



# STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN



MASSACHUSETTS  
Department of  
Early Education and Care

State of Massachusetts | 2020-2025

# RE-BUILDING TOGETHER

## We are in a critical moment of opportunity for families and communities across the Commonwealth.

On March 10, the same day the Board of the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) approved the Department's strategic plan, Governor Baker declared a State of Emergency to control the spread of the COVID-19 virus, which has changed the child care and education environment across the Commonwealth dramatically and will likely to continue to do so in the years to come.

During this time, EEC has focused on ensuring the health and safety of children, families and providers. However, widespread program closures and challenges associated with re-opening safely at lowered capacity have impacted the field significantly across all types of providers and in all corners the state.

In the face of these challenges, we came together to form an emergency child care system that would continue to serve the children of essential workers and the most vulnerable populations in the state through the crisis, providing invaluable lessons in courage and insights into the day to day operations of safe child care during COVID-19. Likewise, many families were able to sustain their children and their work, and EEC supported their efforts with direct-to-family interventions like its partnership with the WGBH Educational Foundation to launch the Family Activity Initiative. Finally, EEC has continued to provide financial and other supports directly to programs by continuing to pay all pre-pandemic childcare subsidies, covering the parent fees paid to subsidized programs, and funding technical assistance to help families and programs access unemployment compensation, small business assistance, and other income supports available.

As we work to maintain the progress Massachusetts has made amidst the crisis and widespread impacts of the pandemic, it has become even more apparent that early education and care is a fundamental underpinning of stability for our families, our state, and our nation—especially as our nation faces an economic downturn. The bold vision we adopted in March holds new emphasis and increased weight as we grapple with how to sustain this critical workforce infrastructure even as we build towards high quality early education, with improved child and family outcomes.

To allow for the field re-building that must take place through this pandemic and in the years after, we have revised the attached EEC 5-Year strategic plan. This revision retains our commitment to the highest goals and aspirations articulated in the original plan. However, we have taken the input gathered from numerous field surveys, town halls and conversations with other state departments to correct our course in how and when we will accomplish some of those aims. We have also updated key data points based on what we have learned of the impact of COVID-19 on the childcare market as a whole.

In the coming months and years, EEC will continue to push ahead to engage, listen, and partner with the community and providers to ensure that young children have the care and education needed to thrive in school and life. We ask that you continue to join us in these efforts to re-build together in new and productive ways, so we may look back on the other side of this crisis stronger, more tightly bound to a unified vision for early education and care, and having created the foundation on which a more sustainable and vibrant future for children and families can rest.

Sincerely,

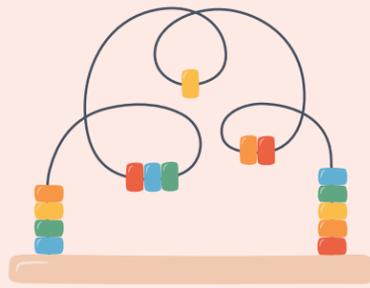
Samantha Aigner-Treworgy  
EEC Commissioner





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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## About the Department of Early Education and Care

**The Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) was formed in 2005 when two separate state agencies merged their early childhood offices: the Office of Childcare Services at the Department of Children and Family Services and the Early Learning Services Office at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.**

The first state in the country to focus a department's work wholly on early education and care, Massachusetts was pioneering in its commitment to equitable access to high-quality services for its youngest residents.

While the Department historically emphasized the importance of childcare as a workforce support and early learning as a way to personal and professional advancement for children, it has evolved over the years. Today, the Department works to ensure that high quality care and education programs are available so that Massachusetts children, also youth, and families of all kinds can learn and thrive.

The majority of this work is directed toward meeting the needs of children living with their families, but the Department also monitors programs and collaborates with other state agencies that serve children and youth who live outside of their family homes.

In FY2020, investment in EEC constituted nearly \$680 million in federal and state funding. This funding was utilized to support providers who opened emergency childcare and in support of programs that had to close and/or reduce services due to the COVID-19 pandemic. All the funding used for those purposes from March 10, 2020 through August 31, 2020 totaled \$160M.

The department employs over 200 people across one central and five regional offices, which work collaboratively with public and private partners to ensure the safety and quality of a variety of early education and care programs, including family and center-based childcare, preschools, family support, residential (e.g. group homes, residential schools) and placement (e.g. foster and adoption). The Department's work includes:

- 1 Financial assistance for vulnerable families, to help them afford quality education and care for their children. In FY19, \$572 million was dedicated to financial subsidies to underwrite the cost of program attendance for 78,121 children ages 0-12.
- 2 Licensing and oversight to approximately 8,700 public and private organizations serving children through the early years, before and after school, and through residential and placement services. Each of these entities requires annual licensing visits, ongoing monitoring and support, and technical assistance provided by the Department.
- 3 Training and support for childcare programs to improve the quality of education and care they provide. This includes a quality rating system in which 5,000 early education and care programs participate, as well as other types ongoing training, support, and additional resources.
- 4 Targeted initiatives for programs to focus on family engagement at the community-level, partnerships with local school districts, and efforts to build the early education and care support infrastructure required at the local level for families to thrive.
- 5 Support to thousands of teachers through professional development requirements and activities, credential and competency standards, background record checks, and system-level partnerships with higher education institutions, with whom it provides scholarships to support degree attainment.

## About this Plan

This action plan drives Massachusetts towards a system of equitable access to high-quality early education and care, with strategies that will be prioritized for action through 2025.

The process to develop this plan began in October 2019 and was timed with the appointment of the state's fifth commissioner to the department. The Board of Early Education and Care charged the new commissioner with developing a strategic action plan that would direct the Department's leadership for the state for the next five years.

### Planning was deeply grounded in community engagement, including the following core activities:

- A series of two 'listening tours' in fall 2019 and winter 2020; the first of these drew over 500 providers, educators, partners, and families. The second drew hundreds of returning participants as well as new constituents eager to hear about the direction of the agency.
- A survey and listening tour focused exclusively on Residential and Placement programs licensed by EEC in February and March 2020
- A far-reaching survey conducted throughout the fall of 2019 - with responses from over 700 participants, representing 11,000 voices
- A 'cost of quality' survey and webinars with over 300 center-based early childhood programs, out of school time programs, and family childcare homes - January-March 2020.
- Workshops with higher education stakeholders and expert advisors to build an operational plan for EEC's new vision for quality - January-March 2020
- Engagement with the Massachusetts Partnership for Infants and Toddlers (MPIT) to apply their findings from family and community engagement to these strategies.
- Invitation to the public to submit any type of document for consideration in planning; subsequent review of over 100 documents

### As EEC navigated the pandemic, ongoing field engagement and data gathering has included:

- Twice monthly public webinars related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the field- held from March 2020 through present
- Periodic surveys beginning in the spring and continuing through the summer of 2020 for all licensed EEC providers across the state to better understand their concerns regarding the closures and re-opening of programs
- Weekly surveying of licensed providers beginning the week of July 27th to get a real-time sense of the changed early care and education landscape, including: field capacity by region, program enrollment, adequacy of the workforce, and increased costs as programs have re-opened under new health and safety regulations related to the pandemic.

Community input was paired with internal and external research to articulate current needs, opportunities, best practices, and lessons learned from past efforts.

We understand the landscape is continually changing in ways hard to predict. We view this action plan as a living document—one that we will all shape, together, in the coming years. It is intended to serve as a road map whose navigation will be conducted collectively by all of the stakeholders engaged in this work across the Commonwealth.

To all of the constituents who have attended sessions, written us, or responded to surveys: your partnership has resulted in a plan that truly belongs to all of us. We could not have built this vision without you.

Thank you for helping us act on these strategies in way that is reflective of your expertise, and in dedication to our shared vision on behalf of children, youth, and families.

## The Case for Early Education and Care

### Early education and care fuels social, academic, and economic opportunity for children and their families.

With the benefit of a quality early education, children's lifelong potential is improved, as well as that of their families.

