

# Framework for Connecticut's Statewide System of Early Childhood State and Local Partnerships



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With financial support  
from Connecticut Early  
Childhood Funder  
Collaborative

**A project of:**



September 30, 2016

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*a project of Connecticut Council for Philanthropy*

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# Framework for Connecticut's Statewide System of Early Childhood State and Local Partnerships



For more than 20 years states have tested a variety of models of state and local early childhood governance in an effort to improve the skills, abilities, health and mental health of young children before they arrive at school. According to the BUILD Initiative's Framework for Choosing a State-Level Early Childhood Governance System, "In the United States, more than 60% of all children from birth to five spend time in the care of someone other than their parents. Early care and education services are provided through a wide range of programs with varying designs, purposes and oversight. States have increasingly sought to develop new governance structures that align authority and oversight of early childhood programs and services." Connecticut has been a leader in the nation in consolidating most of its early care and education programs and services into an Office of Early Childhood (OEC). From the initial planning for the OEC, the vision expressed by many state and local leaders was to also link together state and local work in order to achieve a more coordinated system with greater potential to get better results for children and families.

## **CT Early Childhood Funder Collaborative** a project of Connecticut Council for Philanthropy

was formed in 2011 by a group of 14 funders to provide input and support to the state's early childhood system building efforts. In 2015, the Collaborative provided funding for this effort to explore options for strengthening the connections of local communities to one another and to the state in order to share information and best practice.

## **Section 1. Introduction to Local Partnership Work**

Identifying the most vulnerable children, providing outreach to families and improving the quality of programs and services must be done at the community level and local leaders are best qualified to advise policy makers about the needs and what works best in their communities. In efforts to improve the communication and ongoing work between state government and communities, states began testing state-local models in the early '90s.

Some of the models that were created required major changes in the state governance systems in which they were created and those changes resulted in new ways of doing business. Some states began at the state level by focusing on more intentional coordination across all agencies that serve young children and their families; others, consolidated more of their child care related programs and services into a single agency; two states developed models that included two lead state agencies; and a few states created new departments or, as in the case of Connecticut, a consolidated Office of Early Childhood with a dedicated mission to serve young children and their families. Regardless of which approach states took at the state level, most state leaders concluded that the ability to get the best results for

children and families required a more formal state and local structure, which is connected through a common vision and outcomes, formal feedback loops, an effective communications system and strong linkages between the state and local communities.

Local partnerships are created to convene their communities around early childhood issues to assure that all children have their developmental, health and early learning needs met and that their families are supported and engaged as leaders. The local partnership table is the place where planning, coordinating and problem solving takes place, where family voices are heard and local

assessments of the needs and challenges of all children within a defined geographical area are understood. In a state-local partnership early childhood model, the local partnership and state government agencies work together to inform the state's early childhood efforts and to achieve the strongest results for young children and their families.

More than 20 states have put in place local public-private partnerships (called partnerships, collaboratives, councils, hubs, and coalitions) as a way to make connections to and among families, programs and the state's early childhood governance system. For the purpose of this report, the term "local partnership" will be used to describe the local unit. This term signifies that the local work and decision making are not done by a governing body alone but requires many, diverse partnerships among and across the community. It is the place where all the programs and services for young children in the community are reviewed for results and where population data is studied to identify areas where children need greater assistance. Partnerships also build community champions to advocate for young children and help support fundraising from government, business and philanthropy.

A review of other states demonstrates that local partnerships choose different local governance and operating structures. Many of them are non-profit organizations, some are public agencies, and

some are local councils, operating through a local nonprofit, which acts as their fiscal agent. In some states, the design of the local structure is written into state statute or within state rules. In other states, communities have flexibility in their local design, within certain guidelines. In all state and local models,

the local structure, with its strong connections to the state's early childhood governance structure, forms a solid platform that enables information, assessment of needs and program results to be communicated from families and communities to the state, and allows funds, technical assistance and other supports to flow to communities and families, leading

to the services that best meet local needs. Working together, the state and local communities are able to set standards and accountability measures and improve services in response to changing needs and evolving research, and to deliver services in a cohesive, rather than fragmented way.

## Section 2. What Has Been Learned about Local Partnership Work in Other States?

The local component of early childhood systems has been studied by many individuals and organizations, including the BUILD Initiative, a national early childhood systems building organization. A BUILD report, *Nuts & Bolts of Building Early Childhood Systems Through State/Local Initiatives*, highlighted various models from 12 states (Arizona, California, Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Vermont, Washington and Virginia) and captured important learnings from their work (Endnote 1). These particular states were selected for this study because they each had a local system structure that connected to the state's work and their local approach and work had been in place between five to more than twenty years. Smart Start Kansas was included in the report even though its local system has changed from its original design. Following are some highlights of the findings from the 12 states.

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## *1. Need for Local Coalitions as Part of a State Early Childhood System*

The primary reason given by all the states for developing local partnerships was to build a stronger, more family-friendly early childhood system and to get better outcomes for all the states' young children, especially children with high-risk factors. State leaders have been motivated by other factors to formally organize a community-based, local element within their early childhood systems. Some conceived of this approach as a way to raise awareness about the needs of young children and to highlight the need to begin nurturing and supporting children early, in order to maximize their development and learning and to support social-emotional and physical health. Others saw this approach as a way to improve collaboration at the local level and as a means to engage community volunteers to accomplish more with already existing funding. Regardless of the scopes of their work and their levels of funding, all local partnerships emphasized that the needs of young children and their families must be considered, understood and addressed. The local partnership has become the table at which an assessment of the needs and gaps in services are shared and where they determine together how to bridge the gaps and reach more vulnerable children and families, whether through better blending and braiding of funding, creating or improving current services or by leveraging new resources.

### **Collective Mission and Vision**

The mission and vision statements of the established state initiatives revealed some common themes. The most common one was school readiness, exemplified by, "Every child will arrive at school healthy and ready to succeed." More recently, some states and communities have included literacy in their mission statements, illustrated by, "Prepare young children to read." While some states prioritize funding for the most vulnerable children, many states emphasize that the vision is for all children.

Other common themes among states are related to the age cohort and the age ranges. Some local partnerships support all children beginning before or at birth; others address the years from birth to kindergarten; and for others the system encompasses children from birth until they reach third grade. While a focus on early childhood has been the hallmark of this state-local approach, some state and local partnerships have also joined a broader partnership that expands the years from cradle to career.

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## Local Governance Models

Local partnerships form independent nonprofit agencies for the purpose of leading the local collaborative work in many states. North Carolina and South Carolina each established new county-based nonprofits for this purpose and each oversees an annual allocation with guidelines from the state. In California, the local partnerships are county commissions that are part of county government. In Colorado, Vermont and other states, each local partnership determines its lead organization and they are sometimes part of an already existing community organization. In still others, independent early childhood councils are formed as the local early childhood planning unit and their funding is handled through a locally determined fiscal agent.

In states where the governance model is a local nonprofit agency, the organization operates with a board of directors and board membership guidelines are either outlined in legislation or guidance about the board membership is provided by the state oversight agency. In these states, board members come from a broad range of expertise; family members/caregivers; early childhood, education and health; community organizations; business; civic organizations and others. In states where a local partnership is a formal council that is not managed by an agency, the membership is similar to the types of members on nonprofit boards, chosen for their expertise and interest in early childhood.

The authority and legitimacy of local partnerships vary. Most states have legislative language that defines their board or council, including members, functions and obligations. Other states' created them through a governor's executive order. More recently some states, including Delaware, Maryland and Pennsylvania, used a request for application process to create local transformation zones as part of the Early Learning Challenge. Some states have found unique ways to give authority to this local work. In Michigan the Early Childhood Investment Corporation and Great Start Initiative were established through an interlocal agreement between the Michigan Department of Human Services and participating intermediate school districts. All of the state and community leaders interviewed for the Nuts & Bolts study advised that it is **important to validate this important work by giving the local partnership some kind of formal authority.**

## Geographic Area of Local Partnerships

An important decision is how local partnerships will be geographically distributed throughout the state. This issue may be emotionally laden, judging from past experience. States have approached this determination, based on their state's history and resources. The first three states to take a state/local approach to early childhood systems building - North Carolina, California and South Carolina - defined their local governance boundary as **county** lines. This was reasonable for these particular states because of having strong county government including a history of planning and funding for children's services at the county level. Other states took different approaches.

