Sustaining Early Success

Delaware's Strategic Plan for a Comprehensive Early Childhood System

2013

Partners in Early Success

The Early Childhood Council wishes to thank its community partners for their commitment and contributions to strengthening policies and programs that serve Delaware's young children and their families. Their ongoing partnership is essential for creating and sustaining the comprehensive early childhood system described in this plan.

AstraZeneca
Barclays Bank
Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation of Delaware
Capital One 360 (formerly ING)
Chichester duPont Foundation
Children and Families First
Delaware Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Delaware Association of School Administrators
Delaware Association for the Education of Young Children
Delaware Business Roundtable, Inc.
Delaware Head Start Association
Delaware Public Policy Institute
Delaware Chief School Officers Association
Delaware State Board of Education
Delaware State Chamber of Commerce
Delaware State Education Association
Delaware State University
Delaware Technical & Community College
DuPont
Family Support Coordinating Council
Governor's Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens
Home Visiting Advisory Group
Interdenominational Ministers Action Council
JP Morgan Chase
Latin American Community Center
La Esperanza
Longwood Foundation
Metropolitan Wilmington Urban League
Montessori Teachers Association of Delaware
Nemours Health and Prevention Services
PNC Bank
Prevent Child Abuse Delaware
Rodel Foundation of Delaware
Social Venture Partners Delaware
State of Delaware P-20 Council
Sussex County Early Childhood Council
United Way of Delaware
University of Delaware
Vision 2015
Wesley College
Wilmington Early Care and Childhood Council
Wilmington University
Workforce Investment Board
YMCA of Delaware

Community Partner Committee Chairs

The Council thanks the community partners who have committed to head the Strategic Goals Committees and help guide the implementation of this plan.

Mary Kate Mouser, *Executive Director, Nemours Health and Prevention Services*
Michelle Taylor, *President and CEO, United Way of Delaware*
Daniel Curry, *Superintendent, Lake Forest School District*
Ed Freel, *Senior Advisor to U.S. Senator Thomas R. Carper and Policy Scientist, Institute for Public Administration, University of Delaware*

This plan is dedicated to the families, providers, teachers, and healthcare professionals who are working each day to give all Delaware children a great start.

Join Us!

We are in the middle of a great story—a story about giving our state's children a great start in school and in life. I am eager to share this story with you here in the Delaware Early Childhood Strategic Plan and ask for your support. Investing wisely in early childhood affects our collective well-being, quality of life, and future prosperity as a state. We must act as responsible stewards for the next generation.

When I became Governor, we inventoried state policies impacting young children and their families and began to build the necessary infrastructure for a comprehensive and sustainable early childhood system that serves all Delaware children. Then, in 2011, at a time of economic uncertainty and tremendous budget pressure, we acted decisively to keep early childhood at the top of the state's investment priorities. With the strong support of the General Assembly, we invested an additional $22 million in high-quality early childhood initiatives, making it the largest new ongoing spending priority in the state. In 2012, our unique ability to work together positioned Delaware to win $50 million in the Early Learning Challenge federal grant competition. This award presents an exciting opportunity to keep the momentum high and step up our efforts.

We've come a long way, but we still have a lot of work to do. The number of high-needs children in high-quality programs is much too low, and too many Delaware children arrive at school without all the skills they need to succeed. This is not acceptable. If we want to create an educational system that produces young adults who enter the workforce equipped to compete and succeed in a global economy, we have to start at the beginning. We have to get it right the first time.

It takes more than education to help kids be ready for school—they also need good health care; appropriate social and emotional development opportunities; and strong support from their families and communities. Our state must continue to link these elements together to set each child up on a course toward lifelong success.

The good news is we know what works, we know where we need to go, and we know how to get there. When it comes to this endeavor, the evidence is irrefutable, the path forward is clear, and the stakes are profoundly important. In this plan are the areas that we've collectively chosen as significant priorities in the coming years. An incredible amount of work is being done across the state to further the goals outlined here. Now we need to accelerate that work and finish the job we have committed to do on behalf of our youngest citizens.

I hope you will join us in this extraordinary work. It is work that shapes lives. It is work that changes futures. It is work that will help our state thrive in the twenty-first century. It is work that will become our legacy.

Jack Markell

Governor Jack Markell

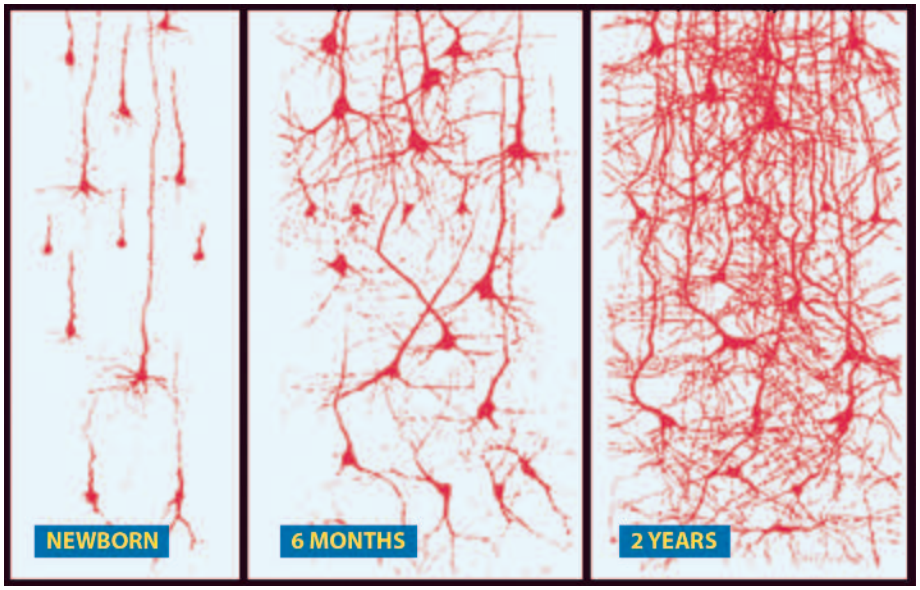
Early Childhood: The Window of Opportunity