There are decades of research in early education, human services, psychology, neuroscience, biology, and related fields regarding healthy child development, what can derail it, and what we can do to promote or restore it. According to a synthesis done by the Harvard University Center on the Developing Child (2016), the scientific story of child development research can be boiled down to three core concepts:

- 1 Relationships with caring, responsive adults and early positive experiences build strong brain architecture for children
- 2 Significant stress from ongoing hardship or threat (e.g., exposure to violence, extreme poverty, or maltreatment) disrupts the biological foundations of learning, behavior, and health, with lifelong consequences
- 3 Providing the right ingredients for healthy development, including protective factors that can counterbalance the effects of adversity from the start produces better outcomes than trying to fix problems later (pp. 7-12)

The positive impacts of quality early care and education among children are broad, driving success in school and in life (The Heckman Equation, 2020). A large body of social science research shows that high quality early childhood programs improve children's academic and social skills, including documented positive effects on cognitive test scores and school readiness, as well as on attentiveness, motivation, self-control, and sociability. (Cunha et al, 2006; Almond & Currie, 2011; Duncan & Magnuson, 2013; Elango et al, 2016; Heckman et al, 2016; Havnes & Mogstad, 2011; Campbell et al, 2014).

Consequently, when children participate in high-quality early childhood programs in the critical ages from birth to five when their brains are developing, they are more able to use and convert the knowledge they gain into longer-term success.

Children who demonstrate developmental delays—either as a result of disability or exposure to early “toxic stressors” like extreme poverty, abuse, neglect, and parental mental illness or addictions—risk lifelong problems in learning, behavior, and physical and mental health.

Yet reaching these children at the youngest possible ages holds great promise in countering negative effects. Early intervention for children at risk of developmental delays can positively impact outcomes across their physical health, language and communication, cognitive development, and social/emotional development (National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center, 2011).

### SUMMER 2020 UPDATE

The centrality of exposure to quality education and care to financial and social stability has become even more apparent as we have navigated through the COVID-19 pandemic. Without sufficient access to quality education and care during the pandemic, it is estimated that children will experience significant learning losses that are difficult to recover (Kuhfeld, M. et al, 2020), as well as other impacts on their health and well-being related to prolonged physical inactivity (Xiang, M., Zhang, Z., & and Kuwaharab, K, 2020), social isolation (Loades, M. E. et al, 2020), and increased poverty and inequality (Van Lancker, W & Parolin, Z, 2020).

### Child impact is compounded by positive impact to the family.

Accessible early education and care also ties directly to increased *family* income through educational attainment, skill-building, and workforce participation.

Many families need or want to accommodate two full time work schedules. Some regions in North America—those with supportive public policies—have seen 10 to 14 percent increases in mothers' ability to find and keep a job outside the home when they have access to care (Baker, Gruber, & Milligan, 2015 and Malik, 2018).

Research confirms that families who can access early education and care supports benefit from substantially increased household income. This economic boost holds true not just during children's early years, but throughout their lives (Garcia, Heckman, Leaf & Prados, 2016). In turn, increased family income creates positive social, academic, and future economic returns in the lives of children from those households. This cycle of positive benefits appears to be enacted through parents' increased ability to invest in a home learning environment as well as a reduction in the negative stressors associated with poverty (Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, 2017).

**If early care and education costs were capped at 10% of a family's income, making it more accessible for all families, then US GDP would likely increase by \$210 billion thanks to families working more (Bivens, Garcia, Gould, Weiss, & Wilson, 2016).**

### Employers also reap the rewards:

- **Access to talent:** Compared to those other developed countries, the US labor force participation of women has lagged by 2% to 14% (Savage, 2019), meaning there is a vast untapped supply of talent absent from the US workforce.
- **Higher productivity in current workforce:** Right now, childcare “breakdowns” result in distraction at, or absenteeism from, work. The estimated economic impact of lost earnings, productivity, and revenue resulting from childcare crises is \$57 billion annually in the US. (Ready Nation, 2019).
- **Building the workforce of tomorrow:** Employers need a workforce that is well educated, highly skilled, and equipped with 21st century skills, including social-emotional competencies. An early education lays the foundation for the workforce of tomorrow and ensures the US continues to compete in the global marketplace.

### SUMMER 2020 UPDATE

It has become increasingly clear in Massachusetts and across the nation that early care and education is a critical element of workforce infrastructure.

Before the pandemic, some 83% of parents of children under five across the nation reported that finding affordable childcare was a serious problem (Malik, R., et al, December 2018). After the pandemic, as of June 2020, some 13% of working parents reported having to quit their jobs or cut back their hours to take care of their children and they reported losing an average of a full day of work per week to childcare (The Washington Post, July 2020). Further, it is anticipated that tremendous numbers of working parents will have to fill childcare gaps when kids go back to virtual or part-time school in the fall of 2020 with no apparent solutions in sight (Ho, K., 2020).

**For these reasons, since the establishment of the Department, the Commonwealth has made significant investments to support families through a robust early education and care system...yet demand far exceeds the existing resources available.**

Despite impressive total investments, the early education and care system is fragile and in need of urgent intervention.

Providers struggle to sustain their business model against rising operational and personnel costs, challenges recruiting and maintaining a qualified workforce, and difficulties meeting the complexities of family needs. These, among other factors, have strained program stability, sometimes past its breaking point. In the last fiscal year, there were 755 licensed providers that closed in the state (Massachusetts EECe, 2020).

This situation is not unique to Massachusetts. Across the U.S., chronic under-funding of early education and care programs “is compromising the well-being of educators and the children they teach and threatening the economic security of millions of families in the United States” (Gould & Blair, 2020).

**Nationally, families spend approximately \$4 on early education and care for every \$2 spent by the federal government, and every \$1 spent by states (Gould & Blair, 2020).**

### SUMMER 2020 UPDATE

At the outset of the pandemic, EEC began to survey providers to understand the changing landscape of early care and education, including field capacity by region, enrollment, workforce re-engagement, families served, and organizational financial stability. As a result of this data gathering, EEC gained the following understanding from providers by the end of August 2020 (Massachusetts EECf, August 2020):

- **Lost capacity:** 149 or 2% of licensed EEC providers statewide had indicated that they did not intend to re-open and 82% of those providers are Family Child Care for a loss of approximately 2,600 or 1% childcare slots statewide.
- **Safety net:** The 3,091 providers that re-opened in the initial weeks tended to be: minority- or woman-owned (89%) serving predominantly lower-income families (52% of families) and essential workers (28% of families attending).
- **Uneven burdens:** All programs reported increased costs for health and safety, but only a small percentage (4% of programs) have passed those costs to families in the form of a fee.
- **Under-enrollment:** While costs have gone up, enrollment and attendance are still lagging (62% of current licensed capacity or 32% of pre-COVID capacity are enrolled), resulting in significant financial burdens for the sector.
- **Workforce:** Most of the programs that have re-opened (85%) report that they have re-hired adequate staff members to meet enhanced health and safety requirements for re-opening.

### Resulting gaps in access threaten positive child and family outcomes.

The result is a demonstrable shortage in the availability of early education and care compared to the need.

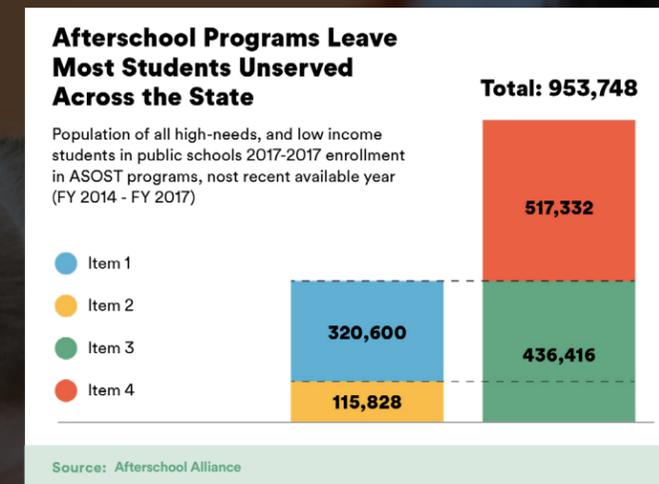
Prior to the pandemic, in more than three quarters of households in Massachusetts, all available parents were working, which is higher than national average. (Whitebook, McLean, Austin, & Edwards, 2018). At the same time, the early education and care system had licensed capacity for only one quarter of the total children from birth to age-12 in the state (Massachusetts EEC, 2019 and USDHHS, 2018).