Arizona and other states that have more recently launched their state/local partnerships have chosen a **regional** approach, recognizing that there can be economies of scale in the administrative and programmatic functions within a region. There are other differences and nuances across states. In the case of Arizona, the local coordinators are hired within the regions but are staff of the state office of First Things First, signaling a desire to build more cohesion across the state and between the state and local levels. Most recently, the Oregon legislature determined that there would be a specific number of regions that would cover the entire state and allowed local communities to determine how those regions were defined and where the lines were drawn for their 16 Early Childhood Early Learning Hubs.

Some states are just launching their statewide state/local systems and are discovering that many communities have already organized early learning councils or planning groups. In an attempt to build on what is already functioning well, some of these states are inviting the local councils to partner with the state to develop a statewide system. Many of these newer models are regional partnerships. In these models, states define the parameters, such as having a requirement that all areas of the state must be included and determining a finite number of regions that will be approved. Limiting the total number of local partnerships is often required for efficiency and because of limited funding. While local leaders often advocate for having their own local partnership, states have found that if operated well, and if all communities are included at the local partnership's planning tables, a regional approach is efficient, effective and more likely to be sustained.

A different set of challenges presents itself when local coalitions, which have evolved over a period of time and have been funded by different funders, transition to a full statewide system of local partnerships. Leaders in these states found that in order to achieve statewide coverage in a manner that could be reasonably funded, in some cases they had to ask the local coalitions to change their established boundaries and scope. States like Oklahoma, for example, found that in order to achieve statewide coverage and be able to fund the collaborative work statewide, they had to ask local coalitions to increase their geographic boundaries and take in areas of the state that were not a part of an already existing coalition. Some local board members in these states resisted at first, feeling strongly about their defined community, and also fearing that they would be taken over by a larger entity. While their apprehensions were understandable, there was also concern that having a large number of very small community or town efforts created an administrative burden, stretched scarce resources and resulted in local coalitions that were not able to meet accountability standards and sustain themselves over time. Eventually the state set criteria for the number and size of councils it was able to support, and then worked with the local councils to merge or consolidate, using local relationships, needs and resources to guide decisions. In the case of Oklahoma, all of the viable work of previous councils was subsumed and continued within the new structure.

### **Accountability and Measuring Success**

A major question that should be answered early when organizing or reorganizing a statewide system of local partnerships is how to measure the success of the local work, both statewide and as individual partnerships. This is particularly challenging when local communities are implementing a variety of strategies and are measuring each of them in a different way. Without a statewide measurement system in place, it is especially challenging to gain continuing support of policy makers and the public for local partnership work. Having the ability to communicate the value of local partnerships' work, both individually and collectively, is critical to sustaining it over time.

The struggles and complexities inherent in measuring the impact of community councils are highlighted in a brief prepared for the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund (WCGMF) Trustees entitled, "Assessing the Impact

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of the Memorial Fund's Community Program." The brief points out that assessing the impact is a challenge they struggled with for some time. The report goes on to say that the data they were collecting could help to improve the support the Fund was providing to the communities, but it was difficult to document the extent to which the coalitions were making a difference at the level of child outcomes (Endnote 2).

Numerous studies exist demonstrating the relationship between high-quality early childhood programs and positive outcomes for the young children who participate in them. This data is particularly strong regarding children with high needs. A question for consideration is whether or not local partnerships should be held accountable for direct child outcomes or whether their outcomes should be measured by their success in strengthening the programs and services available to young children and their families and in making those services and supports available and accessible to them in their communities. Scott Raun was a pioneer in local partnership work in Colorado and suggested, "System builders and funders must recognize that building a system is a means to an end, it is not the reason for the work. Ultimately, a successful system must improve the quality of early childhood experiences for all children" (Endnote 3). The majority of early childhood programs cannot achieve high quality alone and often need outside supports, coaching and funding. All services should be measured for their direct impacts, and systems work should be measured for its collective impact on the entire system of programs and services in a community. A question that could be asked at the local partnership table is, **Does each child in our community benefit from each service or program that he or she is accessing and is the combination of our collective programs, services and strategies creating a high level of quality programs and services that will lead to better outcomes for all young children and their families?** These are two different parts of the same question and each is important to assessing the success of your community's efforts.



Some states are now re-thinking how they measure the success of local partnerships' core work and efficacy in terms of measurable indicators such as the availability of needed services that match the needs of families; access of children and families to needed services; parent/caregivers' knowledge about child development and increased literacy practices; the percentage of children in high quality programs; the percentage of children whose care is subsidized in the highest rated programs; the percentage of children with special needs who are identified early and given needed supports; among others. While states are still formulating strategies for measuring these kinds of outcomes, a few states have put in place some promising approaches. The Early Childhood Iowa State Board adopted a single set of program measures and all local partnerships must annually report their results using these measures. This data is compiled statewide and reported annually to the Iowa State Legislature. Each local partnership is also involved in a rating process on a regular basis through Levels of Excellence and is rated either *probation*, *compliant*, *quality* or *model*. This process allows local partnerships to grow and improve their functioning over time with support from Early Childhood Iowa, their state-level oversight and support agency.

Michigan's Great Start has a multi-pronged approach to evaluation, conducting both an annual evaluation of the Great Start systems-building efforts at the local level and also measuring progress toward direct outcomes of programs. The Great Start annual evaluation system has clarified key levers for positive change at the local level that appear to play the most important roles. The three most important levers are a community's readiness for change, its intentional systems-change actions, and authentic parent leadership and voice.

North Carolina Smart Start created a Performance-Based Incentive System (PBIS) to measure each local partnership's annual progress toward specific population-based indicators. The indicators within PBIS cover the areas of early care and education, health, family engagement and support. Progress targets are set for each local coalition annually, based on its current statistics and data and as they are reached over time, the targets are increased to new levels. This system is credited by many as a key factor in many improved indicators in the state, including the large percentage of all young children being served in the highest rated early learning programs statewide.

Two of the most consistent recommendations from the current state leaders about how they demonstrate accountability of their work were to have a **clear set of desired outcomes at the very start of your local initiative**, and to make sure there is an **adequate system in place for collecting and reporting data**.

## Public Education and Advocacy

Public education and advocacy are essential elements to advancing and sustaining a systems-building policy agenda and to securing the financial resources necessary to support these efforts at the state and local levels. Local coalitions can and should play a lead role in a state's advocacy and public education efforts. The state entity that leads systems building work should coordinate statewide efforts designed to promote the collective policy agenda. Local leaders in states interviewed for the *Nuts & Bolts* report see their local coalitions as the "go-to" for their legislators on all early childhood issues. This grass tops and grass roots approach has been shown to be successful in moving a results-based, statewide policy agenda on early education.

Local coalitions have also demonstrated their important roles and functions in educating the general public about early childhood issues and high-quality early education. As new local champions are engaged and involved locally, knowledge and information about young children spreads throughout the community and engages the electorate about current needs and issues. This approach, community by community, helps to make early childhood a bi-partisan issue, which is essential for the long-term success of the early childhood system.

### 2. A State Level Management Structure for Local Coalitions is Required

In order for a state and local governance system to be effective and sustained, there must be a state-level agency or organization that has the responsibility for oversight of local coalitions, including supporting and providing technical assistance to them. In general, the state-level organizations that oversee and provide technical assistance to local partnerships across the nation may be one of three types of entities: a **nonprofit organization, government agency or quasi-government agency**. Each type has been effective and each has had its unique challenges, and close examination of the three types reveals an important fact: whatever entity is given this responsibility, that entity must view the local work as key to its organization's overall mission and not as just an add-on for the agency. This translates into having dedicated staff to focus on the local coalitions who can keep the mission of the local work central to the work within the agency.

Some of the characteristics that local leaders have identified as important within the state entities that have led and supported this work successfully are:

- Widespread respect throughout the agency for the local work;
- Non-hierarchical approach - a belief that everyone's role is important;
- Flexibility, creativity and quick response;
- Non-bureaucratic approach, strategic thinking and open to new ideas;
- Collaborative, not turf-driven and sensitive to process;
- Financial synergy;
- High level of expertise in the field of early childhood and systems building.

In the 12 statewide state/local systems that are a part of the *Nuts & Bolts* report, the primary responsibilities of the state entities that support the local councils are to set a common vision, determine statewide outcomes, manage a data system, facilitate a feedback loop and provide them with tailored technical assistance. In states where funding is distributed through the local partnerships, monitoring is also a central function. In addition to these functions, state leaders also advocate for the kinds of systems-building changes, policies and funding that are needed to support local efforts. In most of these states, the state also plays a role in connecting local communities to each other through a network for problem solving, sharing promising practices and learning from each other. In states where there is not a specific state agency with oversight responsibilities, such as First 5 California, a membership organization was formed to perform many of these functions.

