



2024 Preschool Development Grant

Strengthening Tennessee's Early Childhood Care & Education System

STRATEGIC PLAN





Acknowledgements

The strategic planning process and resultant report would not be possible without the contributions and collaboration of numerous individuals and organizations.

For more information **visit:** www.tn.gov.

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Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Office of Child Care, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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Executive Summary

The PDG-5 Grant & Tennessee's Approach

The Tennessee State Department of Education (TDOE) was one of 21 states to be awarded a Preschool Development Birth-5 (PDG-5) federal planning grant in the Spring of 2023. This grant provided funding to support research on the current early child care & education (ECCE) system, conduct stakeholder engagement and experimentation to determine a new vision and strategies for improving ECCE across the state. TDOE outlined four goals for implementation of the planning grant:

- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Understand current needs and gaps among a diverse set of stakeholders. Engage state early learning leaders in the strategic planning process.
- **Needs & Opportunities Assessment:** Analysis of key insights representing current- state challenges and areas of improvement across the early education system.
- **Initiative Iteration:** Testing of innovative approaches to improving early education to help refine strategic initiatives.
- **State-wide Strategic Plan:** Development of a plan built on research, stakeholder engagement, initiative testing and refinement that includes Tennessee's vision for the future of early education and defined initiatives to bring the vision to life.

Our Process

TDOE made the strategic decision to take a human-centered design approach to uncovering current state needs, crafting a future vision and creating a strategic plan. Human-centered design represents a non-linear, iterative process to understand and re-frame challenges within a system and create innovative solutions by bringing together diverse perspectives.

TDOE fostered system-wide collaboration by convening a group of ECCE leaders representing state agencies, ECCE expert and directors, advocacy groups, and non-profit organizations. This Preschool Commission was engaged at every step including research, ideation and Strategic Plan development. They will continue to support Strategic Plan evolution and implementation.



Executive Summary

During the Discover phase TDOE conducted interviews with all stakeholder groups and a statewide survey, a review of current literature, and quantitative analysis across multiple data sources. This research resulted in a complete understanding of current state of Tennessee's early education system to inform the Describe phase.

TDOE captured its research in a Landscape Analysis summarizing key facts and figures, eight insights comprising stakeholders' most pressing challenges and vignettes illustrating how these challenges might manifest throughout a typical family's early education experience.

Outputs from the Describe phase were brought to a co-creation workshop with the Preschool Commission that kicked off the Design phase. This group formed a shared vision for the future and explored innovative approaches to addressing the challenges uncovered in the Discover phase.

These approaches were refined through the Iterate phase. A program to pilot select interventions was launched in five Model Districts and learnings gathered through focus groups and observational research. Strategic initiatives were tested directly with relevant stakeholders to determine which features resonated most. The final Strategic Plan incorporated learnings from the Iterate phase, building on the vision and initiatives that the Preschool Commission co-created.

The Strategic Plan

TDOE crafted the Strategic Plan around bold initiatives that address the key pain points identified in the Discover phase and challenge the status quo. Initiatives are conceived with long term outcomes considered. They are designed as pilot programs to explore new strategies, data or information-generating programs to generate new insights or actions that result in new products or processes that can endure with minimal ongoing funding.



Executive Summary

The Strategic Plan comprises an overarching vision for the future of early education in Tennessee:

We envision an early childhood education system where families are fully supported through their ECCE journey, all children have equal access to high quality learning environments and educators have the resources they need to pursue and sustain an ECCE career.

Strategies to make that vision a reality focus on the three key beneficiary categories, each with its own aspiration and set of strategic initiatives as outlined below:

Program Quality We aspire to expand access and increase quality of early learning opportunities by enabling ECCE programs to best support student success.

- **Mixed Delivery Remix:** Increase the availability of high-quality, full-day ECCE seats by piloting a grant program that incentivizes and supports programs to become mixed delivery centers.
- **Connect with Kindergarten:** Improve children’s Kindergarten readiness and improve Kindergarten teachers’ preparedness by building and leveraging long-term and immediate insights about preschool experiences and how they prepare children for Kindergarten.

ECCE Workforce We aspire to invigorate a new generation of ECCE educators by creating a frictionless professional path and initiating broad cultural shifts.

- **The (ECCE) Choice is Clear:** Increase the pipeline of qualified early educators and raise the overall level of credential attainment in the field by creating new and simplifying existing pathways to credential attainment and educator professional development.
- **Mindset Makeover:** Build community perception of ECCE as a crucial step in childhood education by launching a statewide marketing & outreach campaign that leverages ECCE performance outcomes data and strategic partnerships .



Executive Summary

Family We aspire to equip families with the knowledge, tools and support structures to help their children thrive from birth-5.

- **Tools to Guide:** Incorporate ECCE into Tennessee’s broad vision for learning and equip stakeholders with comprehensive, easily digestible information in an established digital location.
- **A Quality Understanding:** Help families understand quality and decide on the best-fit ECCE program by piloting a comprehensive research tool that aims to become the first place families go when looking for an ECCE program.

Tennessee ECCE Innovation Lab

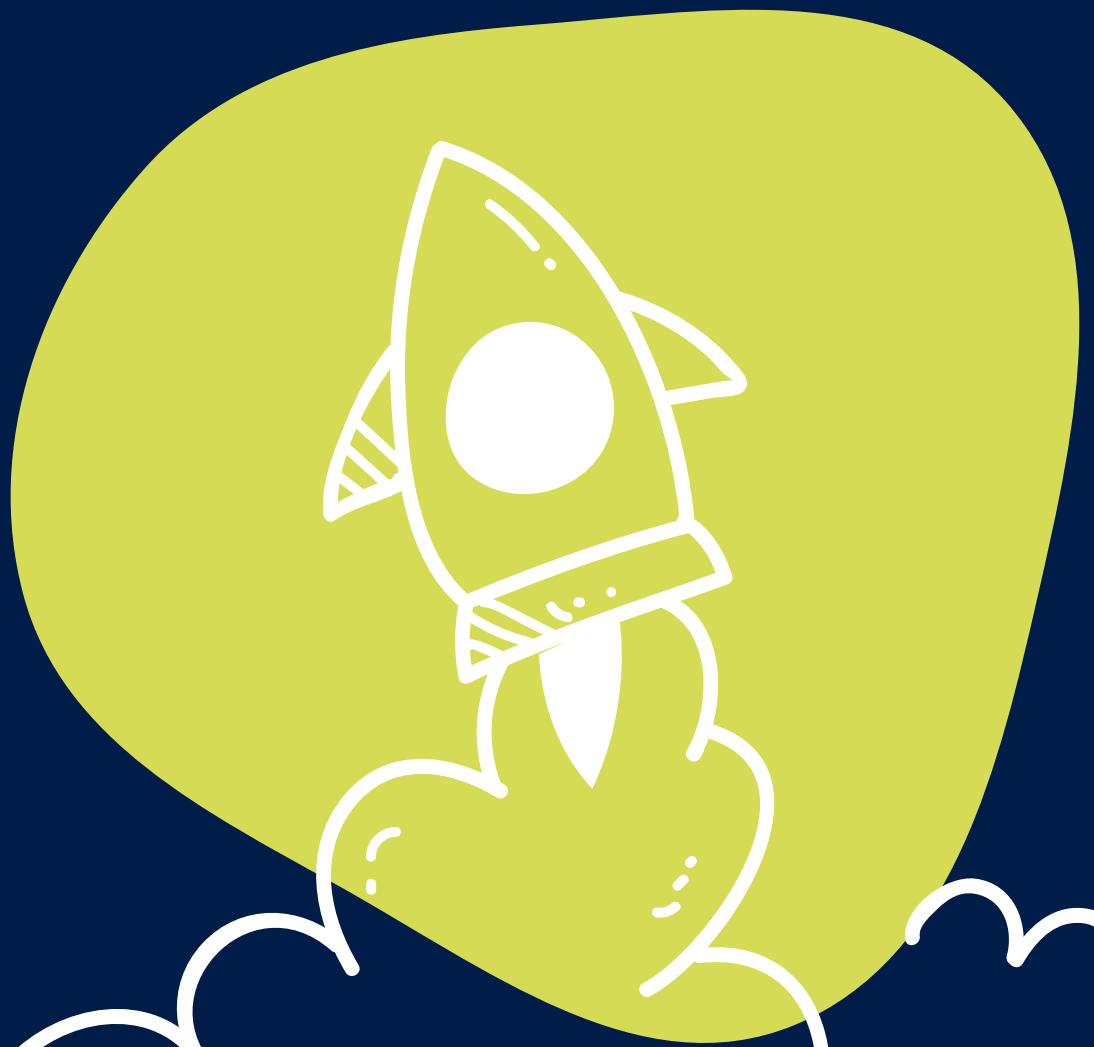
The Strategic Plan includes development of a new coordinating body that cuts across every beneficiary category. In acknowledgment of the interconnected nature of the six strategic initiatives, this group will ensure that the actions outlined in the plan are implemented in a human-centered manner, that learnings from pilot programs and insight generation are leveraged to their full potential and that TDOE and their partners continue to advance innovative solutions.

- **Innovation Lab:** Maintain strong momentum on generating, developing and testing new ECCE approaches and ensure Strategic Plan initiatives generate lasting impact by creating an Innovation Lab to oversee implementation, capture key learnings and own a backlog of ideas to drive future ECCE innovation.

TDOE and its partners have grounded this Strategic Plan in the human needs uncovered through its extensive stakeholder research and have incorporated voices from across the ECCE system to shape the initiatives that will address those needs. TDOE and the Preschool Commission are committed to the successful implementation of the strategic initiatives contained in this plan. Consistent with their iterative approach, they anticipate an ongoing evolution of the plan’s initiatives as new methods are piloted, learnings internalized, and future ideation is considered.

Looking Ahead

introduction



Background

Tennessee & ECCE

The US Department of Health and Human Services explains that early childhood experiences, particularly the first five years of life, impact long-term social, cognitive, emotional, and physical development¹. Research into short-term effects of early learning shows that children who attend high-quality early learning programs are more likely to take honors-level classes and are less likely to repeat a grade².

Tennessee families rely on stable, high-quality early childhood care and education (ECCE) to go to work and school. Additionally, access to high-quality early learning contributes to the Tennessee Department of Education's (TDOE) goal that all children become successful readers by third grade and are better prepared to thrive in kindergarten and beyond.

By the Numbers

In Tennessee, there are an estimated **437K preschool age children, 22% of whom are living in poverty** (over 5% more than the national average).^{3 4 5}

Therefore, the state requires a robust and highly coordinated ECCE system to ensure that the diverse needs of all Tennessee children are met.



Successful delivery of quality early care and education is the responsibility of multiple government agencies, corporations, non-profits, and community organizations across the state. Together, the stakeholders that take part in ECCE delivery and oversight provide a variety of services including, but not limited to funding, creation and enhancement of ECCE programs, training and support for the ECCE workforce, consultation and resource allocation for vulnerable families, specialized care for children with disabilities, and political advocacy and awareness campaigns about the importance of ECCE.