Brain Development

Now, more than ever before, we know that the stakes are high for our young children. **Early experiences shape the brain's architecture and set the stage for a child's lifelong success.** Positive early experiences increase the likelihood of lifelong positive outcomes; negative experiences often lead to negative outcomes. Harvard's Center on the Developing Child found:

- **Ninety percent of brain development occurs by age five**; 700 neural connections are created every second of a child's early life.
- **Adult-child interactions literally "wire" a baby's brain** and determine that child's ultimate cognitive, social and emotional capacities.

Getting it right the first time is important. It is also more cost-effective. Public investment in early education must be aligned with what we know from neuroscience. **Early childhood is the critical period for investment in lifelong success.**

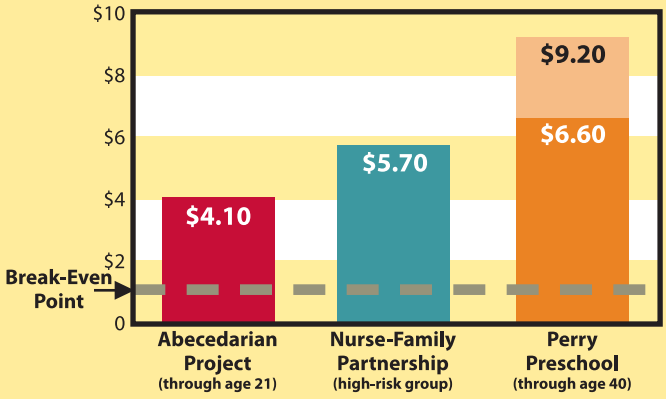


Neural connection formation, birth through age two, *www.developingchild.harvard.edu*

Economic Development

Early childhood development is economic development. Longitudinal studies show investment in early childhood generates multiple benefits—better learning outcomes, decreased crime and incarceration rates, reduced healthcare and social welfare expenditures, increased productivity and tax revenue, and even enhanced national security.

Early Childhood Return on Investment



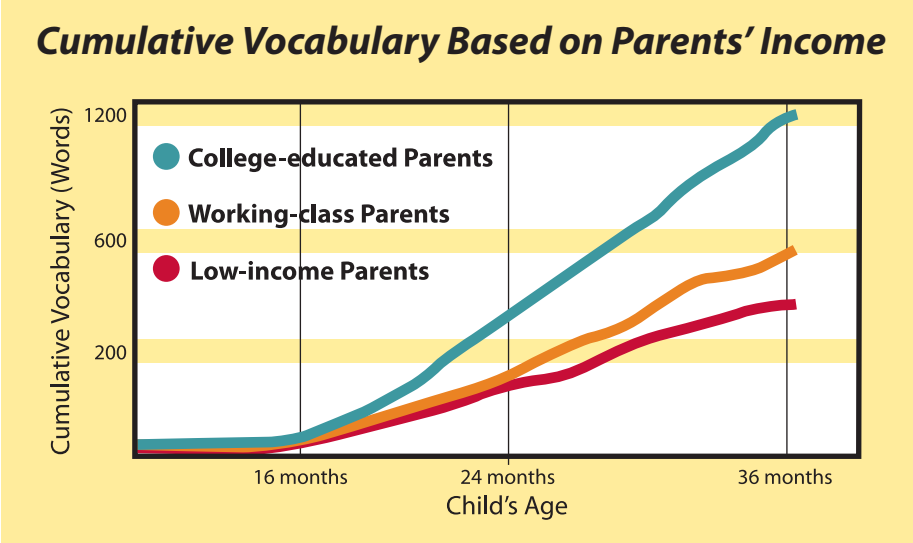
Three of the most rigorous long-term studies found high returns for every dollar invested in children of low-income households.

www.developingchild.harvard.edu

- **Economists estimate a 7–16% return on investment (ROI) in early education** for children from low-income households—an ROI that outpaces the average 6% annual return from the stock market since WWII (*www.heckmanequation.org*).
- **Investment in early childhood leads to increased earnings for individuals** and reduced public costs—crime cost, special education, and welfare savings (*www.developingchild.harvard.edu*).

Educational Outcomes

High-quality early childhood programs are essential to the overall effectiveness of public education.



www.developingchild.harvard.edu

- High-quality early learning, especially for children at risk, has been shown to significantly improve early literacy, language and math skills and to decrease special education placements by nearly 50% through second grade and reduce grade repetition by up to 33% through eighth grade (*www.partnershipforsuccess.org*).
- By age three, the typical vocabulary of children with high needs is roughly half the size of the 1,100-word vocabulary of children whose parents earn middle- to higher-level incomes. **Children's vocabulary at age three is strongly correlated with their literacy skills in third grade** (Hart & Risley, *Meaningful Differences* study, 1995).