Many states have allocated funding to a state agency or nonprofit organization to support their local partnerships, while other states are challenged to take on these added responsibilities with limited additional funding. The predominant learning from the study is that the state's support for the local work is essential to achieving the mutual goals they collectively set out to achieve. In states without strong state support, the local coalitions have struggled and in some cases they have not survived.

State and local leaders also reported that funding is critical to the success of their local partnerships and the states work to support them and the answers to funding questions are complicated and dependent on the political and financial realities within each state. As reported in Nuts & Bolts, the state-level funding arrangements for the state/local work vary widely. The following chart from that report demonstrates the variation in funding amounts reported during the 2013-14 budget year (Endnote 4).

State/Local Coalition	Annual Funding	Source
<b>North Carolina Smart Start</b>	\$150 million	2012-2013 state general funds
portion to local coalitions	\$144.80 million	
<b>Arizona's First Things First</b>	@\$130 million	tobacco tax
<b>California's First Five</b>	@\$450.5 million	tobacco tax
portion to local coalitions	\$360.4 million	
<b>Early Childhood Iowa</b>	\$29 million	FY 2014 state funding
portion to local coalitions	\$28,650,000	
<b>Michigan: Funding to Great Start Coalitions</b>	\$12.3 million	FY 2014
<b>Smart Start Oklahoma</b>	\$1.6 million	approx. annual state appropriation
portion to local coalitions	most of the \$1.6 million	
<b>South Carolina First Steps</b>	\$13.46 million	FY 2013 state funding
Virginia Early Childhood Foundation	\$1.25 million	FY 2014 state funding
<b>Vermont's Building Bright Futures</b>	\$184,000	annual state contract
<b>Washington State Community Momentum Grants</b>	\$800,000	FY 2014 from the Department of Early Learning

Funding is a necessity for a level of staffing that matches the functions and responsibilities that each partnership will perform and in addition to funding for staffing, some amount is also needed to support activities that are designed to fill gaps or create bridges across parts of the early childhood system. Often, having this type of flexible funding available brings everyone to the table to work on problems and learn to share common outcomes and funding.

In some states, the funding is intended for coordination and convening around early childhood issues. In others like Colorado, a significant part of their local partnership funding supports their state's quality rating system.

Just as the amount of funding provided to local coalitions varies by states, there are also differences in the responsibilities associated with that funding. In some, the funding is intended for coordination and convening around early childhood issues. In others like Colorado, a significant part of their local partnership funding supports their state's quality rating system. While in others, local partnerships are responsible for making decisions about where state funding, such as child subsidies and pre-K, for example, is most needed in their communities and for providing TA and coaching to early learning programs.

## **Technical Assistance**

One of the key ingredients in the success of a local system of early childhood partnerships is having a state-level infrastructure that provides technical assistance and training for the local partnerships. In *Nuts & Bolts*, technical assistance to local partnerships was described by local leaders as essential to their success and the training that was most important included systems building, collaboration, governance and program development. State and local leaders also underscored the value of getting support in the areas of communications, advocacy and public engagement. They strongly valued being part of a statewide network where they can learn from other communities and share promising practices as well as getting guidance on sustaining their local work. The technical assistance needs vary among local partnerships with some partnerships needing support to fully develop a comprehensive early childhood plan, while others need more specific programmatic knowledge. Other technical assistance in organizational development and financing helps local coalitions make the best use of resources and build a strong infrastructure for their collaborative work. All of the states interviewed for the *Nuts & Bolts* report, whether they had significant or limited resources for their work, highlighted the value of technical assistance and peer-learning networks. (Endnote 5)

## **Local Staff Support is Necessary**

An important learning during the first 20 years of implementation of local early childhood partnerships is that effective local systems building and collaboration do not occur on a purely volunteer basis. When local systems work was in its beginning stages, policymakers often envisioned local partnerships as being solely volunteer driven, favoring the idea of local volunteers leading discussions and decision making in their communities. Experience has shown that volunteer board members, even those who work in other child-related agencies and organizations, cannot be as effective as possible without the support of at least some paid staff. Volunteers often work in full-time jobs and do not have the time needed on a day-to-day basis to manage the resources of a local partnership, organize its meetings, coordinate committee work, conduct the research and needs assessments necessary to inform decision-making, and to organize local events that engage the public and provide outreach to families. All of these tasks require dedicated staff time.

Both state and local leaders believe that in order to create an effective local early childhood system, resources must be designated to support some level of staffing for the local partnerships.

## ***3. Support of Local Partnerships and engagement with them by State Government Child-Serving Agencies are Necessary to Assure the Success of the Early Childhood System***

A highly functioning statewide system of early childhood requires formalized relationships and expectations between state government agencies and local partnerships. While a state intermediary entity can play important roles in the management of a statewide network of local partnerships, the state government's work and funding sources are critical to young children and their families in local communities. The development of a communication system and ongoing feedback loops between the state agencies and local partnerships can assure improved policies and programs and ultimately improved services that achieve better outcomes for children.

## **Major Accomplishments of Statewide Systems of Local Partnerships**

The states that were studied had many documented outcomes and individual accomplishments to report as a result of their local collaborative work, including the following systems outcomes:

- Greater financial resources to support early childhood programs and services;
- Improvements in state policy on behalf of children and families;
- Better outcomes for children and families, including improved third grade test scores and higher graduation rates;
- Stronger collaboration at the state and community levels and between communities and the state level that resulted in specific child and family outcomes;
- More engagement in, support and understanding of the importance of investing in early childhood programs on the part of both likely and unlikely proponents of these investments;
- Increased involvement and empowerment of parents as advocates for the needs of their young children;



- Systems changes at both the state and local levels that have eliminated barriers to services and bridged funding gaps, thereby supporting increases in services for children and families; and
- Improved quality of services and programs for children and their families.

While the research continues and the story is far from complete, the states with a longer track record of having a formal system of local partnerships have valid evidence of significant gains. The effective two-way communications between state and locals, local buy-in and engagement, achievement of statewide outcomes and state supports for local coalitions all appear to contribute to these gains. When state and community leaders collectively develop a vision for supporting the healthy development of young children; set a course together and employ strategies to achieve the vision; align their work; and communicate regularly about local needs and assets, greater outcomes are achieved for young children and their families than either the state or local communities can achieve on their own.

### **Section 3: What Has Been Learned through Local Councils in Connecticut?**

Leaders in Connecticut, at the state, municipal and community levels have long been involved in early childhood systems planning and coordination of comprehensive early childhood services. Other states have looked to Connecticut to learn lessons about its work and the many innovative early childhood initiatives and programs. During the past 20 years, several initiatives funded by philanthropy, government and private sources have supported the creation and implementation of local councils. The first formal multi-community initiative for comprehensive local planning and engagement began in 1995 when the Graustein Memorial Fund launched its Children First Initiative in seven communities over seven years. This was followed two years later by the enactment of the state's School Readiness Program in 63 of the state's 169 communities and included 19 priority school districts and 44 competitive districts. School Readiness Councils were established to guide implementation of local school readiness programs. In 2001 the Memorial Fund launched the Discovery Initiative and provided multi-year support for local early childhood councils in 46 communities, which eventually grew to 54 communities across the state.

Not surprisingly, each of these initiatives had slightly different scopes, populations served and operating procedures, based on the specific requirements set out by the various funders. And in some communities they operated somewhat independently from the others. The School Readiness Councils ranged in scope, size and funding, and their work therefore ranged from solely managing child care slots to more intensive activities including conducting needs assessments and strategic community planning, engaging and partnering with community leaders, and coordinating funding to maximize resources.

In 2012, the Memorial Fund, in partnership with the State Department of Education and Children's Fund of Connecticut, invited the Discovery communities to develop a community plan to establish a single, unified local early childhood council by aligning Discovery and School Readiness Councils. This appears to be the first major attempt to unify these efforts and was successful in approximately 11 communities (Endnote 6).

In addition to these community systems building initiatives, municipalities also played important roles in building early childhood systems, and have contributed toward a statewide system. Hartford's Department of Families, Children, Youth and Recreation, for example, brings together stakeholders and visionary leaders regularly to carry out the vision of its Early Childhood Blueprint, which includes programs and services for young children within the municipal area, tracks progress and results and improves outcomes for children (Endnote 7). This city and others in Connecticut also have a municipal early childhood component for hearing family voices and including their ideas and recommendations from communities into future planning and implementation of services and programs.