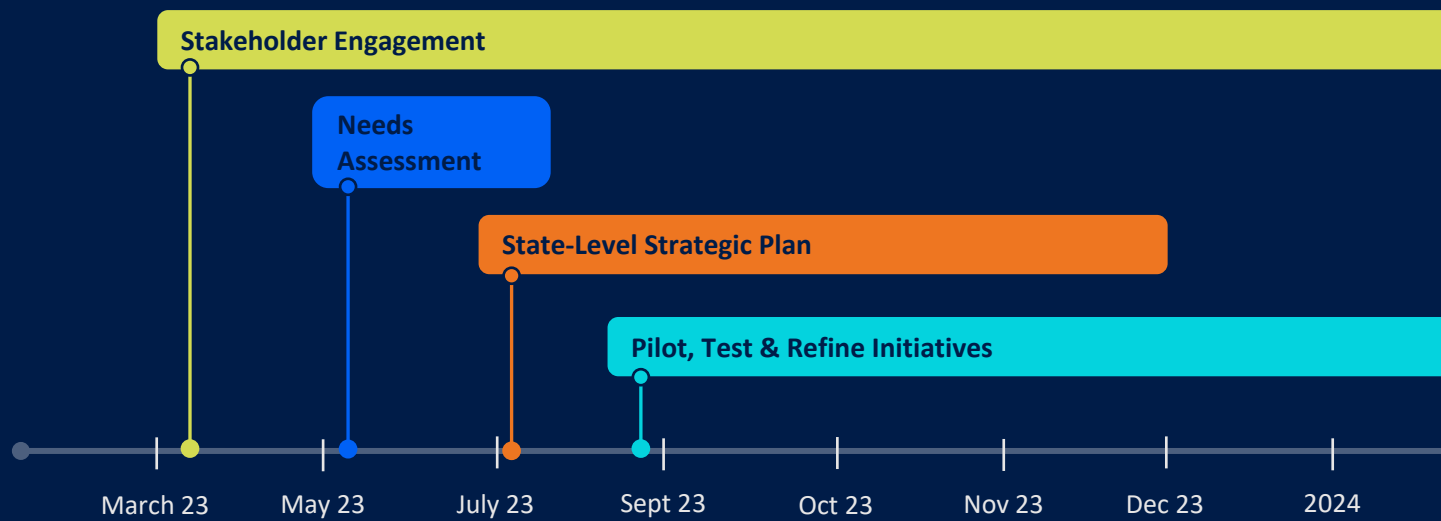
For decades, Tennessee has recognized the importance of ECCE. However, the Needs and Opportunities Assessment conducted as part of the Preschool Development Grant Birth-5 suggests that children, families and educators would benefit greatly from easier access to high quality ECCE services, improved informational tools, greater support and resources for teacher career development across the state.

This Strategic Plan addresses the State of Tennessee’s most pressing ECCE challenges and presents goals and initiatives designed to best address them.

By the Numbers

While data on ECCE capacity in Tennessee is limited, analysis conducted in the needs assessment estimates that Tennessee’s current ECCE ecosystem only has **enough seats to serve 41% of preschool age children. Of these seats, only 55% offer fulltime care.** ⁶





PDG-5 Grant

In 2021, the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE), Office of Early Learning (OEL) was awarded the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) grant by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, and the U.S. Department of Education. The planning grant was designed to support states to analyze the current landscape of their early childcare and education (ECCE) system and propose strategic changes to address challenges and opportunities identified across the state. With this grant Tennessee achieved its goals of completing:

Stakeholder engagement: Conducted interviews and field observations to engage a diverse range of stakeholders (i.e., early childhood providers, school system leadership, teachers, families, community leaders, and state agency staff). Formed the Tennessee ECCE Commission, made up of key ECCE stakeholders from state agencies, advocacy groups and non-profit organizations. Facilitated monthly Commission meetings and a day-long workshop to collaborate on research, ideation and idea development.

Data-driven needs assessment: Completed a cross-sector needs assessment that looks at the current ECCE landscape in Tennessee and addresses topics including family engagement, quality improvement, workforce compensation and supports, and direct services for young children.

State-level strategic plan: Leveraged the stakeholder engagement findings and the needs assessment, consulted with the Tennessee ECCE Commission, and worked to develop a comprehensive strategic plan that addresses governance, scale, accessibility, workforce, and quality for the entirety of the system.

Pilot, test refine aligned initiatives: Launched a series of pilots during the 2023-2024 school year, to test innovative approaches to family engagement and leadership, early childhood workforce, and quality initiatives. Conducted resonance testing with wide range of stakeholders to test and refine the strategic plan.

The ECCE Commission

Involvement in the PDG Strategic Plan

To enhance the depth, quality, and integrity of this work, the Tennessee Department of Education invited key stakeholders representing all parts of the ECCE system to form a commission that consisted of state agencies, ECCE experts, program directors, educators, advocacy groups, politicians, and non-profit and other leaders.

Through each step of our research and strategic plan development, the commission members provided consultations and recommendations to help shape the proposed strategies and represent the perspectives of their respective agencies. *(See appendix for a full list of participating Commission members)*



The ECCE Commission

Involvement in the PDG Strategic Plan

The ECCE Commission met monthly between April 2023 to December 2023 to develop Tennessee's needs assessment and strategic plan.

April

Our team met with commission members to introduce the grant, set expectations, and develop a plan for continuous commission involvement.

Outcome: Aligned on expectations for involvement in the Commission.

May

Our team presented findings and insights from the primary and secondary research efforts.

Outcome: Gathered feedback and identified any research gaps.

June

The commission attended a full day workshop to collaborate on the strategic plan. They worked through a series of brainstorming and ideation exercises to develop, refine, and prioritize concepts for the future of ECCE in Tennessee.

Outcome: Produced set of priorities and initial ideas for the strategic plan.

July

Commission members participated in a review session of synthesized workshop outputs. feedback and refine the aspirations to ensure they accurately reflect the goals of the group.

Outcome: Refined a set of six aspirations to ensure they accurately reflect the goals of the group.

August

Commission members heard from the four Model District program grantees and discuss potential progress measurements for each of the pilot programs.

Outcome: Built familiarity with the Model District pilots and how they will help refine the strategic plan.

September

The Commission participated in a mini workshop to discuss challenges, opportunities, and next steps for achieving the aspirations.

Outcome: Generated details to help us form the strategic plan initiatives.

October

The Commission worked together to refine the actions, programs and resources that are included in the strategic plan initiatives.

Outcome: Further developed the strategic plan initiatives.

December

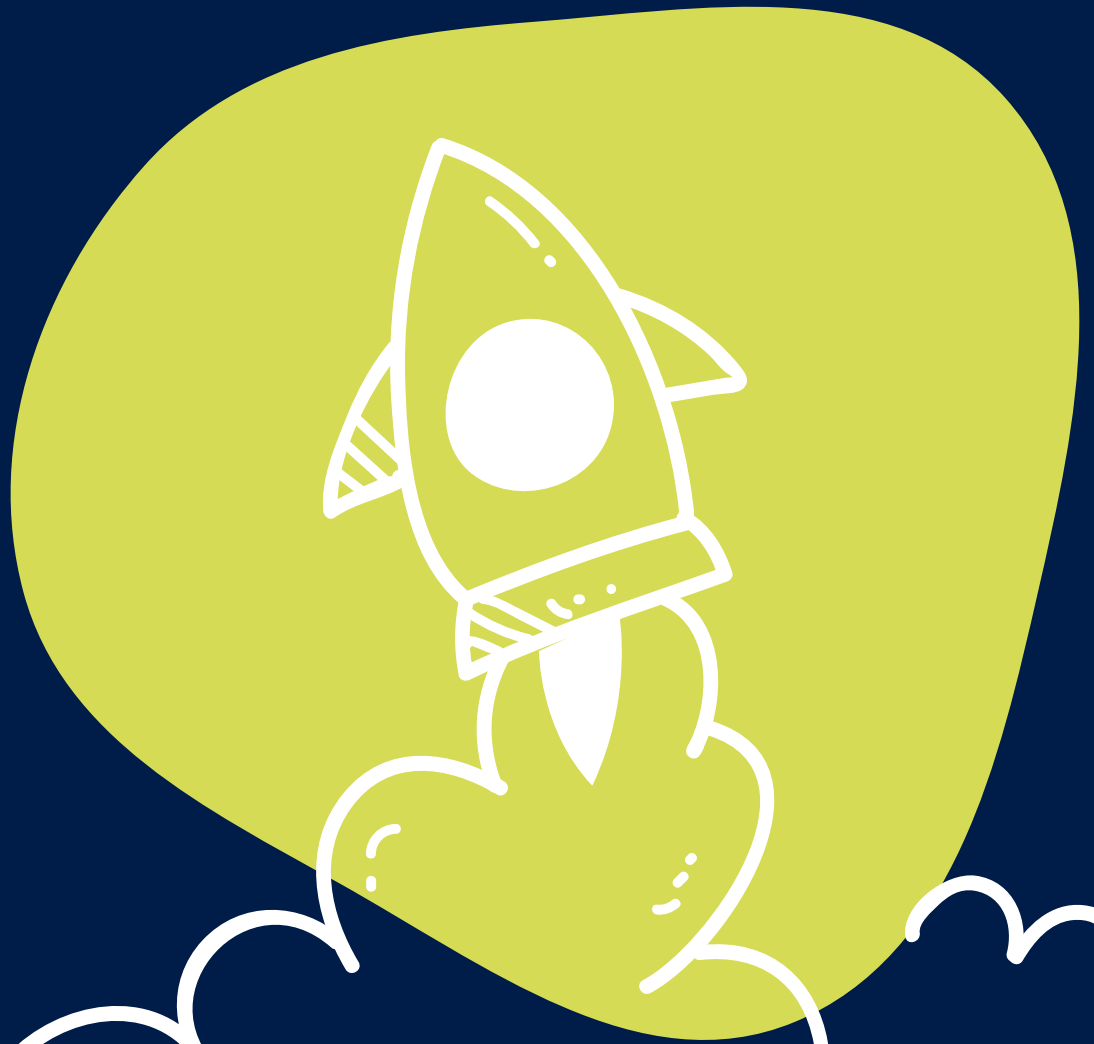
The Commission reviewed the final proposed content for the strategic plan and provided thoughts about testing and refinement.

Outcome: Aligned on the final set of strategic plan initiatives and how they might evolve through testing.