While it is likely that not all of the families of the 1 million young and school aged children in the state need or want licensed early education and care options, there continues to be a large divide between the number of children in working families and the capacity in the Massachusetts system, including for after school care.

### The shortage applies across age groups:

- Over 200,000 infants and toddlers potentially need early education and care, yet there is licensed program capacity for only 53,000 of them.
- While there are far more available settings for preschool aged children, there is still a 30% gap between available capacity and the children who need it (Hardy, 2019).
- During the school aged years, most students lack after-school programs, with 362,000 students whose families indicate they would enroll them in public after school programs if they were available, and 214,000 children whose families say they are unsupervised during the after-school hours (Afterschool Alliance, 2020).

### School Aged Need, Capacity, and Gap Estimates (Afterschool Alliance, 2020)



### The access gap was worse for vulnerable populations.

Massachusetts families, on average, have enjoyed a high quality of life and comparatively higher incomes than national peers. But in other ways, the state has been closer to national norms - particularly when it comes to disparities experienced by children living in low-income households and children of color.

In 2018, it was estimated that approximately 400,000 Massachusetts children lived in low-income households. Children of color were living in or near poverty at much higher rates than their peers, with 54% of black children and 63% of Latinx children living in or near poverty, compared to 18% of white children (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2018).

For these children, the gap between early education and care capacity and family need has been even more striking than the gap for their higher income peers.

**Approximately 400,000 Massachusetts children live in low-income households.**

**'Low-income' households are those with incomes less than twice the federal poverty threshold. For example, since the federal poverty threshold for a family of four is \$26,200 in 2020, then a household would be designated as "low-income" if the annual income is below \$52,400 annually (US DHHS ASPE, 2020).**

Prior to the pandemic, over half of Massachusetts residents were living in a "childcare desert," where there are three or more times the number of children as there are licensed 'slots' in a program. Latinx families and children in low-income households were living in childcare deserts at higher rates; 62% of children who qualified as low-income also lived in a desert (Malik, Hamm, Schochet, Novoa, Workman, & Jessen-Howard, 2018).

Children who need access to special services like Early Intervention experience increased barriers. The research base related to the positive effects of Early Intervention is clear - yet only 9% of children who have delays that would make them eligible end up receiving Early Intervention services, and at two years of age, only 12% of children who would be eligible receive services.

This is worse for black children, with those would be eligible at 24 months of age up to five times less likely to receive services than white children. (Feinberg, Silverstein, Donahue & Bliss, 2011).

Even though young children experiencing homelessness are more likely to have lower birth weights than other children, learning disabilities, developmental delays, emotional problems and behavior issues, they are greatly underrepresented in early childhood programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). This means they are far less likely to receive Early Intervention or to benefit from the positive effects of an early childhood education.

**Gaps in access in the early years create increasing opportunity gaps in later years.**

While Massachusetts has led the nation in 4th grade reading and math indicators, there are striking disparities in outcomes when the data is disaggregated by race/ethnicity and income level. For students in low-income households, Black students, and Latinx students, the divide is as wide as 20 to 30 percentage points by fourth grade and deepens further by eighth.

Without concentrated efforts to disrupt the achievement gap early, over 70 percent of students of color and those from low-income households may find that the opportunities following from school achievement are not fully within their reach.

Likewise, the state fails to benefit from the talent, innovation, and ideas of entire segments of its population, whose future potential is compromised by basic or below-basic reading and math skills today.

**NAEP 4th & 8th Grade - At or Above Proficiency for Reading and Math Assessment Results - 2019 Percentage of Students (Massachusetts DESEb, 2019)**

	All MA Students	Free/Reduced Lunch Eligible	Not Free/Reduced Lunch Eligible	White	African American/Black	Hispanic	Asian/Pacific Islander
4th Reading	45%	26%	55%	54%	29%	25%	55%
8th Reading	45%	24%	53%	51%	26%	22%	67%
4th Math	55%	28%	62%	59%	28%	30%	77%
8th Math	47%	25%	56%	55%	21%	24%	78%

These disparities are even more deeply felt among students with disabilities and English Language Learners, for whom the proficiency divide is more than 30 percentage points (students with disabilities) and more than 40 percentage points (English Language Learners) by 4th grade (Massachusetts DESEb, 2019). See table E in Appendix B.

**These opportunity gaps are compounded by intersecting issues that create additional barriers to child and family potential.**

Families living in low-income households have simultaneously faced significant barriers to economic mobility, including (National Center for Children in Poverty-a, 2018):

- Unemployment or underemployment - only 37% of children in low-income households have had at least one parent who was employed full time (compared to almost 90% of children in above-low income households)
- Single-parent household or no parent in the home—62% of children in low-income households have one or fewer parents at home
- More rental, less ownership—only 26% of children in low-income households live in a family that own their home
- In January of 2018, there were approximately 3,624 families with children (or pregnant women) experiencing homelessness and staying in shelters. This number did not include those families who were doubling up, living in unsafe conditions, or sleeping in their cars (Massachusetts

**SUMMER 2020 UPDATE**

While Massachusetts had one of the strongest regional economies in the country prior to the pandemic, its unemployment rate had risen significantly by June 2020 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, June 2020). The Congressional Budget Office indicates that “low-income families have borne the brunt of the economic crisis, partly because the hardest-hit industries employ low-wage workers. African American, Hispanic, and female workers have been hit particularly hard, in part because they make up a disproportionate share of the workforce in certain industries with jobs that involve elevated risks of exposure to the coronavirus. Although the labor market is expected to improve, in CBO’s projections, the unemployment rate remains higher through 2030 than it was before the pandemic” (Congressional Budget Office, July 2020).

Coalition for the Homeless, 2018).

**Residential and placement programs operated by EEC serve some of our state’s most vulnerable populations:**

In the most recent publicly available report (2017), the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families recorded 9,598 children who required out-of-home residential and placement care, with the greatest shares of those children in foster care (81%) and congregate care (14%) (MDCF, 2017). We consistently hear from stakeholders and other state agencies that the 441 residential programs and placement agencies licensed by EEC across the Commonwealth are not adequate to meet the need.

Nationally, the number of children in foster care has grown by 10% over the last decade, with 20% more children waiting for adoption than there were ten years ago. Yet adoption rates have not kept pace - and have only increased by 5% (USHHS ACF, 2018). Massachusetts mirrors these national trends - with an average of 3,500 children waiting for adoption at any given time over the last three years, and 16,600 children in care each year (Massachusetts EEC, 2019). Ensuring that the programs working with these vulnerable populations are

**We have a very real, increasingly urgent opportunity to break the cycle of poverty and increase opportunity for children, mothers, families, businesses, and communities.**

supported in providing high-quality care for these vulnerable children and youth is a vital part of our mandate as a state.

**Call to Action**

Massachusetts has truly led the way in education – with progressive funding formulas, high achieving students, on average, and a relatively high overall quality of life.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, early education and care providers, educators, and leaders in this state have also risen to the occasion to come together across the Commonwealth to launch a network of emergency care sites, plan for re-opening of programs, and find creative, new solutions to emerging challenges.

At the local level, providers have worked together with advocates, philanthropy and other community partners, showing tremendous resilience and fortitude while advocating for systems-level solutions to address areas of greatest fragility, and hold up the parts of the system at greatest threat of slipping between the cracks.