College, Career, and Military Readiness

- Children of low-income households who participate in high-quality early education are **more likely to finish high school and twice as likely to attend college** (*www.nieer.org*).
- Seventy-five percent of young Americans are not qualified to join the military, according to the Department of Defense. Military recruitment experts support investment in early childhood education to improve graduation rates and lower incarceration rates—expanding the pool of potential military recruits (*www.cdn.missionreadiness.org*).

"There are only 2,000 days between the newborn baby and when that child will show up in kindergarten. It is urgent that we use the best scientific information to make sure we support all our children so they can succeed in school. Our children can't wait."

Dr. Andrew Meltzoff
Co-director,
University of Washington Institute for Learning and Brain Science

Creating Delaware's Comprehensive Early Childhood System

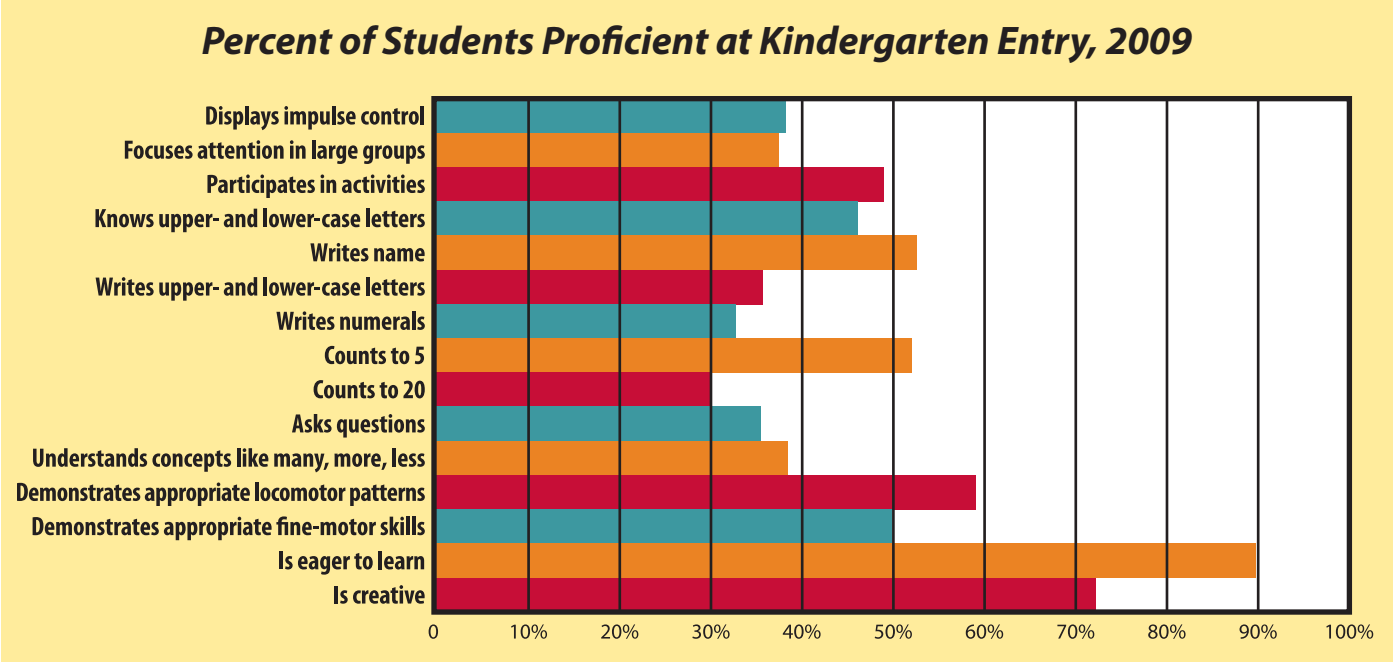
For two decades, a broad group of stakeholders has worked in concert to strengthen the state's early childhood programs and services. Since 2006, when the state's early childhood plan, **Early Success**, was last updated, that work has intensified in both focus and momentum.

- **Delaware Stars for Early Success (Stars)**, the state's Quality Rating and Improvement System, was established.
- **The Early Learning Foundations (ELFs)**, the state's early learning and development standards, were integrated with licensing standards and workforce competencies.
- The **Interagency Resource Management Committee (IRMC)**, responsible for oversight and coordination of early childhood programs, was strengthened with a broader mandate.
- The **Delaware Early Childhood Council (ECC)** was reconstituted as a stronger community partnership that advises decision-makers on improvements in policies and services.
- **Home Visiting** programs and **Help Me Grow**, a 211 call-in referral service, were expanded to support parents as their children's first teachers and healthcare providers.
- **State licensing requirements** were strengthened in the areas of child health, safety, and nutrition and are now a national model.
- A **Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework** and **Career Lattice** were adopted to provide coherent guidelines to support an effective early learning workforce.
- In 2011, Delaware created and funded a **tiered reimbursement system** for Purchase of Care subsidies that is tied to levels in Stars.
- In 2012, Delaware received a $50 million federal **Early Learning Challenge Grant.**

Delaware's comprehensive early childhood system will:

1. **Address the learning, physical and social-emotional health needs of *all* children from birth through third grade.**
2. **Engage and support families as first teachers and health providers.**
3. **Offer all children access to high-quality early learning and development programs and professionals.**
4. **Prepare all children to arrive at school ready and eager to learn and prepare schools to build upon these foundations.**
5. **Coordinate policies and programs across agencies to provide integrated, comprehensive services to young children and their families.**
6. **Mobilize Delaware's community partnerships to support all facets of children's development.**

While we have made much progress, our state continues to face serious challenges in supporting the development of its youngest citizens. In Delaware, 4 in 10 children, birth to age five, are from low-income families. Our state has the lowest developmental-screening rate in the nation (*www.commonwealthfund.org*). Among Delaware's early childhood workforce, only 1 in 3 has a bachelor's degree or higher (*decc.delaware.gov*). A 2009 study found that two-thirds of five-year-olds do not enter kindergarten with the necessary proficiencies for success.



Children Who Entered Public School Kindergarten in Delaware in the Fall of 2009, University of Delaware, 2010

Addressing these challenges and others has been a key driver in developing Delaware's strategic plan. Building on the momentum generated in recent years, we are committed to creating a sustainable early childhood system that generates positive outcomes for all young children and their families.

Fulfilling this commitment requires more than doing a better job at or filling gaps in what we are currently doing. Our existing system is not comprehensive, and it does not fully support the diverse collaborations among stakeholders that are essential for long-term sustainability. This strategic plan begins with a new, "bottom up" vantage point for evaluating what is needed and how it can best be achieved. It springs from a deeper understanding of the developmental needs of Delaware's young children and their families and leads us to recognize and advocate for a new arrangement of policies, programs, and practices that will address those needs in a comprehensive and sustainable fashion.

Delaware's commitment is that all its children will have access to an integrated early childhood system, from birth through third grade, that provides high-quality services and an environment that supports their growth, development, and learning, and prepares them for success in school and life.

A Pathway for Sustainable Change

Mobilizing Support

Our strategy builds on one of Delaware's great strengths—the capacity to mobilize across all sectors to address our community's most important challenges. A broad-based partnership of policymakers and advocates, early childhood educators and service providers, families, and public/private partners has been responsible for most of the early childhood improvements over the past two decades. That partnership must now be expanded and refocused to fully support all children as they grow, develop, and learn. **Mobilization of this partnership is the key to sustainability.** To support this effort, the Council has organized committees that will advise and guide the implementation of the strategic plan to make Delaware's early childhood system one of the most successful in the nation.

"I think…part of our system of reform has to include what we do in those early years of life and not just fixing our schools…. If they're not ready to learn by the third grade, they know they're behind. And by the sixth or seventh grade, they're thinking about dropping out. And as soon as they enter high school, they drop out. It is an unacceptable situation, our dropout rate."

Colin Powell
Retired Four-Star General
and former U.S. Secretary of State

A Long-Term Outlook

Many of the improvements needed to create a comprehensive early childhood system will be accelerated by the funding provided through the federal Early Learning Challenge Grant.

The strategies described in this plan incorporate the key commitments that Delaware made for use of grant funding from 2012–2015. **This strategic plan, however, extends beyond the grant in two significant ways:**

- First, the scope is broader. **We believe early childhood extends through third grade, thus requiring a system that aligns early childhood with K-12 education.** Similarly, a comprehensive system requires fundamental changes in governance and policy that are matters still to be engaged through public dialogue by Delaware policymakers and citizens.
- **Second, the timeline for this plan goes beyond the period of the grant** because of the timetable required for implementation and to ensure that the system we create is sustainable.

Continual Improvement

Delaware's strategic plan is as much about generating an ongoing process of change as it is about implementing discrete actions. For that reason, many actions required to develop this system extend beyond those described here, particularly in the later years. Like all good strategic plans, this one is a living document, a resource for achieving our objectives that will be reviewed and revised as the process of change unfolds. The Delaware Early Childhood Council is committed to that continual improvement process.

A Roadmap for the Work Ahead

The needed changes are complex and transformative. This strategic plan does not seek to catalog these changes or prescribe a strict implementation timetable. Our focus, instead, is on charting a pathway for transformation, one that builds upon our strengths and accomplishments, accelerates the process of change, and concentrates on the essential building blocks.

> ***"The highest rate of return in early childhood development comes from investing as early as possible, from birth through age five. Starting at age three or four is too little too late, as it fails to recognize that skills beget skills in a complementary and dynamic way. Efforts should focus on the first years for the greatest efficiency and effectiveness."***
>
> Jim Heckman
> Nobel Laureate in Economics,
> University of Chicago

Guiding Principles

Five guiding principles serve as the foundation for our plans and the strategies to fulfill them.

Whole-Child Development

Children must be physically, emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally healthy, have access to high-quality early learning experiences, and enter school prepared to succeed. Our plan grows from a broad view of the many factors that influence a child's development and learning. Successful early childhood systems must address all of these factors in an integrated manner in order to improve long-term outcomes for children.

Birth-Through-Third-Grade Learning

Researchers and educators agree that early childhood extends across two largely unconnected education systems—a mostly private birth-to-five system and a mostly public kindergarten-through-third-grade system. To set children up for a lifetime of success, we must strengthen both systems and overcome the gulf between them. Educators in both systems need more training and "cross-pollinated" professional development. Families need more support to help them get their children off to a great start. All of us must learn to see a child's first nine years as our best opportunity to chart their course toward success.