Continued Involvement

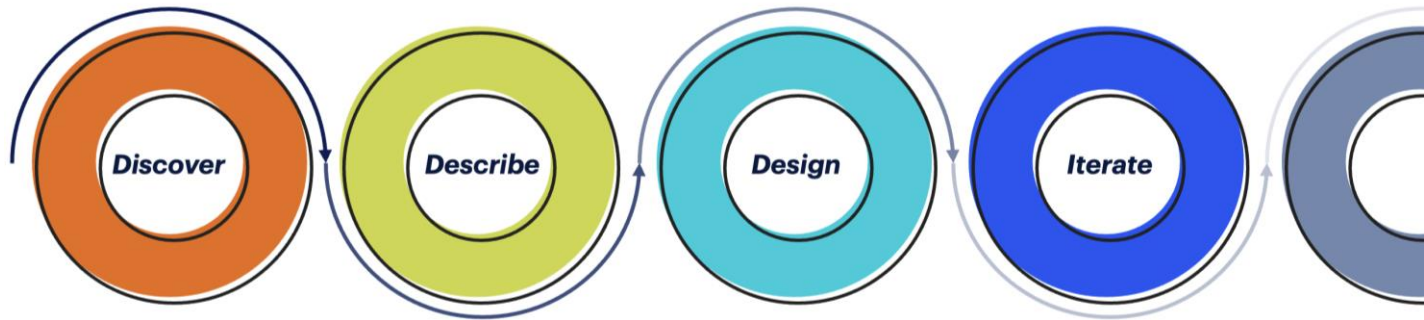
The Department of Education will continue to partner with commission members and their organizations in a targeted manner as advisors to relevant strategic plan initiatives.

Our process



Our Process

Developing the Tennessee's Needs Assessment & Strategic Plan



Tennessee set out to follow a deliberately human-centered, collaborative process to understand the complex nuances of the ECCE system and develop a strategic plan to secure a successful future for all stakeholders. To ensure the plan was exhaustive in its approach, our process involved in-depth research, stakeholder engagement, testing and validation, and refinement.

We leveraged human-centered design thinking methods to understand needs and opportunities within the Tennessee ECCE system. Design thinking methodology is defined as:

“A non-linear, iterative process that teams use to understand users, challenge assumptions, redefine problems and create innovative solutions to prototype and test.”

We define the Tennessee ECCE system as all organizations, agencies, actors, and stakeholders that receive ECCE, are involved in its delivery, or govern its rules and structures. A full system diagram is showcased in the Needs & Opportunities Assessment microsite.

We understand that a complex system exists that requires engaging and balancing the needs of diverse stakeholders, therefore we used a systems approach to arrive at strategies that consider all actors in Tennessee's ECCE landscape. A systems approach is defined as:

“An approach that designers use to analyze problems in an appropriate context. By looking beyond apparent problems to consider a system as a whole, designers can expose root causes and avoid merely treating symptoms. They can then tackle deeper problems and be more likely to find effective solutions.”



DISCOVER

Our team conducted a literature review, in-depth stakeholder interviews, and surveys to understand the ECCE system and uncover the pain points, challenges and opportunities for improving ECCE in Tennessee.

Literature Review

The team gathered prior academic and TDOE research findings to provide background and context within the early childhood education space, specifically targeting best-in-class experiences in other states and countries.

- **100+** TN, US, and international sources including reports, articles, data sets, studies, news, guidelines, and standards.
- Identified emerging trends
- Created a Tennessee Preschool Stakeholder map
- Informed the development of research plan and interview guides

Interviews

Conducted a total of 46 interviews (2,420 min):

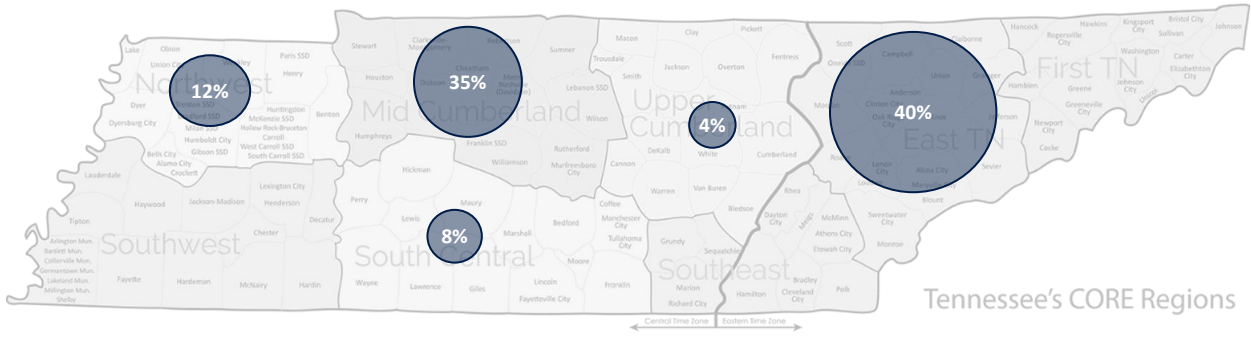
- 25 Families
- 14 Industry Experts & Commission Members
- 7 ECCE educators and Program Directors
- Qualitative data to understand the current state preschool experience
- Identified pain-points and areas of opportunities for future strategy development

Surveys

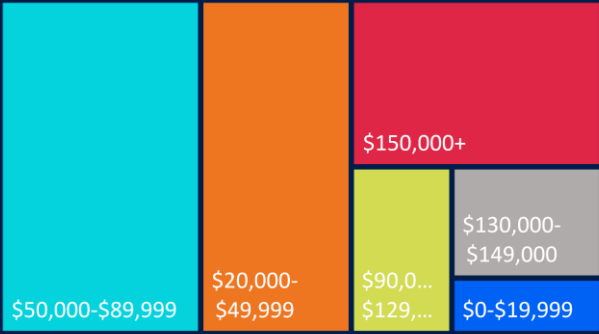
Conducted a statewide survey:

- 1,135 responses
- 237 interested in participating in 1:1 interviews
- Gathered quantitative data from families in TN who have children between ages 0-5
- Identified 15 high-impact families to interview (Non-English speaking, child with disabilities, etc.)

Family Engagement Demographics



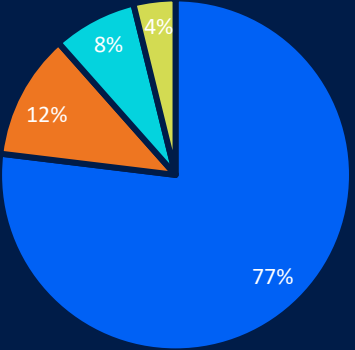
Household Incomes



Household Types

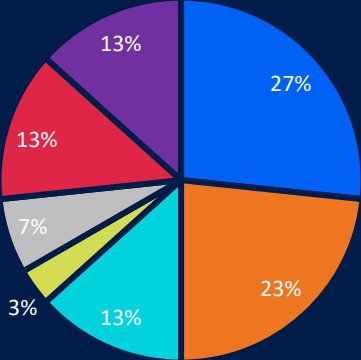
- Single and dual-income households
- Unemployed, retired, part-time and full-time employed
- Varying family sizes
- Families with children with special needs

Race / Ethnicity

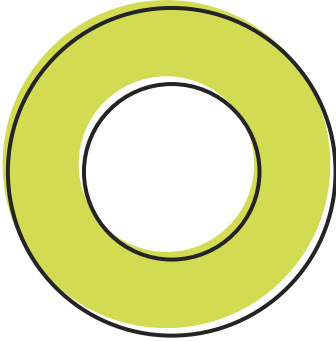


- White
- Latino
- Black/African American
- Other

Student Program Enrollment



- VPK
- Child Care Center / Private Preschool
- Faith Based Preschool
- Family Child Care Home
- Head Start
- No ECCE Program
- Public School



DESCRIBE

Leveraging our research findings, our team developed a Needs & Opportunities Assessment that consists of a holistic current state landscape analysis and detailed insights that serve as the foundation of our strategic plan.

Landscape Analysis

Detailed analysis of Tennessee's current ECCE system including:

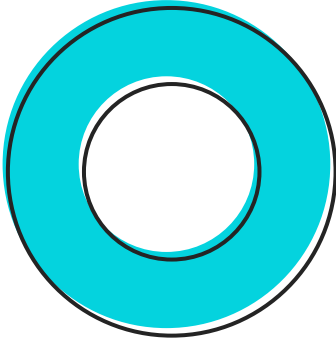
- Involved government agencies, non-profits, legislators and other key players implicated in the governance and implementation of ECCE, including member of the Tennessee ECCE Commission
- Demographics of ECCE eligible children (0-5) and their families
- The current experiences of the ECCE workforce, the current employee pipeline, and challenges faced by educators
- The state's current program offerings, service offerings, program capacity, affordability, and other accessibility factors
- Quality metrics, processes for measuring quality, awards and recognitions, as well as plans to improve how quality is measured and communicated

Insights

The **8 key insights** extract the most important themes, pain points, and opportunities that exist across the state. The insights look across all categories, from governance to accessibility, to consider all factors and identify the underlying needs that must be addressed to bring true systematic change to ECCE in Tennessee.

Vignettes

Vignettes are story-like artifacts that personify the experiences of families and educators in Tennessee to help us, and the commission members, empathize with families as we develop the strategic plan. Vignettes allow us to look beyond surface level data and understand the lived experiences of people who interact with the ECCE policies, systems, and programs in TN.



DESIGN

The team, alongside the ECCE Commission built the foundation of Tennessee's PDG strategy. Through a series of research presentations, workshop activities, interviews, and feedback sessions, we created an initial strategy and plans to test, validate and refine it.

Workshop

The team facilitated a co-creation workshop with the ECCE commission members. During this day-long session, members represented their agencies through a series of design thinking activities to collaborate on building the foundation of the strategic plan. The group:

- Explored innovative approaches to improving the ECCE system,
- Created actionable concepts for systematic change, and
- Developed priorities and next steps for implementation, testing & refinement.

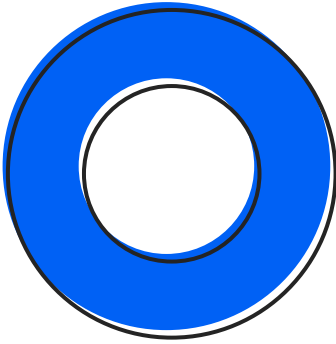
Draft Strategic Plan

The Draft Strategic Plan contained the first complete iteration of our future vision, aspirations, change concepts and pilots.



Tennessee Department of Education





ITERATE

Our team refined the Draft Strategic Plan through real-world testing and learning. Testing, iteration, and validation are important steps in the strategic planning process that allow us to ensure that the solutions we propose align with the capabilities, needs, and goals of the stakeholders we are serving. To cover all proposed initiatives, we launched a Model District Program and conducted initiative Resonance Testing.

Model District Program

What is the Model District Program?

Four Tennessee Districts' pre-K programs were awarded a competitive grant to expand services during the 2023-2024 academic year. The Model District program allowed grantees to test the impacts of new services related to family engagement and leadership, workforce, and quality. The learnings from Model District interventions helped steer and shape the initiatives included in the Strategic Plan.