The Connecticut Early Childhood Funder Collaborative comprised of 14 funders has been involved in and supportive of early childhood system work since 2011, having provided funding for the research and planning that ultimately resulted in the establishment of the Office of Early Childhood. It continues to seek ways

to advance early childhood systems development working with state agencies, policymakers, early childhood research and advocacy entities as well as local partnerships, providers and parents. In thinking about the future work, it is important to reflect on what has been learned so far.

It is clear that the various efforts aimed at creating local early childhood planning bodies or councils throughout Connecticut have created a strong foundation for future work. Looking at a map (on page 16) of some of these

efforts (Endnote 8), it is also apparent that local councils and municipal efforts are already in place across much of the state, particularly in cities, towns and communities where the largest numbers of children live.

Future planning should include consideration of the children and families

who are not included in the current council areas and who may live in lower resourced areas where high-quality services are not available to the families who need them. Other states have learned that these more rural, isolated areas often lack transportation as well, resulting in a critical deficit for some of the most at-risk children in their states.

It appears from the reports that have been written about the outcomes of the local early childhood planning efforts in Connecticut and from the testimonies of those involved, that the local efforts have been successful in achieving the outcomes that they were designed to achieve. This is especially important to acknowledge given the funding levels and various expectations of the various initiatives. The evaluation reports identify outcomes that were achieved, based on guidelines and funding and, in general, these outcomes are much like those achieved by other states doing similar work with similar guidelines and funding.

In looking at the functions of local councils in Connecticut, they are already performing some key functions in their communities, including being the central point of contact, developing relationships with community leaders to influence decision making;

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providing outreach to families and providers; collecting and sharing data; child transition planning; coordinating and accessing resources; and sharing information and others. (Endnote 9)

Given these important functions, it is wise to recognize that the unique role of local partnerships may not be in delivering the direct services that young children and their families often need to thrive, but in coordinating between and among those programs and services to increase their effectiveness and to assure that they are reaching the children who need them. **The local**

**partnership is the glue that fits all the programs and services together as a unit and that assures that families have access to the particular services that their child and family needs.** Since the local partnership

“sets the table” by having all the needed participants together to

plan, identify and solve problems, and reviews population data to help identify children most at risk of school failure, the local partnership can best lead change that assures that individual children will have improved services that lead to better child outcomes. This work of the local partnership supports and leads to stronger child outcomes over time. Therefore, **the direct outcomes of the partnerships are different from the outcomes that would be expected from direct service programs** in which a particular program strategy can be designed for and delivered to a particular child and assessments can be made before and after the program strategy is administered to measure particular gains for individual children. Methods are needed to measure both systems outcomes (at local partnership level) and direct child outcomes (at the program level) in order to achieve collective outcomes in statewide early childhood systems.

There is evidence that there is much to build on in many of the strong councils and infrastructure that has already been created in Connecticut. **According to the data that has been collected in Connecticut, including the community stories, interviews with participants and families, and reports by various evaluators, the outcomes that could be reasonably expected in this kind of work are indeed being achieved.** It is evident that the supports provided by Connecticut’s

philanthropies and the Office of Early Childhood to the local councils helped to achieve the outcomes laid out in the local councils’ proposals.

Following are some specific examples from evaluation reports and stories that both demonstrate the unique role of the local council in achieving outcomes and show that the work of the council brings critical and significant added value for children and families. (Endnote 10)

- A local council looked at data about the achievement gap that emerges even before children begin school and tracked children in a school readiness program to see if the gap is reduced for children who scored below their more affluent peers. The answer was yes. So the council engaged the broader community to understand the need for this high-quality preschool program and recruited children who could most benefit from its services and who would not have been reached otherwise. These children made significant gains in the program.
- Another local council identified the health needs of young children as a priority in their community and focused together on improving the quality and availability of accurate health data. By engaging the broader community of parents, preschools, public schools and health providers, the council was able to develop new strategies that improved the health forms and data that is received from parents and health providers, an accomplishment that could not have been achieved by any of the individual entities working on their own. The improved health data now provides evidence to be used to improve health outcomes for children at a younger age.
- A major goal of one local council was to improve third grade reading scores in its schools. The council and schools began by jointly looking at data about how kindergartners were doing on their early reading assessments. This led the group to think about how well the children were being prepared prior to coming to pre-K and Kindergarten as well as how well children were doing after they were enrolled in those programs. This research resulted

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The local partnership is the glue that fits all the programs and services together as a unit and that assures that families have access to the particular services that their child and family needs.

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in introducing a new early reading intervention curriculum that is now implemented in pre-K through 3rd grade. To increase their outreach to parents and the community about the importance of early learning experiences as a precursor to and foundation for reading, they are also working with the library and high school students who are taking child development classes.

- In reviewing its community's data, another local council identified a major problem with chronic absenteeism. With all segments of the community together, the group began to discuss the reasons for this and identified a variety of contributing factors, such as transportation and mental health issues, and worked collaboratively to address these issues, which resulted in significantly improved attendance for children and the ability to take advantage of the services that improve their outcomes.
- Another important outcome of local councils in Connecticut is the increased participation in early learning programs of children who have high-risk factors and who will likely struggle when they arrive at school. The reported evidence of this is widespread. Through a review of data showing areas from which children enter school without the skills and abilities they need to be successful, local councils are able to focus their outreach and collaborative efforts to identify and make it possible for these children to participate in programs that improve their skills and readiness factors.

- The city of Hartford was the first municipality in the state to implement a citywide Early Childhood Blueprint and the first large city to require all preschool providers to report uniform child progress measures based on state early learning standards. This planning and documentation accounts for all children and better assures they will be served in programs that meet their learning needs (Endnote 11). Hartford has now been joined by other cities doing this important work.

In addition to the examples of outcomes described above, the value of all the capacity-building efforts in communities that have been underway in Connecticut over a number of years can also be demonstrated in the high rate of participation of the local councils in the various trainings and workshops offered; the high rates of satisfaction of the participants in the various opportunities provided to them; and the wide range of roles of local participants on their local councils. All communities have significantly increased their capacity for community planning and needs assessment and their ability to collaborate and work together on behalf of children. They are now addressing early learning and school readiness, and a high number of councils are also addressing health and family support, another result of the capacity-building work that has been underway. The planning table that is convened by the local councils heightens the awareness of the community about the importance of working across disciplines, agencies and organizations and becomes the impetus for serving

families well and achieving better child outcomes. The work that local councils in Connecticut are fostering includes activities, engagement, outreach and training that have been shown to assist and improve community programs and services where children and their families are served.

As mentioned earlier, Connecticut's local coalitions highly value the training and technical assistance that has been provided to them as part of the systems-building initiatives that have been in place, especially the opportunity to meet with peers from other communities for ongoing learning and sharing best practices. When asked at a network meeting what the purposes might be for continuing cross-site convenings as part of a coalition of local partnerships, the group responded with areas of interest and need that included cross-community discussions on common issues and sharing of best practices; networking to share ideas; development and implementation of a unified statewide advocacy agenda; collective financial resource development and an ongoing communications network. (Endnote 12)

### **Strengths and Challenges**

Following are some observations about strengths and challenges in Connecticut's early childhood landscape and readiness to put in place a system that links the state and local partnerships on behalf of young children and their families.

#### **Strengths and Opportunities**

- A long history of innovative work on behalf of young children and families;
- Highly skilled, knowledgeable, and passionate leadership at the state, municipal and community levels;
- Ongoing strong philanthropic support and funding for work on behalf of young children;
- Strong ownership of results for children within communities;
- A state-level consolidated Office of Early Childhood that has demonstrated that it values local community connections to early childhood work;
- Broad willingness on part of state, communities, philanthropy and others to consider options for a statewide system that connects the state and local systems;

- Evaluation reports and data showing that the foundational work that is being done in municipalities and communities is effective and can be built upon;
- A high level of capacity that already exists in many cities, towns and communities; and
- Technical assistance provided to communities that was successful and highly valued by community participants in systems building.

#### **Challenges**

- The belief of some that "local" must be a very small geographic area;
- Finding a means of bringing different local early childhood planning groups together within a statewide system and framework;
- Overcoming the belief expressed by some local leaders that another local effort will be yet another "stop and start" for their community;
- Finding a way to engage people and identify leadership in areas of the state that have not previously participated in early childhood systems-building work in their communities;
- The need to define "local" for the purpose of a statewide system in Connecticut that recognizes its history and value, includes all children and is effective and sustainable;
- The wide range of potential sustainability among the existing local partnerships due to the loss of private funding and the varying levels of local success in diversifying funding; and
- The local system is currently in transition and there is a need to act quickly to keep current efforts moving forward.