This continuing, difficult work has provided models of new ways of funding programs (e.g., classroom-based funding) and movement towards partnership in problem-solving. Taken together, these efforts through crisis make this vision MORE possible as child care providers grapple with the pandemic – not less.

But we still have to continue to push innovation, even as we rebuild. We must have one eye on the future even as we build back to the capacity we have just lost. We must balance a return to ‘normal’ with a commitment to creating that ‘new’ normal and on a stronger foundation than it was. This is how we will build a better future for all children, youth, and families who currently face so many barriers to school achievement and economic opportunity.

We are in a moment to decide if we can re-build on our strengths as the highest achieving state in the nation while also becoming the most equitable state in the nation by supporting all families, despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have a very real, increasingly urgent opportunity to break the cycle of poverty - and power increased opportunity for children, mothers, families, businesses, and communities. These strategies - to stabilize our system today, in parallel with some strategic innovations to build a better tomorrow - remain our starting point and road map forward.



# STRATEGIC DIRECTION:

## Systemic Solutions for Families, Educators, & Programs

The Department, in collaboration with the Board of Early Education and Care, offers the following strategic action plan to guide the work.

**OUR VISION:**  
the world we would like to see

EEC's vision is that children, youth, and families reach their full potential now and in the future.

**MISSION:**  
the role we play in achieving the vision

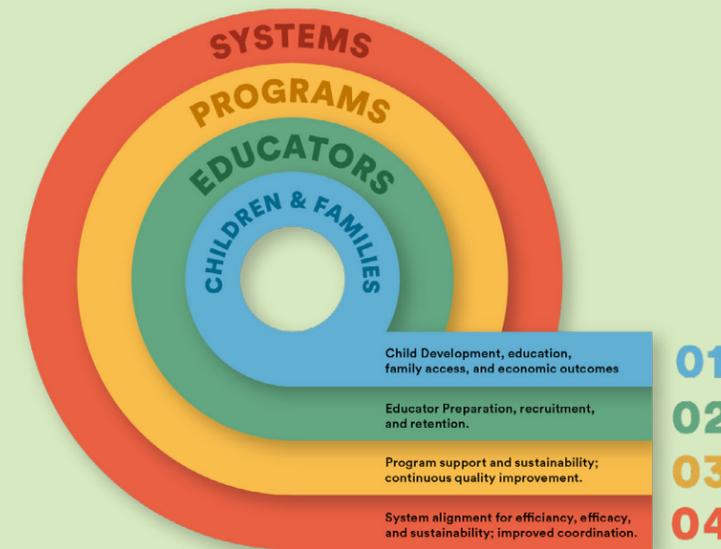
The Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) creates the conditions for children, youth, and families to thrive socially, academically, and economically.

We do this by:

- > Working across organizations and sectors to build an equitable system of safe, affordable, high-quality early education and care
- > Supporting residential, placement, out-of-school/after-school, and early education and care programs
- > Supporting educators in their essential work with children and youth
- > Increasing opportunities for families to support their children and attain economic mobility

EEC is a system. As a government agency, we support an interconnected web of constituents, including:

- Collaborating agencies
- Federal partners
- Programs we license
- Programs we support through grants and regulations
- Educators and professionals we qualify, certify, and support through professional development
- Families, children, and youth who are supported by our investments



If just one of these constituent groups is out of sync or left behind in our work, the system becomes more fragile and our vision is jeopardized.

Therefore, to create lasting change, we have to build strategies that are tailored for each constituent group's unique assets and needs while also bridging across audiences in a mutually reinforcing way.

Only then can we strengthen our system as a whole and keep us all directionally aligned—marching together towards a bold new vision.

### Innovative Strategies for Transformative Change

The urgency of family, educator, and program needs across all program types requires us to act quickly now, aligned around the change we want to create. The impact of the pandemic on the field has further intensified the need for creative change and immediate action in the EEC field as a whole, not just through investments in subsidies for lower-income families, but to create a sustaining infrastructure for all families to facilitate stability and prosperity.

Our innovative strategies for transformative change occur at the family, educator, and program levels:

#### 1. Increase Family Affordability and Access:

- A Grow and transform subsidy investments to ensure they drive increased affordability and access to high-quality programs for families
- B Build capacity among communities to help families identify quality programs, access resources that support child development, and act as their children's first and most important teachers
- C Ensure our collective capacity to support children towards 3rd grade success using a developmentally appropriate, shared measurement system

#### 2. Grow the Number of Highly-Skilled Educators:

An Educator Credentialing Framework that translates across settings and geographies and validates increasing expertise through stackable qualifications

#### 3. Build a Backbone for Program Quality to Drive Investment:

A unified and universal approach to quality for each program model that prioritizes investments in program improvement and wraparound services, ensuring program sustainability and capacity building

As a pre-requisite to transformation, there are system-level requirements that lay the foundation for a more seamless, streamlined, and supportive experience for families, educators, and programs. These include a re-organization of our regulations and policies, technology systems, and staffing structures to reduce burden among, and better support, constituents – as well as to advance our shared vision and goals. These requirements were among the immediate priorities prior to the pandemic, and they have undergone accelerated transformation in light of the complex closure and re-start of child care due to COVID-19, offering both opportunities and necessitating major shifts in culture, people, and technology in order to support the field through this challenging time.

Each of these innovations is outlined in more detail in the sections below. Taken together, they tell a story of a system that is more stable, effective, and capable—and a state that is ready to lead the nation in outcomes for children, youth, and families.

# 1 Children, Youth, & Families

**Our goal is that children are on track for success in school and to reach their full potential, and their families are empowered to work, build their skills, and attain economic mobility while supporting their children’s education and development.**

To achieve this goal, we will address those concerns heard throughout this process, including affordability of care, barriers to access, and a lack of measurable results that can be tracked and shared across systems and constituents.

**Our strategies are to:**

- A** Increase access to early education and care by addressing availability and affordability, while building community capacity to support families
- B** Build a system to measure a child’s path to being on track to 3rd grade success that accounts for the child’s developmental context and available community supports to increase household income. This economic boost holds true not just during children’s early years, but throughout their lives (Garcia, Heckman, Leaf & Prados, 2016).

## 1A Address Affordability and Build The Opportunity Community Capacity

**Affordability:** Massachusetts has the second highest cost of childcare in the U.S., next to D.C.; the average annual cost of infant care is \$20,913 and the average cost of caring for a four-year-old is \$15,095.

The cost issue is compounded for infants and toddlers. In a 2019 survey conducted by the Massachusetts Partnership for Infants and Toddlers (MPIT), over 60% of families with infants and toddlers cited education as an area of top interest and concern. This data point is not surprising, given that the estimated share of all families in the Commonwealth who can afford infant care is only 5.4% (Economic Policy Institute, 2016).

**To care for one infant in MA would require 22% of a median family’s income, 84% of earnings for a minimum wage worker, and 76% of a childcare worker’s salary (Economic Policy Institute, 2016).**

Birth rates nationally are at a 30-year low and the population in Massachusetts mirrors that trend. A national poll found that economic factors were among the top four of five responses given for young adults’ decision not to have more children, with childcare cost as the most commonly-cited concern (Miller, 2018).

Bridging the divide between the cost of programs and families’ ability to pay is a leading strategy to increase equitable access.

### SUMMER 2020 UPDATE

According to regular provider surveys instituted early into the pandemic and at the start of re-opening of early education and care programs, EEC providers have reported increases in the cost to families because of new COVID-19 fees (4% of programs), increased childcare rates (16%), and payment to hold childcare slots (19%) if they are not ready to return. These increases, while likely necessary for sustainability for providers, create economic challenges for all families who are seeking quality options for their children so that they can work or gain employment skills (Massachusetts EECf, August 2020).