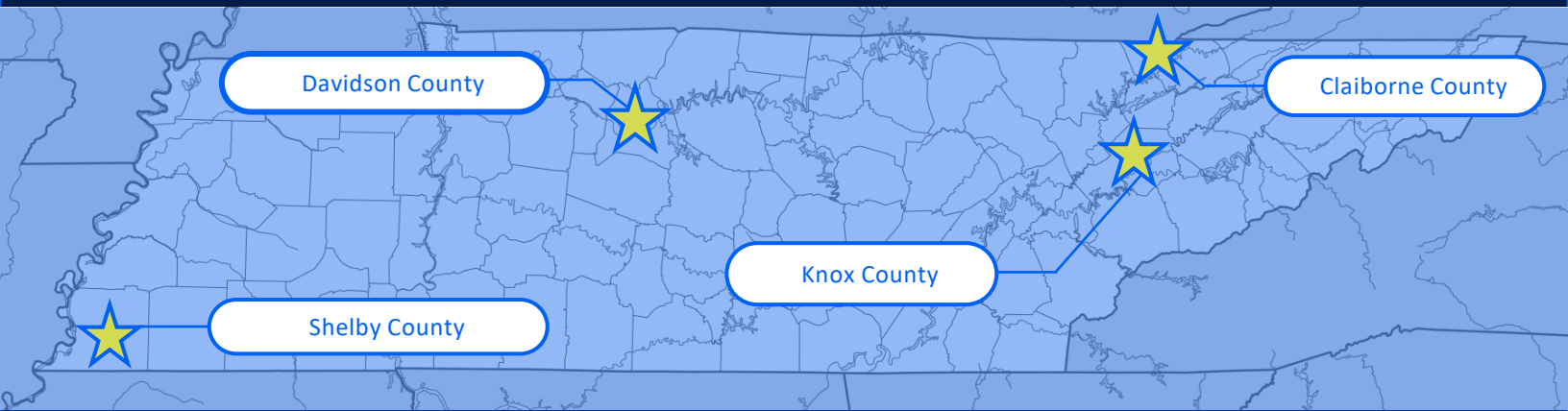


Testing & Validation Approach

The team regularly liaised with Model District leaders, conducted on-site observations and spoke with educators, directors, families and community partners in each school to understand the obstacles, benefits, and impacts of delivering innovative & quality preschool services. Through qualitative and quantitative research, we gained insight into how different program offerings impact factors such as student attendance and performance, parent engagement and career opportunity, and educator satisfaction.

These programs helped to inform the strategic plan by shedding light on the challenges and opportunities experienced by programs when providing these services. Additionally, the Model Districts help prioritize the proposed initiatives in the plan by validating the types of services that are truly desired by, and have a positive impact on, families, programs, and community partners.

Model District Activities



Research Activities

5

site visits with observational research

15+

Virtual Interviews & Consultations

4

Parent Focus Groups

We spoke with

14

Teachers & Teaching assistants

2

Community Partners

14

Administrators

26

Parents

Resonance Testing

What is Resonance Testing?

Resonance Testing is an evidence-based methodology for soliciting feedback on concepts to gauge perceived desirability and feasibility. It involves presenting stimuli to select stakeholder groups to explore their response. Through interactive activities and conversations, our team gained understanding of how our proposed initiatives would be received and captured feedback that led to refinements and additions to the initiatives.



Testing & Validation Approach

After working with the commission to narrow down proposed initiatives for the strategic plan, we created a conducted resonance testing with administrators, educators, and families to understand:

- Would this initiative be helpful to those who it was designed for?
- How could the initiative be improved?
- What currently existing initiatives can be leveraged?
- What constraints (time, resources, logistics) must be considered during implementation?

Parents

Initiatives Tested:

- Mixed Delivery Remix
- Connect with Kindergarten
- ECCE Choice is Clear
- Mindset Makeover
- Tools to Guide
- A Quality Understanding

Educators

Initiatives Tested:

- Mixed Delivery Remix
- Connect with Kindergarten
- ECCE Choice is Clear
- Mindset Makeover
- Tools to Guide
- A Quality Understanding

Administrators

Initiatives Tested:

- Mixed Delivery Remix
- Connect with Kindergarten
- ECCE Choice is Clear
- Mindset Makeover
- Tools to Guide
- A Quality Understanding

the strategic plan



STRATEGIC PLAN OVERVIEW

PLAN STRUCTURE

The Tennessee PDG strategic plan maintains simplicity while addressing the diverse needs of Families, the ECCE Workforce, and ECCE Programs across the state. The plan contains an overarching **strategic vision** divided into three unique **aspirations**. The plan proposes seven **initiatives** (two per *aspiration*) that will help the state achieve the *strategic vision*.

Tennessee’s ECCE Vision

Program Quality Aspiration 1	Mixed Delivery Remix Initiative 1
	Connect with Kindergarten Initiative 2
ECCE Workforce Aspiration 2	The ECCE Choice is Clear Initiative 3
	Mindset Makeover Initiative 4
Family Aspiration 3	Tools to Guide Initiative 5
	A Quality Understanding Initiative 6
DOE Innovation Lab Initiative 7	

Tennessee's Vision

We envision an early childhood education system where families are fully supported through their ECCE journey, all children have equal access to high quality learning environments and educators have the resources they need to pursue and sustain an ECCE career.

ASPIRATIONS

PROGRAM QUALITY

We aspire to expand access and increase quality of early learning opportunities by enabling ECCE programs to best support student success.

ECCE WORKFORCE

We aspire to invigorate a new generation of ECCE educators by creating a frictionless professional path and initiating broad cultural shifts.

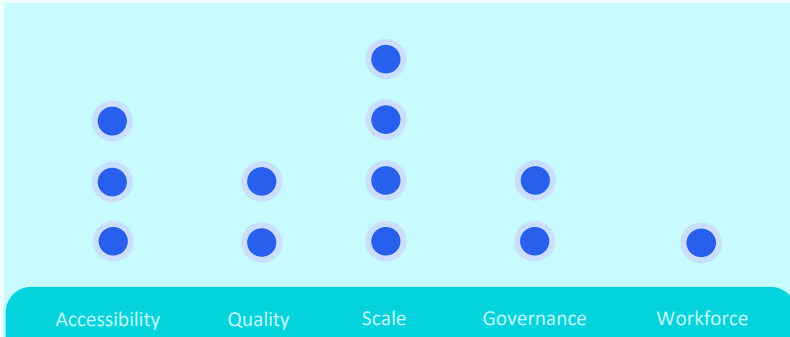
FAMILIES

We aspire to equip families with the knowledge, tools and support structures to help their children thrive from birth-5.

Iconography Guide

5 Area Dot Scale

This scale illustrates the extent to which each concept addresses each of our PDG-5 grant guiding questions. Each initiative is ranked from 1 (lowest) to 4 (highest) for each guiding question.



Accessibility: Address family challenges when looking for and enrolling in ECCE

Quality: Define, communicate and support continuous improvement in ECCE quality

Scale: Increase the number of families that can access high quality ECCE

Governance: Coordinate across state and local levels for alignment across services

Workforce: Address workforce challenges to attract and retain high quality ECCE professionals

Initiative Icons

Governance



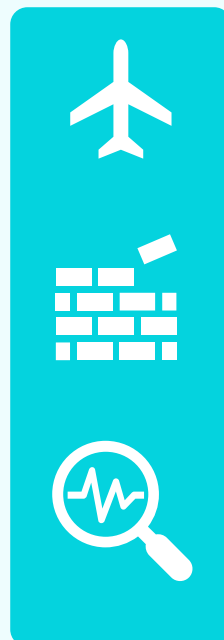
Specific populations that an initiative will target

Focal Populations



Organizations involved governance and coordination of an initiative

Sustainability



Pilot project designed to test a concept and generate results to support future actions

Built-to-last project that requires only minimal investment to maintain over time

Research project that will generate data or insights that inform future actions



Aspiration 1

Program Quality

We aspire to expand access and increase quality of early learning opportunities by enabling ECCE programs to best support student success.



The Need

Tennesseans need greater access to high quality preschool. Increased capacity is needed to meet demand and more robust data is required to best demonstrate the link between quality ECCE and subsequent academic success.

The research says...

Currently, it is estimated that Tennessee's ECCE system has the capacity to serve only 41% of preschool age children (when adjusting for total ages served).⁶ Our research has identified specific access gaps for children in younger age groups, certain geographies and for families just above income thresholds for Tennessee's subsidy programs. Parents often cite the struggle to secure a spot in a preferred program, and of paying tuition when they do.

A wide range of programs make up the Tennessee ECCE population: from part-time home-based care to drop-in centers to full-working day center-based preschool and public-school based pre-K. Programs differ in their level of structure, educational philosophy and overall quality. Kindergarten teachers receive children at varying levels of readiness, reflecting the full spectrum of preschool and care situations.

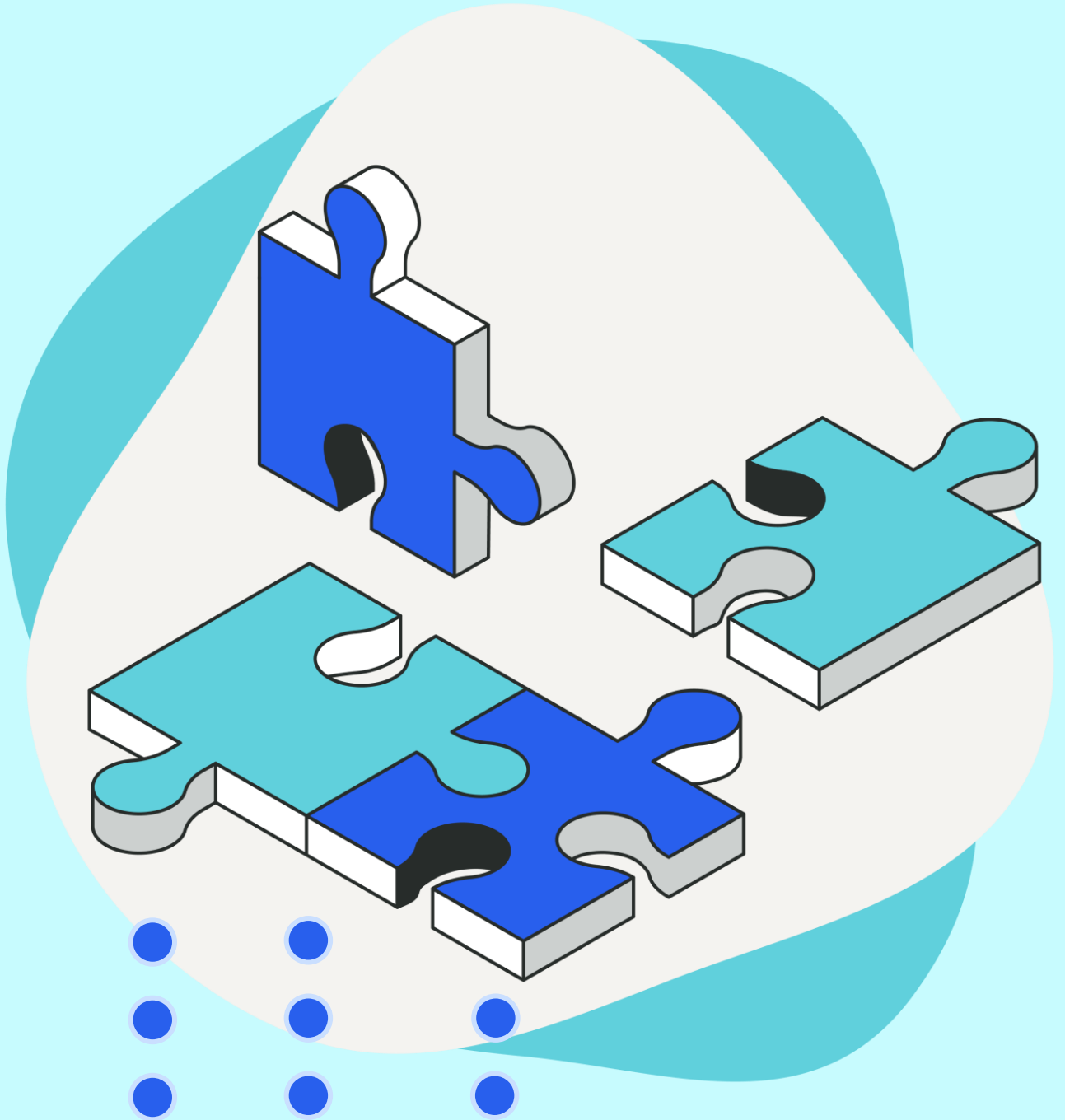
This diversity of ECCE experiences presents a challenge to generating data-driven insights. Data linking children's early education with later outcomes exists for those who attend Voluntary Pre-K, but a comprehensive dataset for all children could be an asset in demonstrating the link between ECCE and Kindergarten readiness.

