance NH's Early Childhood System over the next three years while minimizing duplication of effort. The early childhood landscape in NH is marked by consensus and positive momentum. We look forward to working collaboratively on our collective commitment to increase wellness and educational opportunities for all NH children and families.

Respectfully submitted:

Patricia Tilley, Associate Commissioner, Department of Health and Human Services

Christine Brennan, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Education

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