Support for Access and Resources to Support Child Development: While affordability is a leading challenge, families and providers across the state cited additional challenges (Massachusetts EECb, 2019):

- Geographic areas that lack enough early education and care providers to meet the need
- Desire for more flexibility in the hours and days that early education and care is offered, to accommodate work schedules of many different types, including gig and shift work
- The need for more consistent, affordable, and reliable transportation to and from programs, and better coordination between state agencies to ensure transportation is not a barrier
- Confusion related to EEC processes including waitlists, appeal, and subsidies
- Wish for high-quality options closer to the places where families live and work
- Misfit between the cultural and linguistic diversity of teachers and families
- Need for community-level support to engage families as their children’s first and most important teachers (efforts like Coordinated Family and Community Engagement and home visiting models were often cited as effective and worth expansion)

**“There are not enough specialists to go around and they are never on-site when you need them.”**

-Early Education and Care Provider, Southeast MA Cape Listening Session

- Increasing challenges at the program level with coordination of services, as families face poverty, housing insecurity, under and unemployment, substance abuse, violence, trauma, and mental health challenges, among others
- Access to resources for all families to build social networks, learn about child development, and navigate community-level programs that address their specific needs

### SUMMER 2020 UPDATE

EEC anticipates ongoing shifts in family and business needs as the Commonwealth continues to face the impact of the pandemic. The state is seeing businesses operate on different schedules and remotely, meaning that some of the workforce continues to work from home. Additionally, businesses and families are seeking ‘closed site’ programs to contain virus spread. As fall begins, family needs are evolving - and deep partnerships between early education and care programs, K-12 education, and businesses are forming to facilitate care for young and school aged children and flexibility for working families. EEC will continue to work with the field to navigate economic and social volatility and to ease its impact on programs and the families that they serve.

### Our Planned Actions

#### Address Affordability:

- Restructure and grow public investment to improve affordability and increase licensed capacity to address access gaps within the system overall
- Create incentives in the subsidy system for high-quality programs to serve the most vulnerable families by tiering investments, thereby driving toward equitable outcomes

#### Build Community Capacity to Increase Support:

- Invest in community referral infrastructure to help families identify high quality programs that match their needs through Community Resource and Referral Agencies
- Invest in community-level collaborations as a connective tissue to ensure comprehensive and wraparound supports for child development and family opportunity through Coordinated Family and Community Engagement
- Work across health, mental health, education, child development, youth development, and child and family welfare domains to meet the holistic needs of children, youth, and families
- Leverage the Family Engagement Framework in partnership with the Department of Public Health, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and the Children’s Trust
- Identify successful strategies at the community-level of building a robust birth-to-third grade support system and identify mechanisms to foster scaling

**Massachusetts Child Population by Age Group Over time, 0-12**



**1B** On Track to 3rd Grade Success**The Opportunity**

We know interventions in the early years and grades result in positive outcomes for children later in life. In Massachusetts, there is clear room to grow the extent to which children transition through key educational milestones (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2019):

- 40 percent of children ages three to four do not attend a preschool
- Almost half of 4th graders are not proficient at reading
- 50 percent of 8th graders are not proficient in math

The task of understanding preparedness among children is complicated by the lack of clearly agreed-upon measures for interim success.

Certainly *testing* children in the early years is inappropriate, given the nature of this developmental stage. It is not our desire to introduce increased accountability mechanisms that have a punitive nature or unintended consequences for children. In fact, many of the most impactful interventions in the early years focus on investments in adult capacities, such as family support around promoting child development.

We do know there are key factors in the early years that have demonstrated ties to later educational outcomes. As one example, 3rd grade literacy is dramatically impacted by the number of words to which children are exposed in early childhood, the extent to which they are talked to, read to, sung to, and how many books are in the family home.

These are direct factors, but there are also social and contextual indicators that can indicate a child is on track for school success, including:

- Preschool participation
- Attendance rates
- Expulsion, suspension, and other punitive actions (if present)
- Kindergarten readiness

There are also family indicators, such as:

- Family engagement in their child's learning
- Family educational attainment
- Extent to which families have social capital, economic assets, and protective factors
- The presence of adverse childhood experiences (ACES), like abuse, neglect, and violence, among others

We do not yet know which indicators will be most useful or give us the best sense of how to help our youngest children, but we do know we need a starting point. A comprehensive and meaningful measurement system that accounts for educational, social, and contextual factors in the birth-to-third grade continuum will enable us to understand children's 'on track' rates throughout early childhood, rather than waiting until 3rd grade to know the degree to which we are meeting our goals in the education and care of young children.

**Our Planned Actions**

Build a measurement system to ensure children are on track to 3rd grade success:

- Work with communities to identify current practices that can be elevated and relevant indicators that can be tracked across environments to understand meaningful contributors to 3rd grade success
- Collaborate with public health and elementary partners to assemble a comprehensive set of indicators that can be monitored across data systems and shared populations
- Align measurements with EEC's quality work in early childhood and out-of-school time programs so administrators can tie their quality efforts to child and youth outcomes

**The most impactful interventions in early years focus on investments in adult capacities, such as family support around promoting child development.**

**2** Educators & Professionals

**Our goal is that the early childhood and out-of-school time workforce is professionally prepared, well supported, adequately compensated, and culturally and linguistically representative of the population it serves.**

To achieve this goal, we will address concerns surfaced in the research and by constituents related to the status of qualified educators through the pandemic, as well as the lack of training and education pathways – with accompanying difficulties recruiting, retaining, and compensating qualified educators who are linguistically and culturally reflective of the populations they served.

**Our strategies are to:**

- A** Support and retain early education and care professionals, while building an Educator Credentialing Framework, grounded in competencies, that drives degree and credential attainment for the workforce, and integrates with program quality supports.
- B** Align higher education pathways to support progress for EEC educators: use the Credentialing Framework to direct content, access, and investments among Higher Education and other professional development partners, with a goal of reduced barriers to entry, increased retention and career pathways, more responsive coursework, and a more linguistically and culturally representative teaching force.

**2A** Build an Educator Credentialing Framework**The Opportunity**

The adults who care for children and youth play a leading role in their educational, social, and emotional development. In fact, the science of early childhood brain development and learning requires a sophisticated set of knowledge and competencies on par with those required for teaching in the elementary grades (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2015). For youth ages six to 17, the presence of a caring, committed adult has been shown to correlate with positive well-being and developmental outcomes (Scales, P. C., & Leffert, N., 1999).

The importance of the early education and care professionals in driving program quality and positive child and youth outcomes requires that we focus substantial efforts on their recruitment, retention, and development of these professionals.

Yet, much of the workforce, even those with college degrees, receive wages that are unlivable, and fall far short of the \$15/hour minimum wage threshold approved by the state for adoption by 2023 (Whitebook, McLean, Austin, & Edwards, 2018)

**Nearly 1 in 5 early educators in the US fall below the national poverty line**

(Whitebook, McLean, Austin, & Edwards, 2018).

In a typical labor market, increasing degrees and credentials are a pathway to increasing responsibilities and compensation. In Massachusetts Early Childhood Centers, it costs an additional \$4,600 annually to hire a Lead Teacher with a Bachelor's degree rather than an Associate's degree. Within school-aged programs, a Site Leader will earn \$8,400 more with a Bachelor's than a Site Leader with less than a high school education. Family Childcare Directors/ Owners with a graduate degree earn on average \$18,000 more per year than their counterparts who did not graduate from high school (Massachusetts EECc, 2018 and Massachusetts EECd, 2020).

**According to the Early Childhood Workforce Index of 2018, MA has 'stalled' in its progress to improve early childhood educator compensation through qualifications and educational supports**

(Whitebook, McLean, Austin, & Edwards, 2018).

However, the challenge with limited budgets in many programs is that pay-scales and degree requirements are inconsistent across provider or program setting, so that these gains are not universally held.

### SUMMER 2020 UPDATE

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a significant financial and human resource toll on the field of early education and care with the extended closure of most licensed providers across the state. This is now the workforce baseline from which the EEC and the field will be re-building.

In May of 2020, EEC surveyed licensed EEC center-based and family child care providers across the state, and they reported that nearly half of their staff had been laid off, furloughed or were working at reduced hours (Massachusetts EEC, 2020). As of July 2020, fifty-five percent of agencies had re-opened (Massachusetts EECg, 2020).