“I didn't have much of a choice [of ECCE program]. We chose the one we got in to and thankfully it was a more affordable one ... It's a huge help not to have fees now that our son is in Pre-K.”

- Parent

MODEL DISTRICT PILOT INSIGHT

A key motivator for Model Districts to apply as a grantee to open new classrooms was to **create more learning continuity** for entering Kindergarteners. Educators could easily see that children coming from a Pre-K program had the **strongest foundational skills** among Kindergarteners.



Accessibility

Quality

Scale

Governance

Workforce

Initiative 01

Mixed Delivery Remix

GOAL: Increase the availability of high-quality, full-day ECCE seats for children of all ages, demographics and need profiles.

OVERVIEW

Create a Preschool Expansion Grant pilot opportunity that incentivizes and supports new high quality ECCE seats by making funding available for programs to become mixed delivery centers. Programs meeting quality & curriculum standards and other requirements can receive support for new full-day seats that leverage state funding, vouchers and fees.

HOW WILL THIS WORK?

Expansion through Mixed Delivery. ECCE programs across the state (DHS certified or DOE licensed including private programs and LEA's) can apply to receive state funding to expand classroom seats and become a mixed delivery center. Programs will be required to meet CLASS quality and curriculum standards to be eligible. Funding will support instruction commiserate with a Pre-K school day and programs providing a full working day of instruction can significantly reduce tuition costs for families by leveraging mixed funding (such as childcare assistance vouchers, Head Start, etc.) to operate at optimal revenue levels. The Expansion grant will support a whole child approach and include funding for family engagement & wraparound services.

A Focus on Key Needs. Preschool Expansion Grant funding will target ECCE programs that can meet Tennessee's most critical needs:

- Priority consideration will be given to ECCE programs in childcare deserts, programs accepting children in under-served age groups and programs that operate for a full working day and calendar year.
- The Expansion Grant will endeavor to support children from families whose incomes would disqualify them from VPK, but who struggle to afford market rate ECCE tuition. Strategies include requiring grant beneficiaries to accept Smart Steps Childcare Assistance vouchers and piloting family income eligibility thresholds above current levels for VPK.
- TDOE aims to give families of children with special needs a wider range of ECCE options and plans to require that grant beneficiaries serve every child regardless of disability or EPP status. To be eligible, ECCE programs must have a collaborative partnership with the school district to ensure all students are being educated in an early learning environment.

ECCE Program Inclusion. To ensure a range of ECCE programs can take advantage of this funding, priority programs that do not currently meet CLASS standards (or newly established programs) can be considered eligible by demonstrating a path to high quality and can receive support for quality building before becoming a mixed-delivery center.

Precision Grants. ECCE programs receiving mixed delivery funding will also have access to additional targeted funding opportunities for increasing program quality and breadth of services. These grants may include:

- **Microgrants:** Small one-time grants designed to help programs make minor improvements. These grants are designed to make quick quality improvements with minimal grant administration or red tape required.
- **Transportation Grants:** Transportation remains one of the leading causes for chronic absenteeism across the state. Transportation grants would support grantee-led solutions to providing affordable options for transporting children in classes younger than Kindergarten to reduce barriers to consistent attendance.
- **Aftercare for All:** Financial and logistic support to assist ECCE programs in establishing and/or subsidizing extended-hour academic enrichment programs to cover a full working day. This support could include direct funding to subsidize after-school program fees for voucher-ineligible families, assistance in securing 21st Century Community Learning Center grants, and/or assistance establishing relationships with community partners like the YMCA that implement afterschool programs.

Testing & Validation Insights

What we learned from conversations with with families and administrators that shaped this initiative.

What resonated with Parents. Parents were very supportive to this idea overall. They felt the quality vetting component would help them target a desirable program and valued the subsidized tuition. A full working day and year-round schedule was also appealing because it reduced the need for additional childcare. Parents were motivated to reduce the amount of change their child experiences and they see benefit in being able to keep the ECCE environment as consistent as possible.

What resonated with preschool directors Both private and public preschool administrators found many aspects of this initiative appealing. They felt they could easily meet quality standards and support grant administration. They were excited about the possibility to expand their services, albeit in different ways. Roughly half felt confident that they could add additional classrooms. Besides expansion, private school directors saw the grant as an opportunity to serve other income brackets and public school leaders cited the opportunity to support families by offering before and aftercare.

The Challenges Physical space and teacher recruitment were the most common challenges administrators mentioned. Some schools have limited space available and nearly all administrators already feel recruitment to be a challenge at their current size. Roughly half felt it that expand classrooms would not be feasible for these reasons, though these administrators would be interested in the grant to expand their services in different ways, detailed above.

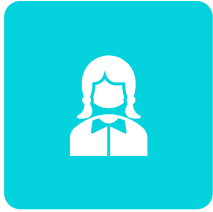
“I’m confident we would meet quality requirements and report on them with a little more administrative support. We would love to serve more children, especially those in different income levels.”- Private preschool director

Desirability



Feasibility





Focal Populations

- Childcare deserts
- Under-served age groups
- Middle Income families
- SPED children
- Families where all available parents work



Sustainability

This initiative is designed as a pilot to demonstrate the viability of public-private delivery of ECCE to increase accessibility, how affordable and high quality ECCE impacts family wellbeing and child achievement, and how expanded options for full-day programs impacts family participation in ECCE. Pilot implementation will include target outcomes and key indicators along with a measurement and results dissemination plan that grant applicants will be required to support



Governance & Coordination

Ownership: TDOE
 Key Partner(s): TDHS
 Participation: TDOT, LEA's, School district leadership
 Statutory Requirements: Initiative will pilot a broadening of the Voluntary Pre-K income eligibility requirements

Measurements

Successful applicants	Number of applicants to the Preschool Expansion Grant program that meet requirements and accept funding.
New ECCE seats created	Number of ECCE seats made available as a result of Preschool Expansion grants
Grantee satisfaction	Index of grantee (ECCE program) satisfaction indicators including intent to continue
Children served from target populations	Number of children within the specified target populations that are served by Preschool Expansion grantees



Accessibility

Quality

Scale

Governance

Workforce

Initiative 02

Connect with Kindergarten

GOAL: Improve children’s Kindergarten readiness and improve Kindergarten teachers’ preparedness for children with all preschool experiences.

OVERVIEW

Build and leverage long-term and immediate insights about preschool experiences and how they prepare children for Kindergarten. Create new data sets and analysis to study this relationship across a wide range of students. Facilitate preparatory activities for Kindergarten teachers to enable them to facilitate a seamless transition for children of all backgrounds.

HOW WILL THIS WORK?

Data Collection: Create a data set that links the pre-Kindergarten ECCE experience (whether it be public, private preschool or no ECCE) of each child entering public Kindergarten to their student record to facilitate future study on the relationship between various ECCE experiences and subsequent academic achievement. TDOE will work with primary and elementary schools to collect ECCE history as part of their standard enrollment processes and centralize this data set.

Comparative Study: Launch a comparative study to understand the impact of specific ECCE experiences on Kindergarten readiness. The study will compare full year early education plus any pre-Kindergarten summer program vs full year early education without a summer program vs only full year early education or only a summer program. The state aims to leverage results to inform programs and educators, advocate for funding & policy changes, and inform future preschool development plans.

Teacher Connection: Equip Kindergarten teachers with the information and skills needed best prepare to receive children with a variety of early learning experiences. Remove barriers for parents and teachers to discuss children’s pre-K learning through parent preparation & outreach (including resources within Best for All Central) to encourage productive conferences. Give Kindergarten teachers access to the preschool information collected at registration including names/contact for children’s preschool programs or primary daytime care-givers when possible, to facilitate exchange. Finally, liaise with Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) to expand training for prospective Kindergarten teachers in preschool learning and child development to deepen their understanding of their students’ prior experiences.

Testing & Validation Insights

What we learned from conversations with educators and administrators that shaped this initiative.

Easy Implementation Within schools that offer pre-K, various approaches exist to sharing student backgrounds when they transition to Kindergarten, though all are limited to pre-K students. Educators see the benefits of having information about all children’s learning history as they transition to kindergarten, including names and contact information for private preschools. Administrators express that it would be simple to integrate the changes necessary to collect this information into existing processes.

Parent Engagement Educators cited that additional context is helpful for understanding their students’ emotions and behaviors, however parents can be reluctant to share information about their children’s history on topics unrelated to education. Connecting with parents through conversation is an important channel of communication that can be helpful for gathering more information and engaging the parent in their child's education and development.