#### ***Greatest Challenges as Reported by Local Council Leaders***

In a recent survey that was offered as part of the review of the major components of the local partnership framework in this report, local leaders were asked to choose the current key challenges that they are facing in their community's early childhood work and to indicate the top three most challenging at this time. The challenges as selected by the respondents included all 8 of the choices given, while their top three most

challenging areas were 1) securing stable funding, selected by 90% of the respondents; 2) having a council whose membership reflects the diversity of their communities, selected by 70% of the respondents; and 3) 50% of them believe that they do not have enough staff time available to carry out the necessary functions of their councils. Other challenges included recruiting and retaining council and staff leadership; engaging all sectors of the early childhood community, including K-12 education and municipalities; engaging all sectors of the early childhood community; getting consensus on community priorities; and having adequate infrastructure (space, fiscal controls, policies and procedures) to carry out their work.

The next section of this document includes a set of recommendations that are designed specifically for Connecticut leaders to consider in creating an infrastructure and formal connections between the state and local communities on behalf of young children and their families.

#### **Endnotes:**

Endnote 1: Cobb, G. and Ponder, K. The Nuts & Bolts of Building Early Childhood Systems through State/Local Initiatives, BUILD Brief. 2014

Endnote 2: "Assessing the Impact of the Memorial Fund's Community Program." Brief prepared for the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund (WCGMF) Trustees, 2014.

Endnote 3: Raun, S. Building an Early Childhood System: System Outcomes. Unpublished paper, 2010.

Endnote 4: Cobb, G. and Ponder, K. The Nuts & Bolts of Building Early Childhood Systems through State/Local Initiatives, BUILD Brief. 2014

Endnote 5: Cobb, G. and Ponder, K. The Nuts & Bolts of Building Early Childhood Systems through State/Local Initiatives, BUILD Brief. 2014

Endnote 6: A Birth to Age Eight Community Partnership Application. William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund, 2014.

Endnote 7: Hartford Blueprint for Young Children: Delivering the Promise of Success. Mayor Perez's Blueprint Team. 2005

Endnote 8: Map developed by the Graustein Foundation, updated 2016 and attached

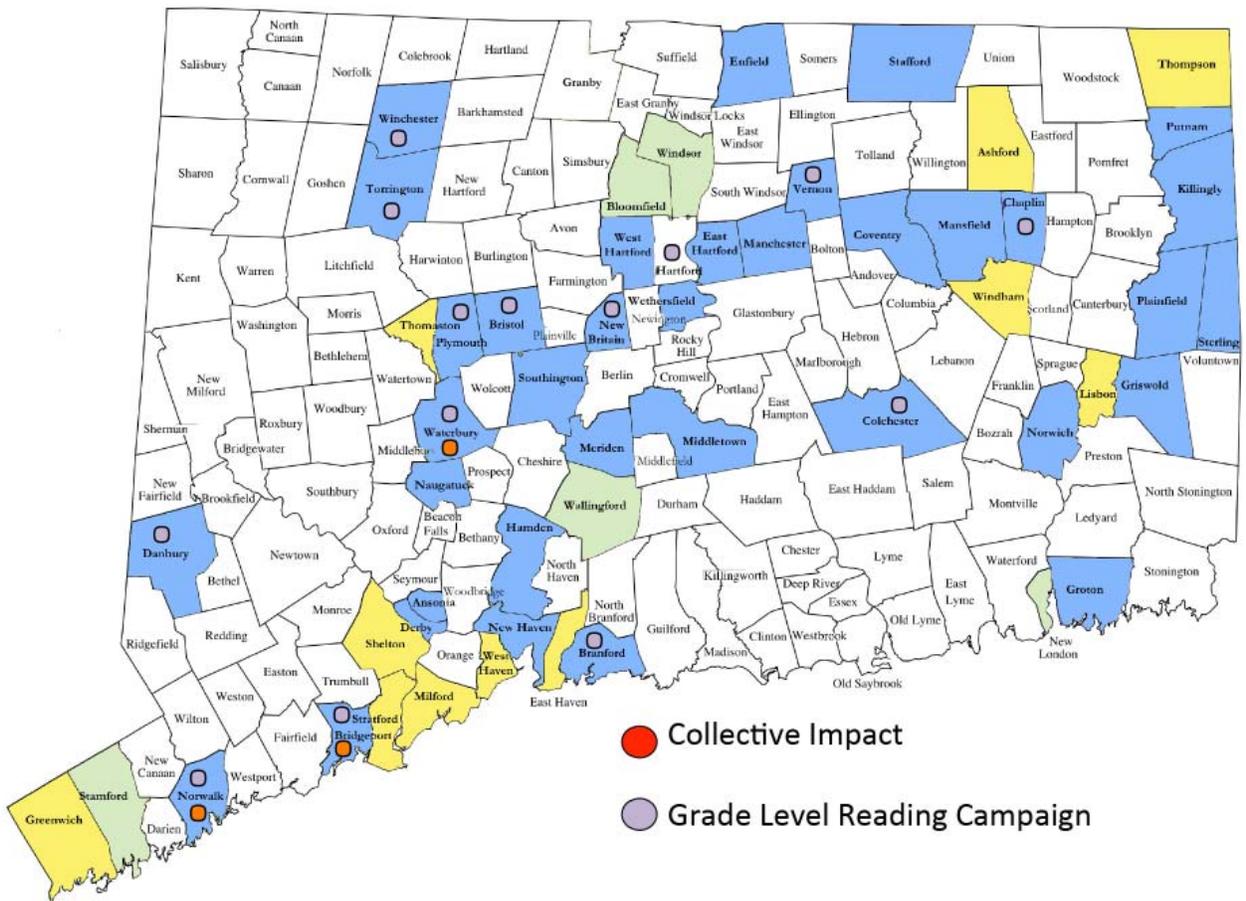
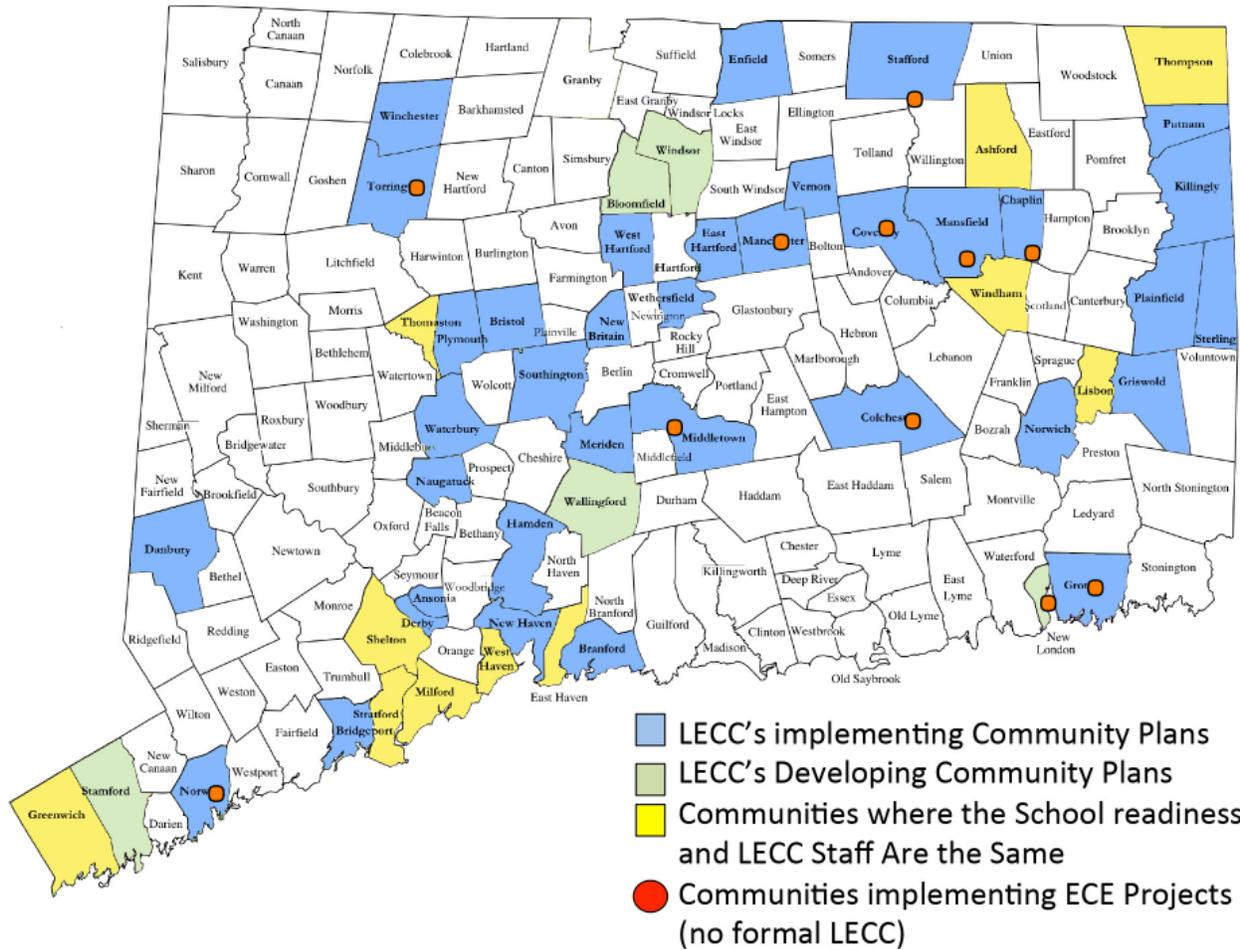
Endnote 9: Local Council Network unpublished paper, dated 12/17/15