Family Engagement

Family is the most important factor in a child's development. Family engagement is essential to an effective and sustainable early childhood system. Every facet of Delaware's system must support family engagement and enable families to be active collaborators in the design, delivery, and evaluation of services for their children. To be engaged, families need knowledge and resources to be effective initial teachers and fully support their children's health, development, and learning. We aim to empower parents to be advocates for their children's health and well-being.

Inclusion

Our commitment is to an early childhood system that serves all children in Delaware—children with language, developmental, and economic challenges and children either in care or at home. Designing the system to ensure universal access for all children reflects sound educational and social policy. Delaware is committed to making inclusion a core component of all its initiatives and will weave it into all aspects of program operation and professional development for early childhood providers, schools, agencies, and communities.

Community Collaboration

Cross-sector collaboration is essential to a comprehensive and sustainable early childhood system and a distinctive asset of Delaware. Many key programs and resources in Delaware serving young children and their families are delivered and supported by private, nonprofit, and community institutions. Our commitment is to strengthen and further mobilize early childhood partnerships and rely upon them as pillars supporting the system.

Delaware's Strategic Goals

Delaware's Comprehensive Early Childhood System depends on the accomplishment of these four overarching and interrelated goals:

Goal 1: A Healthy Start for All Children

Delaware children will become the healthiest in the nation—physically, emotionally and behaviorally. Accomplishing this requires a holistic view of the many factors that contribute to a child's healthy development. It also requires that all children have access to comprehensive, high-quality, family-centered developmental and medical care. Recognizing that children's social, emotional, and physical well-being are critical to their success in school and in life, our goal is to build on Delaware's strengths in supporting a healthy start and address essential gaps to increase young child developmental screening, referral, and follow-up services.

Goal 2: High-Quality Early Childhood Programs and Professionals

All Delaware children will have access to high-quality early childhood programs and professionals. Accomplishing this requires continual investment in Delaware Stars for Early Success, the state's quality rating and improvement system. The vital heart of Delaware's plan centers around increasing the number of top-tier Stars programs while also increasing the number of children with high needs enrolled in these programs. A skilled and stable early childhood workforce across all sectors (e.g., care providers, home visitors) is critical to attaining this goal. Delaware must also support its early childhood workforce through financial and educational incentives, as well as access to professional development that includes partnerships with K-12 and higher education.

Goal 3: An Aligned and Effective Early Learning System, Birth Through Third Grade

Delaware will create an early learning system that enables all children to arrive at school ready and eager to succeed and that prepares K-12 schools to further enrich children's early learning. Accomplishing this requires a seamless linkage between early learning and elementary programs that reflects consistency, continuity, and high-quality from birth through third grade. In turn, this requires implementing the Early Learner Survey and aligning professional development and educator preparation. It also requires structured communications between teachers and administrators, including the smooth transition of data between programs, strategies to support families in making the transition from early childhood programs to their child's elementary school, an increased understanding of the developmental needs of children by all stakeholders, and adaptations from the K-12 system that enhance early learning practices.

Goal 4: Sustained System Improvement

Delaware will develop and sustain policies, programs, and partnerships that generate continual improvement in addressing all children's developmental needs. Accomplishing this requires sustaining the work underway in the three preceding goals. It also requires the strengthening and reconfiguring of state policies to overcome fragmentation, fill gaps in services, and improve accountability. This also requires more effective coordination of services across agencies, including the integration of data systems and the systematic assessment of programs. Again, sustaining this effort depends on the effective mobilization of partnerships to support these priorities.

Goal 1: A Healthy Start for All Children

Delaware children will become the healthiest in the nation—physically, emotionally, and behaviorally.

Objective 1
Provide high-quality developmental screening and follow-up services for all children

Strategy 1: Increase developmental screening of young children

- Healthcare providers, home visitors, and early childhood providers will use standardized developmental screening (i.e., PEDS or ASQ) for all young children to identify developmental delays, disabilities, and behavioral health concerns.
- Increase referrals to Help Me Grow/211, Child Find/Child Development Watch, and other programs.
- 25,000 children will be screened each year with appropriate referral and follow-up services.

Strategy 2: Expand capacity for referrals and follow-up services

- Expand comprehensive evaluations through Early Intervention.
- Link families to services through Help Me Grow/211 and Health Ambassadors.
- Coordinate referrals with the child's medical home.
- Help physicians engage families as partners.

Objective 2
Support children's healthy social-emotional development

Strategy 1: Expand early childhood mental health services

- Double the number of licensed behavioral health professionals available to provide Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Services (ECMHC).
- Train more community therapists to increase availability of high-quality mental health services for young children.
- Provide access to the ECMHC services to every program participating in Stars.

Strategy 2: Build early childhood educator and family skills in interactions with young children

- Offer training for families and early childhood educators on positive behavior management programs.
- Offer information on young child mental health services available in the community.

Objective 3
Strengthen family-centered health and preventive care

Strategy 1: Enroll more eligible children and families in state public health programs and services

Strategy 2: Expand adoption of the medical home model

- Offer training on implementation of the medical home model, making care accessible, family-centered, comprehensive, and coordinated.
- Train health providers in how to maximize reimbursement for medical home–type services.

- Engage families as partners through trusting relationships within the medical home.

Strategy 3: Incorporate child development, preventive health, and anticipatory guidance into primary care

- Promote the use of Bright Futures and other recognized tools.