“The more information the kindergartens teachers get before getting into the school year, the better.” – Director

“We don’t want to replace our transition process but add on whatever would be helpful.” – Teacher

Desirability



Feasibility





Focal Populations

Prioritize the roll out to schools with diverse student populations across socioeconomic groups, race/ethnicity, English language status and access to a variety of ECCE options to build a rich data set



Sustainability

- New data collection protocols and Kindergarten teacher prep support will be permanent process change resulting in year-over-year information
- The comparative study will provide insight into the value of full-year pre-K and summer kindergarten prep to inform future advocacy



Governance & Coordination

Ownership: TDOE
 Key Partner(s): School district leadership
 Participation: LEA's, EPPs
 Statutory Requirements: NA

Measurements

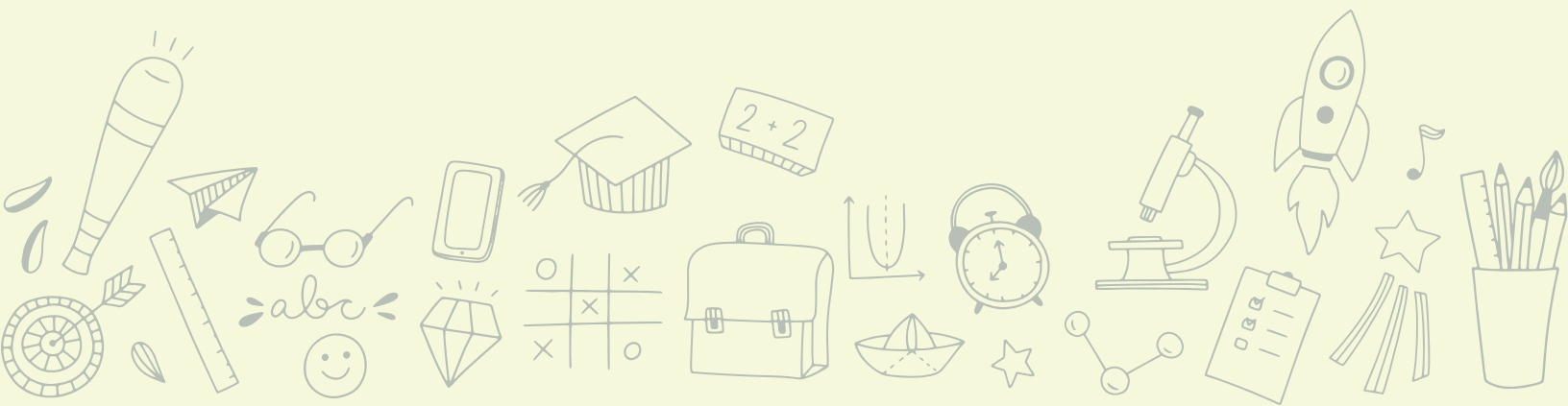
School adoption of data collection requirements	Number of schools collecting preschool data at Kindergarten registration
Completeness of preschool experience data set	Percentage of missing fields from preschool experience data set
Completion of comparative study	Completion achieved when results available from comparative study
Participation in Kindergarten transition activities	Number of Kindergarten teachers participating in informational exchange to prepare for incoming children.



Aspiration 2

ECCE Workforce

We aspire to invigorate a new generation of ECCE educators by creating a frictionless professional path and initiating broad cultural shifts.



The Challenge

Many Tennessee ECCE professionals feel undervalued, and ECCE programs routinely struggle to attract and retain qualified ECCE professionals.

The research says...

Across the state, hiring and retaining certified educators and teaching assistants remains the number one challenge for programs. This is especially true for hiring *certified* TA's and Special Education Teachers. In fact, an analysis of Tennessee's Voluntary Pre-K revealed that less than 20% of TA's held a CDA or higher degree. Support for higher education exists in some parts of Tennessee's system but is not available for early educators at TDOE-oversight programs.

Additionally, a Cost of Quality Report in Tennessee found that ECCE worker salary greatly contributes to program quality (versus other expense categories like facility rent, educational supplies and professional development). The Tennessee state profile notes that salary for early educators is roughly 24% lower than that of K-8 teachers with similar levels of educational attainment. Indeed, the poverty rate for early educators in Tennessee is over 10 percentage points higher than the average Tennessee worker (23% vs 11%).⁷

“Our school has had a teaching position posted online for over a month and we still don't have a single application”

- VPK Program Director

MODEL DISTRICT PILOT INSIGHT

The state set a requirement that each model district classroom staff a Dual Certified ECCE educator.

Of the 4 programs participating only 1 was able to achieve this goal. Program directors cited lack of applications from dual certified teachers as the primary reason.



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- Accessibility Quality Scale Governance Workforce

Initiative 03

The (ECCE) Choice is Clear

GOAL: Increase the pipeline of qualified early educators and raise the overall level of credential attainment in the field.

OVERVIEW

Create new and simplify existing pathways to credential attainment and educator professional development. Implement an incentivized route to a CDA for teaching assistants and early career educators through a scholarship program. Unify, clarify and expand the landscape of existing Educator Prep Programs, financial supports for Bachelors and Masters degrees in early education and apprenticeship programs to build a complete picture of career progression.

HOW WILL THIS WORK?

CDA Scholarship Program. Incentivize individuals entering the ECCE field and fill a key gap in early educator support by launching a CDA scholarship program for para-professionals. Working educators can attain a CDA through a funded online course provided by a third party. The self-paced course will be feasible to complete alongside a full-time teaching schedule and educators will receive a stipend upon completion. Programs will be encouraged to support TA's as they complete the course through study-groups and mentoring from experienced teachers. As part of this program, TDOE will begin tracking credentials of its para-professionals with the goal of a new teacher quality benchmark and an increased pace of advancement to higher levels of education.

Simplifying and Unifying. Make it easier for early educators to advance from high school to CDA through Bachelors and Masters by creating an informational resource that connects the landscape of teacher training and apprenticeship programs available across the state. This resource would outline the various paths an educator can take to build a career in ECCE such that early educators at all levels of means, needs and education goals can find the right combination of opportunities and programs for career advancement.

In addition, TDOE will facilitate harmonization between disparate programs. This could include allowing educators can earn a CDA upon high school graduation through a CTE (Career and Technical Education) program and allowing coursework from the CDA Scholarship program to be applied towards higher education and/or combined with free community college coursework through the Tennessee Reconnect Act for a full Associates or Bachelors degree. It also includes applying a requirement that all early education Bachelors degree programs require dual certification in SPED for all students.

Outreach & Awareness. To ensure full utilization of Tennessee’s existing and new ECCE career opportunities, TDOE will build awareness across the state. This may include partnerships with high school and university career counselors, educator support teams, email & SMS campaigns, etc. Special emphasis will be given to communities with the greatest staffing shortages and to educators with sought after skills like SPED, infant & toddler certification or dual-language ability.

Testing & Refinement

What we learned from conversations with educators & administrators that shaped this initiative.

Educator Segments Educators take different career development paths, largely dependent on their available resources. Some can attend a Bachelors program, and others choose to stay in roles that don't require a credential. There is a significant portion of educators who want to grow and pursue higher education but are limited by lack of funds and information. For this segment, a CDA scholarship and informational career guide are highly desirable, with the potential to make a significant impact.

The Power of People Educators seek guidance during their career journey and support from more experienced educators. Information resources and the CDA program will be most impactful if professional connections are incorporated. Feedback from stakeholders includes mentorship groups for TA's pursuing their CDA and support or acknowledgement from school leadership. Professional connections can also amplify the career informational guide.

Incentivized Support Our testing found additional high-value opportunities to attract and retain educators. Tuition assistance for Bachelors programs, including a scholarship with commitment to teach in the state (such as the popular Mississippi Excellence in Teaching program) were highly ranked, along with salary increases for education milestones and benefits like healthcare.

“If we could have cohorts that could support people in their career so they don't feel alone in their journey and they have mentors and others that can help them.”

– VPK Director

Desirability



Feasibility





Focal Populations

- Early educators without access to support from Tennessee Early Childhood Training Alliance (TECTA)
- English language learners and children who speak a language other than English in their home
- Children with special needs
- Infants & toddlers



Sustainability

- CDA Scholarship Program will serve as a pilot to validate the supports required to raise the overall level of educational attainment for early educators
- Informational career path guides and harmonization of higher education programs are lasting investments that require only low-cost maintenance



Governance & Coordination

Ownership: TDOE

Key Partner(s): EPP's, Community colleges

Participation: TN Board of Regents, District VPK Directors

Statutory Requirements: Current law in the process of change to require teaching assistants to have a CDA

Measurements

CDA scholarship program participation

Number of eligible teaching assistants enrolling in the CDA Scholarship program

Completion of higher education credential

Number of early educators earning a CDA or BA

Educator satisfaction with career path guidance

Index of qualitative and quantitative indicators representing the extent to which career path resources meet educator needs



- Accessibility
- Quality
- Scale
- Governance
- Workforce

Initiative 04

Mindset Makeover

GOAL: Communities in Tennessee acknowledge that ECCE is a crucial foundation for child development and children of all ages in all types of programs deserve high quality education.

OVERVIEW

Launch a statewide marketing & outreach campaign that leverages ECCE performance outcomes data and strategic partnerships to reshape the perception of ECCE in Tennessee.

HOW WILL THIS WORK?

Marketing & Outreach. TDOE will develop a statewide campaign to reshape the perceptions and language surrounding the ECCE profession and the role of ECCE for Tennessee’s children. TDOE aims to continue promoting ECCE workers as highly skilled employees and develop a communication plan that highlights successes in preschool. The campaign will leverage grassroots support by encouraging parents to recognize and ask their local leaders for high quality early learning opportunities. It will include targeted outreach to school district leadership and elementary school principals with the goal of ECCE being perceived as equally important to K-12 education.

Statewide Partnerships. To ensure the success of the campaign, TDOE will seek to partner with other organizations including state government agencies, lobbying organizations, and NGOs affiliated with ECCE. By aligning around a common strategy, organizations can more effectively advocate for policy changes and increased ECCE support to the state senate level. Partnering with other agencies will ensure a common approach to shifting language across state outlets.

Data Validation & Advocacy. TDOE will leverage the data generated through initiatives in this strategic plan to advocate for policy change and increased support for ECCE. With more robust processes for storing and analyzing data, metrics including student performance, educator retention, parent employment, etc. can be used to highlight the importance of ECCE.

Testing & Eval Section

What we learned from conversations with educators that shaped this initiative.

Telling Educator Stories Educators echoed our needs assessment findings that they can be seen as babysitters but consider themselves educators. They desire to be perceived in the same category and with the same level of respect as K-12 educators. Educators feel that if their communities understood the planning and consideration that goes into preschool programming, this would demonstrate that the level of skill and expertise required is equal to that of K-12 teachers.

Science of Learning Educators were aware of the extensive scientific research about the importance of early education but felt their communities are not internalizing it. They cited a disconnect between the available science and community perception and felt that communicating the science in a digestible way to the right audiences is crucial to a mindset shift in early education.

Internal Mindset Shift Several educators felt changing public perception begins with a mindset shift within the early education profession itself. Educators need to believe their worth as a professional in the field. They felt this could be expressed as an expectation of higher standards and professional credentials, more opportunities to build expertise, and market acknowledgement of expertise through salary and leadership increases.

“The public needs to know exactly what we do in our jobs, day-to-day on top of the license requirements, and need to know the difference between school based educational programs and daycare or childcare.”