Endnote 10: Brief for the Graustein Memorial Fund Trustees on the Impact of Our Community Program, June 2014

Endnote 11: Hartford Blueprint for Young Children: Delivering the Promise of Success. Mayor Perez's Blueprint Team, 2005.

Endnote 12: Local Council Network Unpublished Paper, dated 12/17/15.





## Section 4: Recommendations for Connecticut's Statewide Early Childhood System of State-and-Local Partnerships

The Connecticut Early Childhood Funder Collaborative spearheaded the development of this report and recommendations beginning in the fall of 2015 for the purpose of developing recommendations for an infrastructure connecting state child-serving agencies, especially the Office of Early Childhood, with local communities and communities with each other. The overall goal in building a statewide infrastructure that includes state and local partnerships is to improve outcomes for young children and their families and to assure that all children who need them are provided the services and supports that meet their developmental and learning needs. As most state and local leaders have recognized, a state's early childhood system that affords young children and their families access to high quality services, programs and resources, as well as coordinated support services, requires setting a statewide vision and measurable benchmarks, cross-sector state and local planning, an effective communications system, joint decision-making and the use of data for continuous improvement. In order to achieve this level of coordinated work, partnerships are needed at the local level, formally connected to state and local agencies and organizations, all working together to achieve unified goals for children and families.

The process to develop this report and recommendations for a local framework included the following:

- Establishing an advisory task force to the effort with representatives from the Office of Early Childhood, early childhood providers, local early childhood councils, municipal government and philanthropy
- Observing a meeting of the Local Early Childhood Council Network where the members discussed the sustainability of their work with members of the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund staff;

- Interviews with representatives from the Discovery Collaborative and School Readiness Councils;
- Interviews with community, city and state leaders;
- Interviews with private funders;
- Interviews with staff at the Office of Early Childhood;
- Interviews with state nonprofit leaders; and
- Reviews of documents and papers written about Connecticut's state and local work.

The work was closely guided by the advisory task force, which met regularly to review documents and advise the recommendations. Once the components of the framework were developed, a template and survey were created that described the components of the framework. These were shared with local and state leaders across the state in five outreach sessions and their feedback was provided in a survey and helped to clarify and better inform this section of the report.

The following sections summarize earlier findings about state-local early childhood systems and offer a framework for Connecticut leaders to consider.

### ***Why are formal state-local linkages needed?***

Identifying the most vulnerable children, providing outreach to families and improving the quality of programs and services must be done locally while funding and guidelines generally come from state government, especially for the most vulnerable children. Local leaders who work with children and families are best qualified to advise policy makers about their needs and what works best in their communities. States use different terms to describe the state-local approach, such as public-private partnerships, collaboratives, councils, hubs, transformation zones and coalitions. Regardless of the name, all of these models share a common commitment to make connections to and among families, programs and the state's early childhood governance system. In this report, the term local partnership will be used to signify that the

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collaborative effort in a community is greater than the governance unit or council, including all stakeholders and citizens in partnership on behalf of young children and their families. Some **issues exist that require linkages** between the state and local communities, collaborative thinking and collective solutions, such as:

- Affecting school readiness requires comprehensive approaches and involvement throughout various sectors of the community, including early care and education, health, mental health, family support and parent leadership;
- Multiple systems are in place and impact young children and their families;
- Multiple funding streams are in place, each with its own regulations and requirements;
- Individual variations and unique situations exist among children and families;
- Current services are both market-based and government financed; and
- The current situation lends itself to a lack of coordination as well as duplication of services and inefficiencies in service delivery (Endnote 1).

### ***Expected Outcomes from a State-Local Early Childhood System***

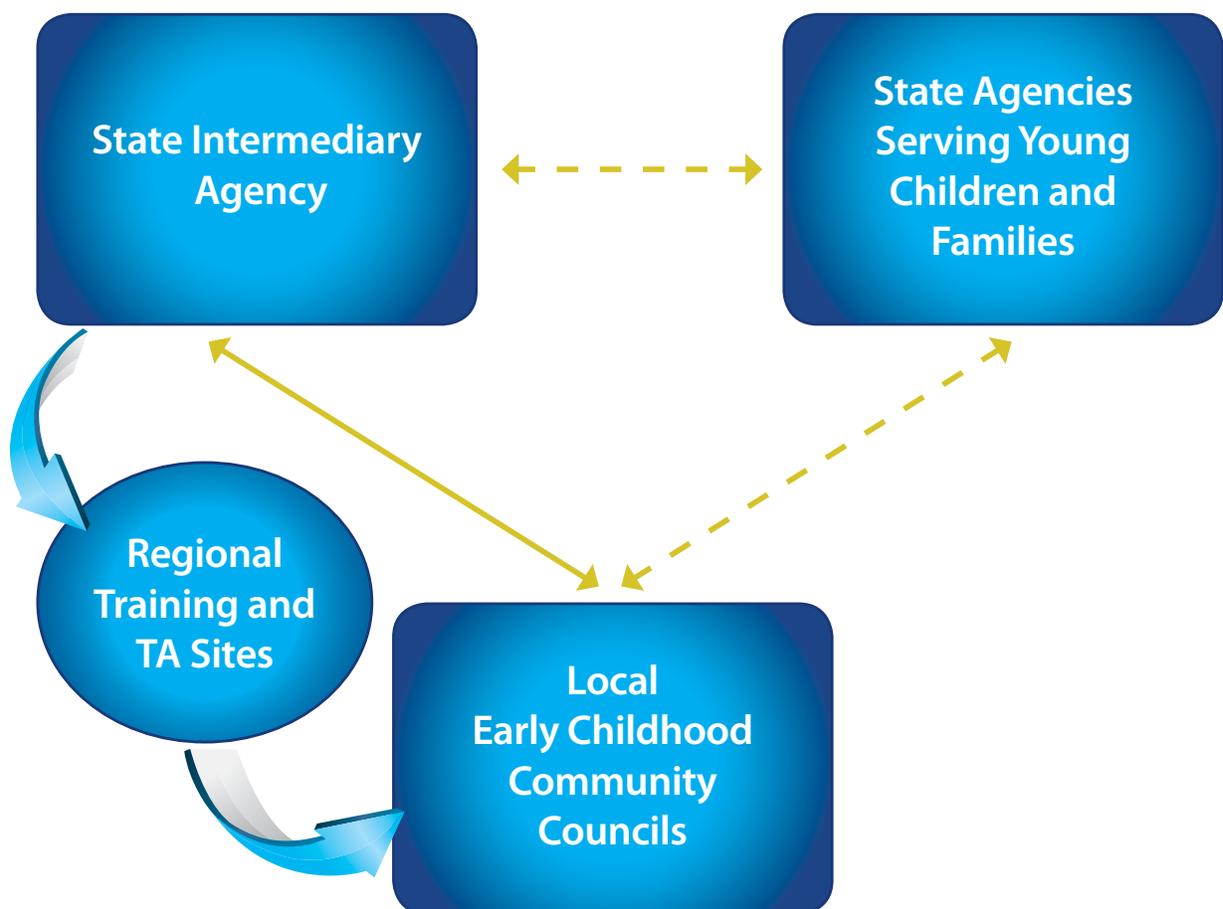
Child and family positive outcomes are the goal of all early childhood systems work. These direct outcomes are achieved in programs and services provided in communities and overseen by a variety of organizations and agencies. Good outcomes may not be achieved however, unless the programs and services are of high quality, designed to meet the particular developmental and learning needs of each young child who participates. This is why a statewide state-and-local system is needed. Some of the purposes of this kind of system are to account for all children; identify their needs; improve the quality of all programs and services provided to them; and to make comprehensive services available and accessible to the children who need them. A community partnership is best able to find local solutions to problems and maximize all funding, programs and services. Just as child and family direct outcomes are measured program by program, there are expected outcomes for a state-local early childhood system that can also be measured across the entire system. More is written in Section 1 about system outcomes, including a list of specific systems outcomes that other states have achieved.