#### Our Planned Actions

##### Support for providers:

Through the pandemic, EEC has made and will continue to make accommodations to streamline or expedite key processes, support providers, reduce financial burden, and make the reopening process as easy as possible to follow, including:

- Deferral of licensing and renewal fees
- Expedited process for background record checks and amended teacher qualifications to remove barriers to entry for the workforce
- Establishing a dedicated epidemiology line to answer educator health questions
- Providing health materials (i.e., gloves, masks, cleaning supplies) for educators
- Supporting targeted mental health initiatives that can be sustaining for a workforce under stress as they return to work through the COVID-19 crisis
- Identifying key recruitment and retention strategies to ensure qualified educators are able to enter and be sustained in the field

##### Build an Educator Credentialing Framework:

- Outline what skills and competencies will be measured within the framework
- Standardize a set of stackable, transferable and nationally aligned competencies that can be gathered through education, training, and experience in the field; starting with the Professional Qualifications Registry, build EEC verification systems for individual educators to achieve credentialing levels

### 2B Align Pathways to Credentialing Framework

#### The Opportunity

This lack of clarity across the mixed delivery system can discourage educators from pursuing a degree – and can deter them from entering or staying in the early education and care field at all.

The lack of a road map to delineate what degrees and credentials are worth in the field at what level of responsibility has compounded compensation issues with a lack of meaningful transferability across settings—providing no consistent baseline for comparability. Varied qualification, education and training requirements across providers create navigation challenges and fail to communicate what priorities the state holds around professional competencies for educators, coaches, and leaders in this field.

We need a clearly defined lattice of credentialing to help educators enter, progress through, and exit the field – so they can achieve educational milestones and compete more effectively for better compensation in the marketplace.

But the approach must be flexible to encompass the many pathways that lead to quality teaching and learning so we can open the field to qualified professionals who are desperately needed in classrooms and homes, today – while still enabling us to raise the bar on the professionalism and quality of our teaching environments, directly improving learning outcomes for children.

We have to leverage the Educator Credentialing Framework to drive investments through Higher Education and other professional development programs in ways that create equitable access for communities to grow their workforce to be reflective of the children they serve.

#### Our Planned Actions

Leverage the Educator Credentialing Framework to increase recruitment and reduce barriers in support of a growing educator pipeline:

- Target financial incentives to support more culturally and linguistically representative candidates to enter and move through Credentialing Framework levels
- Partner with Higher Education to ensure training and education pathways are aligned to the needs of the field, reduce barriers to entry, and build skills and competencies outlined in the framework
- Build the capacity of local and regional partners to provide credential- aligned programming for all educators to grow their competencies

The approach must be flexible to encompass the many pathways that lead to quality teaching and learning.

### 3 Programs

**Our goal is that programs will increase their sustainability, engage in continuous quality improvement, and promote high-quality education and healthy development among children and youth.**

To achieve this goal, we will focus our work on the most pressing needs expressed by constituents and identified in the research, including program stability and custom supports, technical assistance and wraparound services, and meaningful supports for quality improvement.

#### Our primary strategies to fulfill our goals are to:

- A Build a backbone for quality to drive investment: implement a universal quality improvement system that prioritizes program supports like job embedded professional and leadership development and investments in continuous quality improvements
- B Grow the network of comprehensive supports available for providers in addressing the increasing complexity of family needs

### SUMMER 2020 UPDATE

In a survey of providers in the spring and summer of 2020, respondents indicated that their most pressing needs and concerns through re-opening were: a) balancing health and safety with child development and social emotional growth; b) sustaining business or operating models through fluctuations in family demand and enrollment patterns; c) staffing and scheduling patterns for a changed operating environment and in tandem with the changing needs of business and working families; and d) support to communicate with families regarding very different expectations related to mitigating COVID spread and managing exposure risk (Massachusetts EEC-f & g, 2020).

### 3A Build a backbone for quality to drive investment in programs

#### The Opportunity

The starting point for a high-quality early education and care system in Massachusetts is sustainability. Unless programs are able to support their day to day operations in a way that enables their focus on the structural and human factors that build effective early care and education, it will be challenging to engage in continuous quality improvement towards positive child and youth outcomes.

In Massachusetts before the pandemic, the field was experiencing rising personnel and operational costs, which was squeezing already limited program budgets and limiting the ability to invest in quality. In addition, as school districts have expanded their preschool classrooms, the market has urged community-based providers to expand infant and toddler services, which are typically much more expensive to provide. This was the context as the pandemic hit in early 2020, but sustainability challenges have only intensified during the pandemic as community needs have continued to evolve through the complex re-opening of Massachusetts' economy and K-12 schools.

To address sustainability concerns, constituents have continually asked for flexible funding, more custom solutions for each program type, and supports that are designed for the unique assets and needs in each setting (Massachusetts EECb, 2019):

**Family Childcare Homes:** Frequently small businesses, these providers often face the greatest volatility, but also the greatest isolation. Recent data shows closures of 7,500 Family Childcare Homes since 2010 and 769 in the last two years alone, with more licensed capacity moving into center-based settings.

**Early Childhood Center Based Providers:** These organizations reported challenges meeting more complex family needs and sustaining strong business models that can hold steady through changes in funding, in the field, and among families.

**Before- and After-School Programs:** These providers spoke to the 'revolving door' of staff in their classrooms and desire to work more closely with school districts to ensure mutually reinforcing strategies that lead to positive child outcomes through the school aged years.

**Residential and Placement Programs:** These organizations cited needs for greater consistency and timeliness of licensing and investigations, improved technology and information sharing that better includes them, as well as significant cross-agency efforts to reform regulations and better coordinate policy development and compliance monitoring so they are able to better navigate the bureaucracy and focus on the children in their care. A dedicated effort to find a set of custom solutions for residential and placement programs is something constituents have asked EEC to explore in collaboration with agency partners.

Sustainability challenges continue and have accelerated since the COVID-19 pandemic hit, with Family Child Care programs demonstrating the most significant instability over time.

National studies also show increased pressure on early childhood providers to improve quality – but *without* the

accompanying funding to cover associated costs (Bookman, Crandall, Douglass; & Kelleher, 2018, p. 3). As a result, national efforts to measure quality in programs have not always been followed by the desired improvements over time.

In conversation with the field, providers from every type of early education and care setting in Massachusetts – family child care homes, large and small center-based programs, before and after school programs, and residential and placement services – all care deeply about quality support for children and their families. The elements of quality – including educator preparation, early language development, transitions into schools, and family engagement – were evident in programs across the state (Massachusetts EECb, 2019). However, a focus on urgent needs has distracted from the quality focus, especially without a common standard or incentives to achieve it. Representatives spoke about the returns they see when their quality grows – as a provider from Central Massachusetts said, if we “invest in good quality now – then the whole picture brightens.”

**FY19 EEC Licensed Agency Openings & Closings Across Program Types**

	Family Childcare	Foster Care	Group	Large Group	Small Group	Temporary Shelter	Totals
<b>Openings</b>	366	1	10	162	8	3	550
<b>Closings</b>	673	2	12	62	3	3	755
<b>Net Change</b>	-307	-1	-2	100	5	0	-205

Source: FY19 EEC Administrative Licensing Records

**FY19 EEC Licensed Agency Capacity Gains & Losses Across Program Types**

	Family Childcare	Foster Care	Group	Large Group	Small Group	Temporary Shelter	Totals
<b>Capacity Gains</b>	2,280	n/a	164	8,494	76	27	11,041
<b>Capacity Losses</b>	4,417	n/a	139	2,693	16	47	7,312
<b>Net Change</b>	-2,137	n/a	25	5,801	60	-20	3,729

Source: FY19 EEC Administrative Licensing Records  
\*Foster Care Agencies do not have capacity counts.