-Educator

Desirability



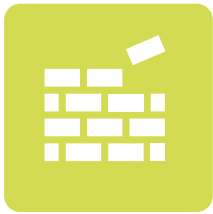
Feasibility





Focal Populations

Initiative will span all populations



Sustainability

The statewide campaign aims to create a lasting shift in perception



Governance

Ownership: TDOE

Key Partner(s): Legislative liaisons for state agencies serving children 0-5, Early education advocates and advocacy organizations, TN state senators

Statutory Requirements: NA

Measurements

Marketing campaign reach

Percentage of population in a specific community that is aware of new messaging

Extent of communications coordination

Number of partners implementing the common language and messaging strategy

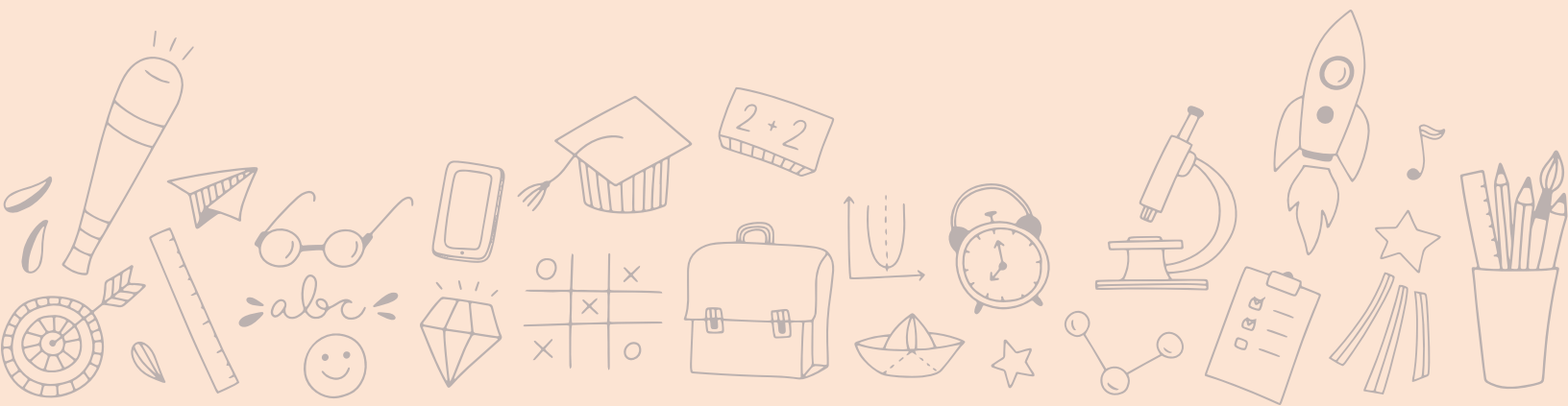
ECCE educator satisfaction

Conduct qualitative interviews, focus groups, and observational studies to learn about the impacts of the program on individuals



Aspiration 3
family

We aspire to equip families with the knowledge, tools and support structures to help their children thrive from birth-5.



The Challenge

For families, the Tennessee ECCE ecosystem is incredibly complex and difficult to navigate. While Tennessee offers a wide variety of quality ECCE services, families struggle to analyze and access them at their full potential

The research says...

Tennessee’s ECCE ecosystem is maintained and operated by a collection of government agencies, NGOs, and organizations across the state. While this approach provides families with the ability to access a variety of programs that best meet their needs, information about these programs can be difficult to locate and understand.

In fact, our research showed that most parents relied on word of mouth, Facebook groups, and other informal communication channels to find the services they need, resulting in unbalanced utilization of programs and services. One study found that in 2022, only 28% of children under 5 living in poverty were participating in the Smart Steps voucher program.⁸ Our team observed a classroom operating at 30% capacity due to lack of applications from families, despite other programs in the area having long wait lists. Programs we spoke with reported that even they lack complete knowledge of the system to guide families in the right direction.

As Tennessee continues to develop new and existing services, ensuring that families can easily access and understand the services they are eligible for will be essential for success.

“We are constantly having to turn down families and they don’t understand why they are ineligible for our program. Even we don’t fully understand the system, but if there was somewhere, or someone, we could point them to for help, I think that would be very useful.”

- Blended Classroom Teacher



Accessibility

Quality

Scale

Governance

Workforce

Initiative 05

Tools to Guide

GOAL: Incorporate ECCE into Tennessee’s broad vision for learning and equip stakeholders with comprehensive, easily digestible information in an established digital location.

OVERVIEW

Design & build an ECCE space within the Tennessee’s Best for All Central portal that helps families and programs understand and access the birth-5 services available from all state agencies. Take a creative approach to awareness building and adoption by targeting users at key touchpoints and leveraging incentives.

HOW WILL THIS WORK?

User Discovery. Conduct an audit of existing digital assets and access points for birth-5 services to be linked to from BFAC portal. Conduct user research with families and programs to understand high impact information needs. Identify existing content to integrate and new content generation needs. Understand current Best for All Central user groups and usage patterns and how they might be leveraged and/or expanded.

Informational Hub Content. TDOE will enable families and programs to make more informed decisions by providing:

- Families with a clear understanding of the different ECCE programs and services available in their area and how to access them including links to other agency sites. (Reference: [*Initiative Quality Understanding*](#)).
- Material to help families understand child development and how to engage with and support their child's learning.
- A guide for programs to understand resources available to them based on respective different agency affiliations (TDOE, TDHS).
- Tools and best practices for ECCE programs to strengthen community ties which may include: Sample Memorandums of Understanding, program spotlights, a tool for family engagement specialists to access a directory of community services for family referrals
- “District Corners” for localized information about programs and services. An opportunity for area businesses/service providers to raise awareness and generate new business as an incentive to participate.

Testing & Adoption. Success of this initiative will heavily depend on people’s ability and desire to use the site. Comprehensive user testing will ensure that key needs are met for all user groups including intuitive navigation and ease of locating information. Strategic marketing is also essential. Like Tennessee’s *Welcome Baby Initiative*, TDOE will explore a variety of awareness and distribution methods including partnerships with pediatricians and healthcare providers, advertising in schools, and online marketing.

Testing & Eval Section

What we learned from conversations with families and administrators.

Family Users Information on early childhood development and the state resources to support children and families is available but disjointed, hard to find and, in some cases, exclusive. Parents gain their information about public program registration mostly through word of mouth, making people the catalyst of knowledge. Parents felt that bringing together information for families in one place will make services more accessible. Parents of special needs children in particular felt that child development guides would help them identify needs sooner and make it easier to find the right services.

Educator & Administrator Users Educators and administrators saw several desirable uses for a portal that centralizes information. When asked what the portal should include, they cited learning standards, processes, and resources at the state and district levels. They also saw the value in a central location to communicate information to parents about school registration and requirements. A link to the community was also important, so that administrators can strengthen partnerships and track family referrals as part of wraparound services.

“Something like this would have been so helpful when I was a first time parent. I didn’t know how to recognize delays and had to use local mom groups or support groups to understand services available”

- Parent

Desirability



Feasibility





Focal Populations

This initiative will be deliberately designed for accessibility to families of all backgrounds including non-English speakers. Rollout to counties with fewer digital resources will be prioritized



Sustainability

This initiative will provide initial funding to design & build an ECCE Hub that will remain a lasting component of Best for All Central. Ongoing oversight and resource updates will be low-cost and integrated into BFAC maintenance



Governance

Ownership: TDOE

Participation: Tennessee state agencies providing birth-5 services, Tennessee organizations providing birth-5 services, District leadership

Statutory Requirements: NA

Measurements

Site Traffic

Number of unique users accessing the site for ECCE resources

User feedback

Index of qualitative and quantitative measures that gauge how well the portal meets user needs.

Portal accessibility

Index of UX testing measures that gauge ease of use and information accessibility across a variety of users

Stakeholder Engagement

Number of agencies and organizations collaborating in developing portal content and links



Accessibility

Quality

Scale

Governance

Workforce

Initiative 06

A Quality Understanding

GOAL: Help families understand quality and decide on the best-fit ECCE program.

OVERVIEW

TDOE will pilot a comprehensive research tool that aims to become the first place families go when looking for an ECCE program. The tool would communicate ECCE program quality in a digestible and relevant way to equip families with the knowledge to make the right choice for their children. This tool will go beyond search-and-locate to capture and communicate a multi-faceted view of quality.

HOW WILL THIS WORK?

Personalized Quality. Build upon the existing Childcare Finder tool and other regional tools to create a searchable directory of ECCE programs in a pilot geography that includes core information to help parents define quality and best fit for their child. The directory would include information that parents currently must gather on their own like teaching philosophy, curriculum, educator credential requirements and combine it with the logistical and safety information already available through existing tools. Families could target schools based on their own unique combination of priorities without the initial legwork of assembling information.

Comparison Table. Create a comparison table that explains the high-level differences between Tennessee ECCE offerings. This includes quality rating systems, licensure requirements, student eligibility requirements, educator certifications, etc. The tool would not only serve to inform ECCE stakeholders but also serve as a starting point for understanding how quality is measured at a systems level.

Parent Ambassadors. Give every family the same opportunity to access “insider” information via word of mouth by including parent ambassadors for ECCE programs as part of the directory. Ambassadors would volunteer to share their experiences with a program to give prospective families the context and clarity that comes with a personal connection.

Testing & Refinement

What we learned from conversations with parents that shaped this initiative.

Everyone should be an insider Parents currently expend significant effort to research ECCE program quality, involving outreach to programs, networking and collating information from multiple sources like Google maps, parent discussion boards, community listservs, etc. Parents assemble a set of information that is relevant to their personal circumstance and rarely use the standard quality ratings or information, apart from safety records. There was strong support among parents for a tool that would expedite research, give easier access to information that feels relevant to their personal decision process.

Quality is Subjective When asked to rank various aspects of ECCE program quality, parents’ answers were varied, underscoring the subjectivity of quality measures and the need for tools that allow families to make a personalized decision. While there was no very strong consensus on quality indicators, parents most often ranked child-teacher interaction and curriculum/teaching philosophy as very important determinants of quality, which are not easily communicated through current measures and tools.

“Yes, a centralized, comprehensive, and accurate database would be extremely helpful, I will credit that even being able to find the preschool information and registration was due to my internet sleuthing”- Parent

Desirability



Feasibility



Focal Populations



Tool would be launched as a limited pilot in a target geography that currently lacks a local care finder tool or other digital resources. Tool could include information about special needs support and support language translation for families with limited English proficiency.

Sustainability



This limited pilot would generate insight on the logistical effort required to create and maintain an ECCE tool that truly meets family needs. This could include technology requirements, setup and ongoing processes and partnerships with programs. The pilot would also generate insight on how family choices and trends change when comprehensive quality information is available to all.

Governance



Ownership: TDOE
 Key Partners: NA
 Participation: ECCE programs, private and public
 Statutory Requirements: NA

Measurements

Site Traffic	Observe the number of users accessing the site for ECCE resources
Positive Feedback	Conduct interviews and surveys to understand whether the site is useful to families
User Testing	Conduct UX testing to uncover if TN ECCE information is more easily accessible to users
Stakeholder Engagement	Measure outside organizations willingness and desire to collaborate on developing portal content



Accessibility

Quality

Scale

Governance

Workforce

Initiative 07

Innovation Lab

GOAL: Maintain strong momentum on generating, developing and testing new ECCE innovations and ensure Strategic Plan initiatives generate lasting impact.

OVERVIEW

Found the Tennessee ECCE Innovation Lab to oversee Strategic Plan implementation and ensure a user centric approach, capture key learnings from pilot programs and own a backlog of ideas to drive future ECCE innovation.

HOW WILL THIS WORK?