## Recommendations

Following is a set of recommendations for Connecticut leaders to consider in creating a statewide network of local or regional partnerships. This network will become the community arm of a state-local system of early care and education, with strong, formal linkages to state agencies that fund programs and deliver services on behalf of young children and their families. The model includes **three components of the statewide system**:

- local partnerships
- a state intermediary management organization
- multiple state agencies that serve young children and their families.

### Proposed Connecticut System of Local Councils



## Recommendation 1:

### Formalize a Network of Local Partnerships

The key recommendation of the framework is a formal network of local partnerships, **beginning with already existing and well functioning city or community entities**, in order to build on the infrastructure that is already in place in Connecticut. While the amount of funding that is available to the local partnerships from public and private sources will determine their full scope of functions and services, there are tasks and functions that are recommended for all local partnerships. The following functions are being performed by many existing Councils and should be continued.

#### Functions of Local Partnerships:

- ✓ **Central Point of Contact** – Share information, convene deliberations, support multi group collaboration and initiate actions.
- ✓ **Advocacy** – Develop and maintain relationships with elected and community leaders to influence decision-making. Champion and organize the community to support key issues.
- ✓ **Direct Access to Parents and Front Line Providers** – Ongoing outreach and listening to providers and families voices.
- ✓ **Collect and Share Data** – Cross sector local teams collect and analyze community population data to inform better decision making.
- ✓ **Transitions** – Create, support, and promote efforts to help children successfully transition to kindergarten and between grades in the k-12 systems.
- ✓ **Resource Management and Coordination** – Enhance providers’ and families’ access to resources (grant opportunities, training and relevant services).
- ✓ **Communications** – Create and share information about issues including but not limited to early care and education policy, practice, campaigns, and events. (Endnote 2)

In addition to these functions, which many of the existing local councils in Connecticut are already performing, other functions are also needed. Each partnership should:

- Actively participate in a Network of Local Partnerships that creates a feedback loop and serves as a conduit to the state for ongoing communications to state child-serving agencies and from state agencies to local partnerships;
- Convene the tables where community leaders and volunteers come together for ongoing planning, learning and action;
- Be a source of contact for families to learn what they need, to advise about available programs and to refer them to community services that meet their child’s needs;
- Engage champions for young children throughout the community to advocate on their behalf;
- Work to garner adequate funding to support the work of the local partnership; and
- Support and advance state policies and programs that improve outcomes for young children and work in partnership with state agencies and the intermediary to achieve better results.

#### Formalizing Local Partnerships:

The development of a highly functioning, comprehensive, statewide early childhood system including local partnerships takes time and other states have found that even after the structure is in place, some parts of the model need to be adjusted over time.

The following are suggested first steps related to the local partnerships:

1. Identify already existing local councils that will be part of the statewide network of local partnerships to serve the purpose and functions described in this paper. Determine how many partnerships are needed to serve this function statewide, how they will be regionally located across the state in a way that includes all children,



birth to 8 in Connecticut, and how they will be sustained. The issue of addressing already existing councils and how it was handled in other states is discussed in more detail in the earlier sections of the report. The recommendation for Connecticut is that the **determination of local partnerships** be part of a process that includes the following actions:

- ✓ **Number of local partnerships-** Determine a specific number of children (or greater) that must be included in each local partnership's area or no less than a specific number of children, birth to 8; a range of a minimum of 750-1500 births per year is an option for consideration.
  - ✓ **Very rural consideration-** Allow special consideration and perhaps a waiver of the specific number requirement in rural areas of the state that cover a large number of square miles where transportation may be especially difficult, even if fewer children live within those areas; these areas of special consideration should be reviewed on a case by case basis to determine what is feasible;
  - ✓ **Local partnership boundaries-** As much as is reasonable and practical, allow local decision-making about which towns will join together with other towns, cities and communities, for the purpose of creating a local partnership;
  - ✓ **Contiguous communities-** In forming new partnerships, require cities, towns and communities that are coming together to be contiguous; and
  - ✓ **All children included-** Develop a plan that assures that every city, town and community in the state is included in one of the local partnership regions; merging areas without councils into already existing partnerships should be a strong consideration in reaching this goal.
2. **Partnership makeup-** The makeup of local partnerships should include a chief elected official; the superintendents of schools; parents of young children; representatives from Head Start, nonprofit and for-profit child care programs, group child care homes, pre-K, nursery schools and family child care home providers; representatives from family resource centers and child care resource and referral agencies; a child health care provider; a mental health provider; a family support provider; a representative from the local homeless education liaison; a librarian; as well as representatives from philanthropy, business and the

community at large. Other members may be added to meet particular priorities and needs, at local discretion.

3. **Consolidate for planning-** Consolidate into one local entity all state supported efforts, including the School Readiness Councils and the former Discovery Councils. While each of these Councils was created with specific goals to serve particular populations, they are all directly related to children, birth to 8, and their scopes of work should be considered as part of the full scope of a local partnership community and its total programs and services. There may still be a need for dedicated committee or task force work in these different areas of work. Some communities have already successfully combined these efforts.
4. **Include neighborhood groups-** Local Partnerships should work together with the neighborhood groups within their catchment areas that are concerned about and already working on behalf of young children and families.

✓ **Funding for Local Partnerships-** Funding should include at a minimum, salary for a coordinator who organizes meetings, coordinates committee work, leads the community in assessing the needs of young children and their families to inform decision-making, and organizes local events that engage the public and provide outreach to families. While a full time coordinator will be needed for each partnership over time, all partnerships should have funding for a minimum of 20 hours per week. Other supports and staffing should be determined based on the amount of funding available from all sources depending on their scopes of work and the particular requirements and responsibilities of each partnership.

✓ **Statewide System of Local Partnerships-** Consider starting with already existing Local Early Childhood Councils and building out additional partnerships over a 5 year period, as the state infrastructure and capacity are built and as funding is available. As is practical, encourage and incentivize the first tier of local partnerships to engage with nearby towns and communities and expand their partnerships into regional entities.

## **Recommendation 2: Create a State Level Intermediary Management Agency**

Other states have found that having an intermediary management agency with a focused mission to support and meet the needs of local partnerships, is a significant factor in the long-term success of the state-local work and without that kind of support, local partnerships have faltered.

Functions that a state intermediary agency should perform include:

- Convene local councils to develop joint vision and mission statements, joint outcomes and priorities that connect to the state’s vision and that the state and local councils are working in partnership to achieve;
- Convene state agency leaders and local council leaders to develop a set of shared expectations;
- Develop in collaboration with the local councils, a system to assure fiscal accountability;
- Create and support a statewide network of local councils;
- Develop a joint statewide data system that is user friendly and measures progress toward the joint outcomes and other priorities; is able to disaggregate data, provide needed reports for local councils; and provide financial supports for entering and verifying data;
- Develop a formal communication system, with intentional linkages up, down and across the system;
- Develop common messaging and communication materials to be used by all local councils within their communities;
- Build public and private resources to further the system’s work;
- Provide leadership on building an equitable early childhood system and supporting local councils to be leaders for equity;

- Build public awareness and educate the general public about the critical nature of early childhood and the needs of and opportunities for young children; create a statewide advocacy plan;
- Support state early childhood agencies to build capacity for outreach and responsiveness to communities and foster capacity building at the local level; and
- Provide or oversee the provision of a system of regional technical assistance and training for the local councils and create formal mechanisms to make this happen.

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Resources must be secured from the state and other funders to make available needed staffing and services to adequately support local partnerships.