**SUMMER 2020 UPDATE**

At the beginning of the pandemic, only 55% of licensed programs statewide had a subsidy agreement in place to serve low-income families. Since state subsidies follow families rather than programs, there is no consistency in how much funding through subsidies a program can depend on month to month, leaving programs that accept childcare subsidies open to additional unpredictable financial shocks. At the same time, many programs located in areas of the state with high poverty rates, and likely serving many low-income families, did not hold subsidy agreements with EEC at all (EEC Administrative Subsidy Data, 2020).

EEC is focused on working with providers and funders to make strides to build a system of child care in the Commonwealth that is coherent and sustainable and combines family and operational support.

In June 2020, the federal CARES Act included additional funds to Massachusetts through the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG). The Legislature appropriated those funds to support providers working with subsidized families and those that operated during the emergency child care period. This funding allowed the Department to offer Restart Stipends built on a per-provider (for Family Child Care) and per-classroom (for Group and School Age Providers) basis. While the funds were allocated to just a portion of the overall child care provider market, and defrayed a portion of fixed operating costs for the months of July and August, their allocation model is one that can be replicated across all provider types (regardless of subsidy agreement) and at scale, as needed and with available funds, in order to sustain key components of the child care infrastructure over the coming year.

**Our Planned Actions**

To ensure we are building back the early education and care system in Massachusetts with a common expectation of the quality that children and families deserve, EEC will work to launch and operationalize a universal quality rating improvement system (QRIS 2.0) that prioritizes program investments and supports.

EEC has already begun this work in the following ways:

- Building a more responsive, flexible and resource-oriented system of quality assurance statewide by integrating EECs licensing and technical assistance functions at the regional office level.
- Enhancing EECs customer service orientation across program types and functions, including technology, responsiveness, and communication improvements.
- Building valued partnerships with and between the field that address quality-related issues: problem-solving orientation and identification of needed program supports; bringing options to solve for operational challenges; and expanding the shared toolkit of resources available to address program and educator needs

EEC will also continue the work to:

- Sustain investments in quality and infrastructure using classroom-based funding approaches with licensing as the baseline, tied to investments in capacity to reach vulnerable populations in under-served geographies and tiered subsidy reimbursement levels that reflect the true cost of quality
- Launch the early childhood center-based QRIS 2.0, with Family Child Care and Out of School Time frameworks to be developed specifically for each program type, in partnership with the field
- Equip programs with support for leadership development, including to support systems of job embedded professional development across all levels
- Build a verification system to validate the highest quality level, rebid contracts to realign funding to the new approach to quality investment, using them as a mechanism to incentivize quality and bring stability to program budgets
- Build the role of FCC Systems to support programs across business and quality functions, with definitions of quality specific to the FCC context, with a focus on family engagement and relevant programming, and support through the FCC Systems to understand, nurture, and grow program strength, sustainability, and quality

As the EEC licensing role in residential programs and placement agencies is different than other program types, specific program strategies have been developed for this program model to address residential and placement needs:

- Work in partnership with the Education and Health Secretariats to ensure role clarity, alignment, and consistency for this shared program population
- Collaborate in an ongoing way to coordinate policies, procedures, monitoring
- Increase role clarity, aligned professional development supports, and data sharing facilitation across state agencies

### 3B Ensure Comprehensive Program Supports

#### The Opportunity

Flexible wrap-around supports are an integral component of program quality. EEC has an existing investment in services like mental health consultation, and trainings, like the Pyramid Model, to support teachers and educators to individualize instruction and organize lessons to address the needs of all learners.

But as family needs have changed, so have the requirements of programs to meet those needs. Licensed programs providing non-parental care cannot be expected to be responsible for meeting all needs of children and families. When programs are not fully supported in this requirement, we face issues like preschool expulsion and vicarious trauma among the workforce. The shifting landscape of families in MA requires that EEC work more closely with peer agencies to provide a more comprehensive set of options for programs to draw from in meeting health, mental health, education, child development, youth development, and child and family welfare needs. Educators spoke of difficulties sustaining children through trauma at home and in their communities. Associated behavioral challenges in classrooms require consistent, ongoing specialized support - but may also require an emergency response when crisis occurs.

The needs of families as the COVID-19 pandemic has continued have become more complex, and the programs who support them are faced with deeper and more intersecting challenges than ever before. Now more than ever, the need for increased types of support, like trauma informed practices among staff and educators, as well as levels of support, like wraparound services and crisis supports, is clear.

#### Our Planned Actions

- Support programs through pandemic reopening in a way that better integrates responsive services for mental and behavioral health supports:
  - Leverage Mental and Behavioral Health Support Consultants towards crisis supports and immediate needs for program reopening during the pandemic, ensuring they are working in partnership with licensors to support educators as they work with children and families through a stressful operating environment
  - Create a mechanism to address “emergency” situations with providers through a triage model of mental health supports designed for an elevated or crisis situation
  - Partner with entities like Boston Children’s Hospital and the Pyramid Model Consortium to bring new learning, training, and development opportunities to the field around social-emotional learning, mental and behavioral health, and balancing child development with operating within COVID-19 health and safety constructs.
- Re-orient and coordinate the deployment of specific program supports, such as Program Development Coaches (PDCs), Early Childhood Support Organizations (ECOs), and Family Childcare Systems, to assist programs more effectively to address immediate needs (e.g staffing and scheduling through reopening during volatile enrollment periods) and, ultimately, advance their quality.
- Facilitate the growth and offering of comprehensive supports to meet the complex and changing needs of children and families who use early education and care services
  - Continue to build capacity to implement evidence-based mental and behavioral health supports by addressing program capacity to implement tiered systems of support
  - Improve coordination of comprehensive supports for families across state agencies to be leveraged by EEC licensed or funded providers

## 4 Systems

**Our goal is to efficiently and effectively steward public investments in early education and care with utmost integrity, transparency and accountability to the people of Massachusetts.**

To achieve this goal, we will work to align all of the initiatives, incentives, functions, and roles that are within our sphere of influence across programs, educators, and children and families – tying them together in a way that keeps all of us moving in a single direction. We will also respond to the urgent concerns expressed by constituents about the largest obstacles they face when interfacing with our people, systems, and technology.

#### Our Planned Initiative:

Improve operations to lay the foundation for transformative change by ensuring a seamless, simplified, clarified experience for families, educators, and programs as they interact with EEC policies and regulations, staff and offices, technology and software systems, and communication structures.

### SUMMER 2020 UPDATE

Improvements in how EEC worked and communicated with providers and families took on a greater priority as the pandemic hit. Residential and placement programs immediately pivoted to COVID-19 mitigation strategies, with urgent coordination across state agencies to ensure health, safety, and seamless operations through the crisis. Child care programs closed and, in a matter of days, EEC initiated an emergency childcare system for essential workers. To support programs through this unusual and rapidly changing environment, and to maintain strong communication, support, and monitoring channels, EEC licensors began to immediately engage with all programs by calling daily to check on key health, safety, attendance, and community factors.

EEC also worked quickly with WGBH to produce Family Fun at Home, an outreach tool for programs to engage with families by equipping them with brain building activities for their young children while they sheltered at home. Distributing these toolkits through regional offices became a first point of program support that soon grew into an ongoing mechanism for delivering critical goods into the hands of programs as they supported children and families through the pandemic – including the gloves, masks, and sanitizer they would need to meet new health and safety standards.

As the state began re-opening, new requirements created the potential for confusion. However, EEC worked to cultivate a culture of mutual support, inquiry, partnership and routines of collaboration to ensure consistency in program interactions and relationships across regions. Further, EEC created a new licensing structure that could allow programs to re-open during the pandemic under altered expectations. Redesigning this policy and process was a huge step from a primary emphasis on compliance toward a collaborative, problem-solving system that considers the challenges as they present themselves, communicates frequently, openly and transparently, and is continually adapting based on feedback from its constituents.