Strategy 4: Strengthen oral health, promote healthy eating and active lifestyles, and increase immunizations

- Partner with early learning and developmental programs, including home visiting and Head Start programs to increase preventive dental visits and promote the importance of oral health.
- Offer online training for early childhood educators on healthy behaviors and how to incorporate healthy lifestyle topics into classroom learning.
- Promote the use of outdoor space for family activity.
- Increase participation in the Vaccines for Children (VFC) program.
- Educate the general public and targeted communities on the benefits and availability of immunizations for uninsured and under-insured children.

Objective 4
Expand evidence-based home visiting and family health practices

Strategy 1: Strengthen evidence-based home visiting services statewide for pregnant women and children ages birth to five

- Strengthen and sustain a continuum of high-quality home visiting services statewide.
- Identify core competencies for home visiting staff and implement them through statewide professional development and technical assistance.
- Increase coordinated professional development across home visiting programs.

Strategy 2: Support families in promoting young children's health and development

- Provide access for all families with young children to community-based parenting and family support programs.
- Inform families about Help Me Grow and various age-appropriate programs.

Strategy 3: Engage parent educators and family support professionals in the early childhood system

- Offer early childhood educators professional development on program standards based on the Delaware Early Learning Foundations.
- Align professional development of parent educators, family support professionals, home visitors, and early childhood professionals.

Home visiting has a long-term payoff in improved high school graduation rates and reduction of $33 billion nationwide in annual child abuse and neglect-related costs, such as hospitalization and law enforcement.

The Pew Center on the States

Goal 2: High-Quality Early Childhood Programs and Professionals

All Delaware children will have access to high-quality early childhood programs and professionals.

Objective 1
Achieve high-quality program improvement through Stars

Strategy 1: Invest in financial incentives for Stars programs serving children with high needs

- Sustain financial incentives for Stars programs that serve children from low-income families through tiered reimbursement of Purchase of Care subsidies up to 100% for Star Level 5.
- Extend financial incentives to promote continual quality improvement in Stars programs through 2018.

Strategy 2: Expand technical assistance and infrastructure support for Stars programs

- Provide technical assistance to help early care and education programs enhance their quality.
- Offer more intensive technical assistance to education providers serving families in high-need areas.
- Implement an Infrastructure Fund for technology and capital needed to support advancement through Stars.

Strategy 3: Promote family engagement through Stars

- Apply the Stars standards to encourage providers to actively facilitate family engagement.
- Mobilize cross-sector community partnerships and use multiple media to increase family awareness and support for Stars programs.

Strategy 4: Promote inclusionary practice through Stars and other programs

- Use Stars standards to support inclusionary practices by early childhood providers.
- Develop and disseminate inclusion resources to families, providers, and community programs.

Objective 2
Invest in a more highly skilled and well-supported early childhood workforce

Strategy 1: Implement Compensation, Retention and Education (CORE) awards

- Offer financial incentives to early childhood educators based on the Delaware Career Lattice and program Star level.

- Recruit and retain qualified educators using CORE awards.

Strategy 2: Implement the Early Learning Leadership Initiative

- Use the Workforce Competencies for Administrators to provide professional development for Stars program leaders serving children with the highest needs.

Strategy 3: Implement education and professional development across all sectors of the early childhood workforce

- Work with all Professional Standards Boards to require coursework related to early childhood development for therapists, home visitors and healthcare professionals as part of their professional development.
- Work with community-based organizations to ensure the early childhood workforce supports program diversity (i.e., race, culture, language).

- Ensure that all professional development for early childhood educators promotes inclusionary strategies.
- Promote Inclusion Credential to all early childhood educators.

Stars Progress

By 2015, Delaware will increase the percentage of:

- **Children with high needs participating in Stars-rated programs from 20% to 78%.**
- **Stars-rated programs that reach top tiers of quality from 27% to 62%.**
- **Children with high needs enrolled in a top-tier program from 5% to 58%.**

By 2018, these goals will be sustained and surpassed so all programs will be top-tier.

Goal 3: An Aligned and Effective Early Learning System, Birth Through Third Grade

Delaware will create an early learning system that enables all children to arrive at school ready and eager to succeed and that prepares K-12 schools to further enrich their early learning.

Objective 1
Strengthen family, community, and school engagement in early learning

Successful Children = Ready Families + Ready Early Education + Ready Communities + Ready Schools

Guided by the "Readiness Equation" above, Delaware will strengthen family and community engagement along the birth-through-third-grade educational continuum.

Strategy 1: Implement Delaware Readiness Teams (DEL TEAMS)

- High-needs communities, in partnership with local school districts and community organizations, will develop teams to support families' and children's school readiness and success. Each team will implement a plan of action to foster increased coordination among families, early childhood providers, the K-12 system including special education, after-school programs, health and social services agencies, special educators and local civic and business leadership.
- Teams will be fully implemented in 2013.

Strategy 2: Develop and disseminate resources to support school readiness

- Help families and community partners understand and support the Delaware Early Learning Foundations.
- Create new resources delineating academic and developmental goals and milestones for children, from birth through third grade.

Strategy 3: Use Early Learner Survey data to inform teachers and families

- Create early childhood communities of practice to support programs serving children from birth through third grade.
- Prepare and support teachers and administrators to use data to inform instructional choices, promote family engagement, and refine teaching strategies.
- Share data with families to assist them in helping their child at home.