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In a recent survey, local leaders in Connecticut were asked to choose the three most important functions from a list of 10 possible functions of an intermediary agency. All ten of the suggested functions of an intermediary were selected by some participants and the top three most important functions related to their current work were:

- **Develop a communications system** with intentional linkages up, down and across the system and developing common messaging and materials that can be used by all; this function was selected by 62% of the respondents as one of their three top priorities.
- **Work together with the Office of Early Childhood** and all other state agencies that fund and provide services on behalf of young children and families; this function was selected by 45% of the respondents as one of their top three priorities.
- **Develop or link local work to a statewide data system** that measures progress toward joint outcomes; this was elected by 42% of the respondents as one of their top three priorities.

## Early Steps Related to an Intermediary Management Agency

1. Choose an already existing agency to perform the necessary functions in order to advance this work quickly and effectively.
  - ✓ Issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) outlining the intent and scope of work that is being launched and distribute it widely in order to identify the most appropriate agency to manage these functions.
  - ✓ Conduct interviews with agency leadership in the agencies being considered, to discuss the scope of work needed for this function and their agencies' interest and potential to perform the required functions.
  - ✓ Ensure that staff in the intermediary agency will be available for this work a minimum of 30 hours per week at the beginning. The skill set and expertise should include: understanding of early childhood systems and the ability to work in partnership with state agencies toward common goals; communications among a broad network of partnerships and agencies; fundraising knowledge and experience; expertise in setting up on-going regional training and technical assistance opportunities; data collection and building an advocacy network.
2. Resources must be secured from the state and other funders to make available needed staffing and services to adequately support local partnerships.
3. Consider early consultation with First 5 California Association, an organization that supports the First 5 CA network of early childhood local partnerships. This lean organization with a small talented staff does an excellent job of supporting the statewide network of local partnerships, training and technical assistance as well as communicating their value to policymakers and the public.



4. Early on, develop a statewide communications system and plan that provides two-way communications and ongoing feedback loops between local partnerships and state agencies and organizations. Together with local partnerships, create common messaging and materials that all local partnerships can use in their communities to support a consistent, statewide message about young children and how local partnerships are improving outcomes for young children and their families.
5. Bring together the child-serving state agency leaders to begin developing a plan for how each agency can better achieve its goals by working more closely with local partnerships and how local partnerships can communicate their needs and program and policy recommendations to the agencies.
6. Work with state agencies and already existing data projects to determine how to best develop or link local work to a statewide data system that measures progress toward joint outcomes.
7. Develop a plan for the regional technical assistance and training for local partnerships. Investigate available venues and resources, giving priority to more effective uses of existing technical assistance and training sources and

making these more accessible through the use of technology, regional convenings, etc. To best support the vision for local partnerships and help build their capacity, the technical assistance and training should include all aspects of building an equitable community system of early education, health, mental health and family support. The skill building should also include support for local leadership development, engaging and bringing together champions on behalf of young children, needs assessment, and data collection and use.

***Recommendation 3:  
Design Supports for the Local Partnerships  
within the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) and  
other Child Serving Government Agencies***

The programs, services and funding sources managed by state government agencies are critical to young children and their families in local communities. And the stronger the relationships and communications are between the state level and local communities, the greater the outcomes will be for young children. Following are recommendations for Connecticut's child and family-serving government agencies to consider in order to create synergy with, and to learn from and support local partnerships to achieve statewide, unified goals and outcomes for young children and their families:

## Early Steps Related to State Agencies

1. Establish dedicated staff and resources in OEC and other state agencies to support state-local coordination, cooperation and feedback;
2. Design an internal structure in OEC that includes these responsibilities:
  - ✓ Provide financial supports to local partnerships;
  - ✓ Together with local partnerships, the state intermediary, and other state agencies, develop common statewide accountability measures for all local partnerships that also link to the state's early childhood goals and outcomes;
  - ✓ Provide ongoing communication on policy and programmatic issues and ongoing feedback loops between OEC, other agencies and the local partnerships;
  - ✓ Develop a plan to consolidate the School Readiness Councils, the Discovery/Local Early Childhood Councils into one local community partnership.
3. Integrate OEC and other child-serving agencies' policies and resources in support of local partnerships.
4. Work over time to develop strategies that assure that all children live in communities with an organized local partnership. As a starting point, establish the total number of partnerships needed statewide and, at the beginning, focus on those community or municipal early childhood councils that are already functioning well, to be the initial local partnerships.
5. All child-serving agencies should conduct a review of their outreach efforts and various local structures and determine ways to consolidate with local partnerships to support a unified planning table in every region of the state.

## Initial Phase-In

- In an effort to jump start this work and recognizing that it will take time to fully develop the three components of the statewide system, the following recommendations are offered as a possible phased-in approach:
  - ✓ **Step 1** - Establish a local advisory group to carry forward the recommendations; include representatives of the existing Discovery Councils, municipalities and non-Discovery Councils; the advisory group will draft the RFP and initial functions of the intermediary;
  - ✓ **Step 2** - Select the intermediary entity and develop its initial functions and budget;
  - ✓ **Step 3** - Develop in collaboration with state agencies and communities outcome measures for the local partnerships;
  - ✓ **Step 4** - Determine the local community coalitions that will become the initial local partnerships;
  - ✓ **Step 5** - Clarify how OEC as the primary source of state funding at this time will communicate and work with local partnerships as a model for other state agencies;
  - ✓ **Step 6** - Secure initial funding for intermediary entity; and
  - ✓ **Step 7** - Select regional hubs for training and technical assistance.

Refer to more detail about each of these components in a state system of early childhood in the first three sections of this report.

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All child-serving agencies should conduct a review of their outreach efforts and various local structures and determine ways to consolidate with local partnerships to support a unified planning table in every region of the state.

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## Conclusion

Connecticut has a strong track record of success in the development of local councils. While the councils were created and funded by different state and philanthropic efforts, with slightly different goals and functions, it is clear that they have achieved success and are a valued part of their communities and have strengthened the state's work on behalf of young children and families.

The Connecticut *Key Themes Report*, developed by the BUILD Initiative in 2012, included these statements and recommendations: "Work at the local level is an essential, widely acknowledged asset" and "Systems building must happen vertically as well as horizontally." In addition, the report examined the possibility of establishing a public-private partnership, an outside of government entity, focused on goals, not turf; to marry private sector resources, innovation, nimbleness with government's expertise." Further, it suggested that this entity would be able to raise money more readily than state government; sustain the work through political transitions and opposition; and better leverage an active philanthropic community. (Endnote 3).

Now is the time to move to a more unified state and local system that is built on the good work and infrastructure that is already in place and functioning well. A unified structure will assure that the well-being of every child in Connecticut is considered, that each and every child that needs services and supports will have the best chance to receive them and that the young children and their families who live in Connecticut are thriving and entering school ready to succeed.

### Endnotes:

1. NC Early Childhood Leaders. Ensuring School Readiness for North Carolina's Children: Bringing the Parts Together to Create an Integrated Early Care and Education System. Unpublished Paper, 2004.
2. Local Council Network, Unpublished Paper. Created by participants at the Peer Exchange Learning Meeting convened by William Casper Graustein Memorial Fund. 12/17/15.
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## About the State-Local Advisory Group

The group that advised the author, and reviewed the framework and other documents created for this report, included state and local early childhood leaders. Members of the group were Maggie Adair, Connecticut Office of Early Childhood; Sarah Fabish, Community Foundation for Greater New Haven; Merrill Gay, Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance; Elizabeth Goehring, United Way of Western Connecticut; Carol O'Donnell, Connecticut Early Childhood Funder Collaborative; Jose Colon Rivas, City of Hartford; Kristin Stoeke, Winchester Schools and Richard Sussman, Hartford Foundation for Public Giving.

### About the author:



Karen W. Ponder is an early childhood educator who began her work on behalf of young children as a preschool teacher and director. She later educated teachers, joined the NC Division of Child Development where she coordinated the Division's

programs for children with special needs and worked on state policy development. She led a large non-profit, the North Carolina Partnership for Children and helped to create Smart Start in North Carolina, the first statewide system of local partnerships. She is currently a national consultant and the focus of her work is statewide early childhood systems that include local community partnerships.

Ponder was previously an advisor to Connecticut in the development of the Office of Early Childhood. She interviewed more than 25 Connecticut state-level early childhood leaders about their work in Connecticut, to learn from their experiences and to hear their suggestions for future approaches and direction. This previous work informed her understanding of the early childhood landscape in Connecticut and her knowledge about the state's early childhood infrastructure and programs. Ponder has worked in almost every state to learn from, advise and inform their work related to early childhood systems, especially connecting local partnerships with state early learning systems.