Innovation Lab team. The Lab team will be equipped with the skills and knowledge to apply a human-centered approach to implementing the Strategic Plan initiatives. The team will be enabled to conduct targeted user research and facilitate a co-creation process to build out detailed features and project plans for plan initiatives. Specific to the Mixed Delivery Remix initiative, this team will provide support and guidance for grantees. They will be equipped to synthesize outcomes from the Strategic Plan initiatives, envision next steps like expansion of current initiatives or development of new ones, and develop plans for future implementations.

Innovations to Explore. An initial backlog of potential future innovative initiatives will be sourced from the ideas generated through this strategic planning process. A current list includes:

- One digital location and process for applying for all birth-5 services across Tennessee state agencies, building in the South Carolina experience
- Collective management groups across ECCE programs for economies of scale
- Opportunities for time-bound early education commitments to bring new educators to the field before their next career steps
- Scholarship incentive programs that fund higher education for educators who commit to teaching in the state
- TDOE pilot to become a model for employer-provided childcare and measure impacts to key metrics
- Centralized Voluntary Pre-K enrollment processes and awareness-building campaign

The lab team will rely on its human-centered design expertise to facilitate the idea generation, prioritization and development process to bring backlog ideas to life as pilot programs.



Focal Populations

Focal populations for future initiatives will be determined as part of the innovation process. Through initiative implementation we will generate insights that may lead us to target to-be-determined focal populations in successive rounds of initiative development.



Sustainability

The Innovation Lab is a pilot initiative that will help determine if having an internal innovation team accelerates the departments' ability to solve problems with impactful and efficient solutions. It will also identify the support required to launch and manage pilot initiatives.



Governance

Ownership: TDOE

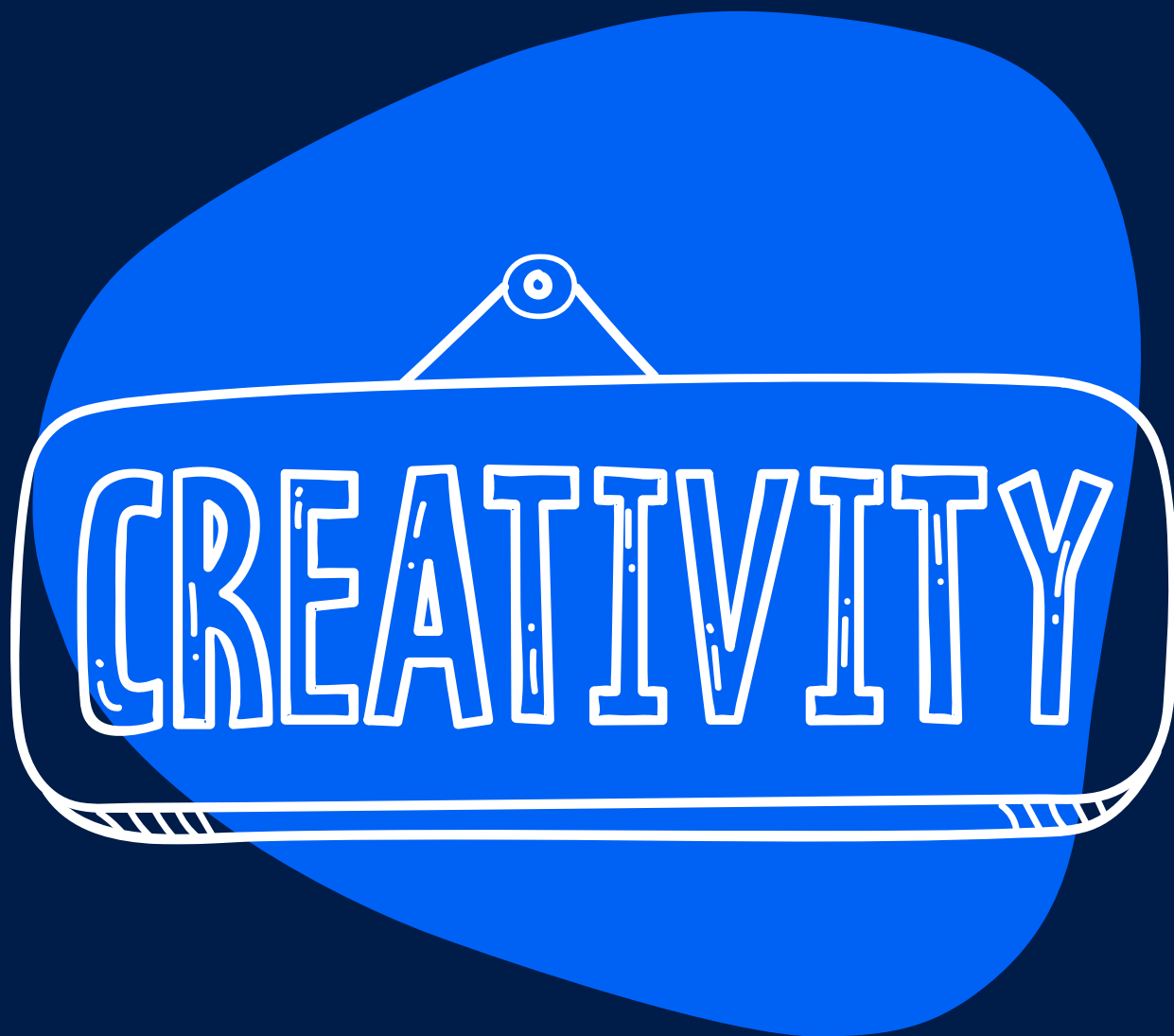
Participation: Lab team may take on temporary members as representatives from state agencies and other organizations that are key participants in specific initiatives

Statutory Requirements: NA

Measurements

Outcomes data	Number of data sources included in Strategic Plan initiative outcomes tracking
Innovation backlog	Number of potential initiatives captured and qualified
Innovation lab events	Number of Innovation Lab-facilitated sessions that progress development or implementation of ECCE strategy

appendix



Early Child Care & Education Participating Commission Members

Commission Members			
Department of Education: Chair		Commissioner Penny Schwinn	Commissioner, Chair
Legislature	Workforce, governance, quality, family choice	Senator Ferrell Haile	Legislative body
Department of Education	Governance, Quality, Kindergarten transition, family supports, IDEA part B, mixed delivery, CCTE, multi-language learners, curriculum, coaching, child outcomes, program standards, data collection	Misty Moody	Assistant Commissioner of Early Learning
Department of Human Services	Governance, Workforce, CCDF, TANF, Wages, program	Jude White	Assistant Commissioner of
Department of Health	Family support/resources, home visiting, Medicaid, Title V Maternal and Health, WIC	Dr. Tobi Amosun	Assistant Commissioner of Family Health and Wellness
Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities	In-home support for b- 3 children with disabilities (Part C: TEIS)	Kelly Hyde	Assistant Commissioner, TEIS
Department of Workforce and Labor Development	Adult education, employee recruitment, labor force statistics	Denice Thomas	
Department of Children's Services		Carla Aaron	Deputy Commissioner Child Safety
TN Board of Regents	CDA and AA programs in early childhood	Dr. Jothany Reed	Vice Chancellor
Tennessee Youth Child Wellness Council (TYCWC)	Early Childhood Systems building, governance	Rob Burke	Director

Head Start/Early Head Start	Early childhood programs and family support, homelessness	Henri Murphy	State Collaboration Director
TDOE Voluntary Pre- K		Jessica Franklin	VPK Director
TDOE IDEA 619		Shelby Ritter	Director of early childhood SPED
Childcare Resource & Referral (CCR&R)	Early childhood professional development/resources for teachers, cross sector professional development	Heather Hicks	Director TN CCR&R
Tennessee Early Childhood Training Alliance (TECTA)	CDA programs, professional development, cross sector professional development	Belva Weathersby	Statewide Program Director
Community- based Organizations	Mixed-delivery model, family and community engagement, partnership opportunities	Brian McLaughlin	COO YMCA, Midstate
Shared Service Programs	Out of school time ECCE models	Katie Harbison	Chambliss Center, President
Advocate Partners	Legislative changes for funding opportunities and governance structure	Blair Taylor	TQEE
Business Partners, including Chambers of commerce	Adult education, employee recruitment, labor force statistics, economic competitiveness	Amy Doran	Ballad Health (Former VPK Director)
Association of Infant Mental Health in Tennessee (AIMHiTN)	Infant mental health	Angela Webster	Chief Executive Officer

Tennessee Association for Children’s Early Education	B-5 advocacy	Cathy Waggoner	President TACEE, Senior Vice President
Childcare Programs	B-5 care both home and center based, workforce development, mixed delivery models	Karen Harrell	Porter Leath
Non-public school early childhood representation	B-5 care in non-public setting, workforce development, mixed delivery models	Randy Scallions	TACS Executive Director
Families	Workforce development, K-ready, quality, accessibility, affordability, full day/full year programs		
Public school early childhood programs	B-5 care in public setting, state-funded preschool, workforce development, mixed delivery models, LEAs	Jamie Hubbard	Rutherford County VPK director
TN Voices	B-8 no-cost mental health consultation and training	Katherine Bell	Early Childhood Director
Telamon	Head Start and family supports for migrant and seasonal workers, transition resources	Jennifer Havens	Head Start
Urban Child Institute	B-5 education and health	Katy Spurlock	Deputy Director
First8 Memphis		Gwendy Williams	Director of Operations

References

- 1 US Dept. of Health & Human Services. (n.d.). Early childhood development and education. Early Childhood Development and Education - Healthy People 2030. <https://health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health/literature-summaries/early-childhood-development-and-education#cit2>
- 2 Gormley, W. T., Phillips, D., & Anderson, S. (2017). The effects of Tulsa’s Pre-K Program on middle school student performance. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 37(1), 63–87. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.22023>
- 3 Calculated using US Census 2021: Total of children ages 0-4 + 38% of children age 5 (number of children ages 0-4 divided by 5) to represent the estimated number of 5-year-olds whose birthdays are after August 15
- 4 The federal poverty line (FPL) is determined by a household’s modified adjusted gross income (MAGI) along with the number of people in the household.
U.S Census Bureau. (2021). *American Community Survey 2021 5-year estimates*.
- 5 (2021, Jan. 12). *The Basic Facts About Children in Poverty*. Center for American Progress. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/basic-facts-children-poverty/>
- 6 Age adjusted ECCE seat coverage calculation assumes an ECCE program provides an equal share of their capacity to children of each age. If an ECCE program has a capacity of 100 children and serves children ages 1-10 years then we assume there are a total of 50 seats for children ages 1-5 years.

ECCE program capacity, ages accepted and operating house come from: TDHS. *Linked list of child care agencies*. <https://www.tn.gov/humanservices/for-families/child-care-services/resources-for-parents/find-child-care.html>
- 7 The University of Tennessee & Tennessee Dept. of Human Services. (2022). (rep.). Cost of Quality Care Study. <https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/human-services/documents/Cost%20of%20Quality%20Care%20Final%20Report.pdf>
- 8 Tennessee Dept. of Human Services. (2022). (rep.). Tennessee Childcare Task Force Final Report. https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/human-services/documents/TN%20CCTF%20Final%20Report_12.15.22.pdf