Objective 2
Develop and implement unified learning standards and assessments, birth through third grade

Strategy 1: Implement the Early Learner Survey

- In partnership with school districts, implement a common statewide kindergarten entry assessment that:
  - Improves alignment across the early childhood and K-12 systems.
  - Informs classroom instruction for both early childhood and K-12 educators.
  - Increases understanding of children's developmental readiness for school along multiple dimensions, including *Language and Literacy Development*, *Cognition and General Knowledge*, *Approaches Toward Learning*, *Physical Well-Being and Motor Development*, and *Social and Emotional Development*.
  - Strengthens partnerships with families.
- Implement the survey statewide for 100% of kindergarten students by the fall of 2014.

Strategy 2: Align elementary grade–learning standards with the Delaware Early Learning Foundations

- Establish standards for the early elementary grades that include important child development domains required by the Early Learner Survey.
- Involve educators serving children from birth to third grade in the process of expanding the standards.
- Align early learning standards with the Common Core Standards for early grades, and provide professional development to link the early learning guidelines to the Common Core.

Objective 3
Provide shared programs of preparation and professional development for early learning and elementary-grade educators

Strategy 1: Develop and offer collaborative professional development for all early childhood educators

- Assure mutual knowledge and understanding of the continuum of young child learning and development by all early childhood and elementary teachers, administrators, and extended day staff through shared professional development.
- Train all early childhood educators in assessment strategies to help them monitor children's progress against the Delaware Early Learning Foundations and the Early Elementary standards.

Strategy 2: Create alignment in teacher preparation programs for early childhood and elementary education

- Work with teacher preparation programs in the region to create a coordinated and consistent approach to alignment of early childhood and elementary education programs.

Strategy 3: Strengthen higher education partnerships in support of the early childhood workforce

- Work with Delaware institutions of higher education to devise and implement a plan to make early childhood classes (e.g., Training for Early Care & Education I and II) articulate for credit.
- Incorporate the Delaware Early Learning Foundations and Workforce Competencies into courses of study at Delaware's institutions of higher education.
- Ensure college-level education/professional development is accessible to all early childhood professionals through scholarships, funding, and remedial support.

Goal 4: Sustainable System Improvement

Delaware will develop and sustain policies, programs, and partnerships that address the comprehensive developmental needs of all children.

Objective 1
Strengthen governance, service integration, and funding

Strategy 1: Review best practices and governance models

- The ECC and IRMC will review national best practices and identify governance models that will further promote collaborative and efficient management of the early childhood system.

Strategy 2: Implement an ongoing system-review process

- The IRMC will create and oversee an ongoing, cross-agency planning and coordination process that will foster the recommendation of improvements in the early childhood system to further the:
  - Alignment of current and prospective policies and services.
  - Efficient use of allocated resources (fiscal, personnel, administrative).
  - Responsiveness of state early childhood services to families.
  - Improvement of communication between early childhood providers and agencies on factors impacting service delivery.

Strategy 3: Sustain public financing for early childhood

- Build upon state and federal investments already committed to sustain public financing for Delaware Stars and other early childhood services, such as Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation, the Delaware Early Learner Survey, and developmental screening and assessment, in order to provide continued access to high-quality programs for all Delaware families.

Strategy 4: Implement an annual review

- The Early Childhood Council will complete an annual review of Delaware's progress in achieving the goals and objectives of this strategic plan and disseminate that review to the IRMC and other state leaders, community partners, and the state's early childhood network. The annual review will be posted on the Council website.

Objective 2
Implement continual improvement in state services

Strategy 1: Implement an early childhood data system

- Develop and utilize a multi-dimensional, integrated, longitudinal data system that combines and tracks information on children, birth through third grade, across state programs, including K-12 education and health care. The integrated system should promote data-based decision-making at all program levels, and should be designed to:
  - Help families support their children's development and learning.
  - Enable early childhood providers and schools to monitor and improve services.
  - Support research and evaluation leading to program and service improvements.
  - Inform policymakers about programs that are successful and what changes are needed.

Strategy 2: Support continual improvement through ongoing analysis

- The IRMC will support continual improvement of early childhood programs through ongoing analysis, including:
  - Performance evaluation of all state early childhood programs.
  - Periodic needs assessments that include family surveys and that track the impact of programs and the areas requiring improved outcomes for young children and their families.
  - Periodic workforce and compensation studies.

Strategy 3: Conduct regular program reviews

- The IRMC will regularly review the impact that agency programs have on the overall character and performance of Delaware's early childhood system in order to facilitate program improvements. These include, but are not limited to, the following:
  - Enhance Purchase of Care as a family-focused program that supports high-quality care.
  - Improve the state's childcare licensing framework to assure greater transparency in policies and operations and improved communications with providers.
  - Develop and apply a valid and reliable assessment tool to measure program quality for Delaware Stars; focus on validating quality ratings and their relationship to school readiness.

Objective 3
Mobilize community partnerships and public commitment

Strategy 1: Broaden community partnerships

- Expand and strengthen the statewide early childhood partnership to include parents, teachers, healthcare providers and community leaders, and institutions from all sectors, including Delaware's public and private schools, nonprofit organizations, business leaders and economic development advocates, faith-based leaders, and military leaders.

Strategy 2: Promote the value of early childhood

- In partnership with all stakeholders and state agencies, the Council will facilitate and support a coordinated communications plan that projects a consistent message about the critical value and importance of investments in early childhood.

Strategy 3: Promote family engagement

- In partnership with all stakeholders and state agencies, the Council will facilitate and support a statewide effort to increase family awareness of the importance of early learning experiences and the value of the Stars program, as well as improve families' readiness for their roles as initial teachers and healthcare providers.

Delaware's Sustainable Early Childhood System

By 2018, Delaware will create a sustainable comprehensive early childhood system that is driven by a statewide commitment to continual improvement and includes the following sustainable outcomes:

Delaware's children will be the healthiest in the nation—physically, emotionally and behaviorally.

- All children will have high-quality developmental screening and services.
- All children will have support for healthy social-emotional development, including access to mental health services.
- All children will have family-centered health and preventive care, including oral health, healthy eating and lifestyles, and immunizations.
- All families will have access to home visiting services and improved family health practices.

All Delaware children will have access to high-quality early childhood programs and professionals.

- All Delaware early childhood providers will be top-tier Stars programs.
- All Delaware early childhood providers will facilitate family engagement and support inclusionary practices.
- Delaware will have among the nation's most highly skilled and best-supported early childhood workforces.
- Delaware's early childhood workforce will be engaged in professional development that supports continual improvement.

Delaware's early learning system will enable all children to arrive at school ready and eager to succeed and prepare K-12 schools to further enrich children's early learning.

- Family, community, and school engagement in early learning will be supported statewide by Delaware Readiness Teams and by enhanced resources to support school readiness.
- Early learning educators and families will have access to data to support their teaching and parenting.
- Delaware will have unified learning standards and assessments and will engage early childhood and elementary school teachers in shared programs of teacher preparation and professional development.

Delaware policies, programs and partnerships will generate continual improvement in addressing the developmental needs of all children.

- Delaware will be among the nation's leaders in implementing best practices in early childhood governance, service integration, and effective and efficient public financing.
- The state will implement continual improvement programs for all early childhood services.
- The state will regularly review the impacts of agency programs on the overall performance of the early childhood system.
- Delaware will lead the nation in the scope and magnitude of community partnership and public commitment to early childhood success.

Delaware Strategies for Inclusion

Delaware will implement the following inclusion strategies in early childhood and school-based programs and focus on successful school transitions for students:

- **Use the Expanding Inclusive Early Intervention Opportunities (EIEIO) Committee to implement inclusive practice across settings (districts, early childhood providers, state agencies, professional development, and communities).**
- **Support children with disabilities to receive services within their local early childhood programs.**
- **Strengthen inclusive early childhood classrooms for young children.**
- **Implement Sequence Transition to Education in Public Schools (STEPS) teams statewide to support a smooth transition process as children move across service settings.**
- **Strengthen support for the transition of dual-language learners to public schools.**

Engagement and Inclusion Resources for Families

211/Help Me Grow—Call-in referral service for developmental and behavioral screening and treatment resources for families.

Part B 619—Programs and school districts that provide a continuum of services and supports for children ages three to five who have an identified disability.

Part C Infants and Toddlers/Child Development Watch—Provides early intervention services for children, birth through age three, with disabilities and developmental delays.

Early Learning Foundations Birth to Age Three Family Activity Book—Provides activities for parents to use with children to support their development and learning.

Early Learning Foundations Home-Use Calendar—Provides activity ideas for children to help prepare them for kindergarten.

Home Visiting Programs (Smart Start/Healthy Families America, Nurse-Family Partnership, Parents as Teachers, and Early Head Start)—These programs offer at-risk families prenatal support, parent-child interaction coaching, and activities designed to promote child-development skills and school readiness.

Just in Time Parenting/The Growing Together Portfolio—Calendar with developmental resources and messages about children's healthy development distributed to all parents of newborns at hospitals in Delaware.

KidsHealth.org—Developed by Nemours in both English and Spanish, the top website devoted to children's health.

MAPS (Meaningful Access Participation & Supports)—Publication that offers early childhood–inclusion information to providers, community programs, and families without children with disabilities.

Text 4 Babies—Free text-messaging service offering prenatal advice and healthy lifestyle tips for expecting parents.

Triple P (Positive Parenting Program)—Provides simple and practical strategies to help manage children's behaviors, prevent problems, and build strong, healthy relationships.

For more information on parent resources, visit the Early Childhood Council website: **decc.delaware.gov**

Milestones for Delaware Children by 2018

- **Increased rates of follow-up health and behavioral health services due to higher rates of developmental screening**
- **Increased immunization rates**
- **Reduced levels of childhood obesity**
- **Ensured access to quality early learning and development programs for all children**
- **Increased levels of school readiness for Delaware children**
- **Increased number of children reading by third grade**
- **Decreased retention rates in the early elementary grades**
- **Decreased numbers of children requiring special education services**

"No economy can succeed without a high-quality workforce, particularly in an age of globalization and technical change. Cost-effective K-12 and post-secondary schooling are crucial to building a better workforce, but they are only part of the story. Research increasingly has shown the benefits of early childhood education and efforts to promote the lifelong acquisition of skills for both individuals and the economy as a whole."

Ben Bernanke
Chairman of the Federal Reserve

Jack Markell, *Governor, State of Delaware*
Matthew Denn, *Lt. Governor, State of Delaware*

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