### 4A Improve Operations for a User-Centered EEC

#### The Opportunity

Fifteen years since becoming a stand-alone agency, EEC has successfully integrated different functions (e.g regulating and licensing; fund allocation; and setting and communicating quality standards) across different program types (e.g early childhood centers and family childcare homes; before and after school programs; residential and placement services). Yet the challenges of uniting different funding streams, functions, and, at times, different philosophical positions, remain.

Constituents feel this in several ways:

**Regulations:** changes at the federal and state levels have been adopted in an iterative fashion, and often applied across program settings, even those for whom the federal guidelines were not originally intended.

As a result, some regulations are in conflict with each other, or cause unnecessary confusion among constituents. Participants in learning sessions cited navigation challenges as they struggle to apply regulatory mandates while also focusing on supporting quality teaching and learning. They spoke of unnecessary bureaucracy, layers of approval, and a need for EEC to lead the way in reconciling regulations with those of sister agencies and other funding streams.

**Staffing Capacity:** Consistent application of these regulations is a capacity challenge within the EEC staffing structure—one which was also an area of heavy feedback in listening sessions. Constituents spoke of having to call multiple people across regional and central offices in order to assemble a complete picture of their requirements, and cited conflicting advice as a challenge to reaching full compliance (Massachusetts EECb, 2019).

A 2019 analysis of department staffing capacity supported the feedback heard in the field and concluded that EEC’s constituents frequently communicate with different units at different points in their user experience—sometimes across both central and regional offices. These overly complex structures create great inefficiency in communications, processes, and the constituent experience.

In feedback from the field, it is apparent that the strain of EEC’s capacity gaps is experienced most by the educators, programs and families who interact with it each day. Across the state, there were requests for more user-oriented systems and procedures that will make it easier to navigate EEC compliance and support functions. These include technology systems, which participants said must adapt to users of varying capacity and should allow users to flow more seamlessly through critical compliance and funding processes.

The 2019 department analysis noted that EEC maintains 10 separate technology systems, creating challenges for EEC staff and the field, and limiting the department’s ability to assemble a complete data picture of field sustainability and access or foster data-driven decision making. Time spent supporting constituents to navigate these systems detracts from the department’s ability to focus on operational improvements and excellence.

In addition to improved supports from EEC, there were resounding calls for better coordination across state agencies. The goals of coordination focused on reducing confusion, minimizing conflicting guidance, and decreasing the burden on constituents to ‘figure it out’ or rely on staff to perform functions on the provider’s behalf.

**Our Planned Actions**

EEC will conduct a comprehensive regulatory review:

- Adopt principles of simplicity, coherence, alignment across regulatory bodies, reduced bureaucratic burden, custom approaches by program, flexibility where required
- Review and revise in partnership and dialogue with the field, specific to each program model and stakeholder group, as appropriate
- Consider implications for equity, access, quality, and safety in each decision point, while taking into account the needed innovation to support the future needs of the state

**SUMMER 2020 UPDATE**

Governor Baker’s March 10, 2020 and June 8, 2020 Executive Orders allowed EEC to work with Residential and Placement, Emergency Child Care providers, and re-opening child care providers under new health and safety standards.

EEC determined that programs would reopen if they could meet the Minimum Health and Safety Requirements. It then identified which regulations would accompany those requirements through the period of the Executive Order.

For this temporary regulatory environment, EEC has applied the same approach as will be used for the while doing long-term planned regulatory review, with an emphasis on simplicity, coherence, alignment, reduced bureaucratic burden, and flexibility. In addition, EEC waived many requirements and process steps in order to simplify bureaucratic layers for providers in ways that can improve their experiences for the long term.

We will also re-orient our staffing structures around the constituent experience:

- Organize our work around families, educators, and programs, so the burden of piecing together the full picture is with EEC, not with the individuals and entities with whom it interacts
- Engage in a culture shift towards understanding equity, access, quality, and safety as embedded in all of our work, and a part of everything we do
- Focus increased staff capacity on reducing wait times for investigations, background record checks, and other key procedures that are pain points for users – as well as on the strategies for the strategic plan

**SUMMER 2020 UPDATE**

Movement toward re-orienting EEC’s work to the user meant that restructuring of staff could not wait, so that work began incrementally even through the pandemic. Points of contact were established across each unit—Background Record Checks, Legal, Teacher Qualifications, Programs. Points of Contact assembled around each region so that programs and educators were able to experience a more seamless EEC interface through the reopening process.

The culture shift was forced into motion by the needs of operating an emergency system in an unknown environment, but it has been intentionally cultivated by how the reopening process, structure, and forms have been built and fueled by ongoing training for field offices. This culture shift will continue to be grown through routines of collaboration across every department and unit, as well as work over the next year to address implicit bias and cultural and linguistic relevance.

Staff capacity grew by 30 positions that were dedicated largely to the field offices to address backlogs or delays and improve processes.

Going forward, EEC will continue to focus on building staff capacity and organizing its work around the constituent experience and the cultural change needed to best serve families and programs.

At the same time, implementation of its newly created plan, EEC will move ahead on the creation of a plan to overhaul its use of technology to build systems that allow for data-informed decision-making that will support the achievement of the strategic plan and re-building efforts through and after the pandemic. That plan will include:

- Intentional culture change toward the use of data analytics and evaluation in the regular operation of the Department
- The creation of internal structures and systems that facilitate the regular analysis and use of data collected to answer department-wide questions and evolve to meet the needs of families and the field
- Establishing timely and effective feedback loops with internal and external stakeholders to inform department activities
- Identifying mechanisms for gathering and reporting findings from data analysis across EEC’s leadership
- Movement from anecdote to inquiry – integrating data into every supervision and department meeting to surface patterns that can help EEC identify system level solutions to ongoing issues and needs
- Consideration of the user experience in technology and software systems
- Establishing a comprehensive, multi-year data plan for integration and implementation



# WHAT'S NEXT:

## Ongoing Engagement

**This plan was co-developed with over 11,000 residents of Massachusetts – their ideas, feedback, concerns, and expertise led directly to each strategy we will undertake. That process does not end here. The Department will continue to engage, listen, and partner with the community, our funders, and other state agencies to make the changes needed to re-build our EEC field in Massachusetts toward a more sustainable, equitable, effective system for children and families.**

In this plan, we commit to an ongoing process of community engagement to activate these strategies together. This includes ongoing feedback loops with communities that are:

- Regular and systematized, so constituents know when and where to provide feedback on the issues they care about most, in a way that is timely and relevant to each strategy's implementation
- Led by dedicated facilitation experts who can engage with EEC content experts to create meaningful avenues for constituents to help shape and refine our work
- Offered in an easy-to-follow cycle, including early engagement, mid-phase response, and late phase reporting to ensure constituents can follow an initiative, issue, or decision from beginning to end

- Conducted in partnership with peer agencies in a coordinated fashion to ensure connectivity across shared audiences, especially with public schools and public health
- Intentional about building from community systems on the ground and strengthening the feedback loops already built in partnership with communities – i.e. grounded deeply in existing eco-systems

This plan was given life by the people of Massachusetts. The vision is yours, the mission is ours, and together we can bring forth a better future for children, youth, and families.

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## Appendix A: Metrics

Through the implementation of this plan and subsequent work, the Department of Early Education and Care seeks over time to achieve positive child development and educational outcomes, as well as promote increased family economic opportunity. In order to track progress toward those overarching intended impacts, the Department plans to monitor progress on 5 measurable outcomes by tracking 11 leading indicators, as summarized in the table below. At the same time, the Department will track progress toward the accomplishment of 10 additional indicators (included under the last outcome below) to monitor progress on important process activities needed to enhance its operations and work across departments to best serve children and families.

We will track progress on these outcomes statewide, but because of our focus on equity, wherever possible EEC will disaggregate the data in accordance with key demographics or geographies to understand whether our strategies are also improving outcomes for vulnerable populations. (See Tables A-E following the Impact Framework for baseline conditions by region or population, where available.) But altogether, our hope is that they capture our ability to build a better system, one that is in service of, and in partnership with, children and families.



### 2020-2025 EEC Impact Framework

Outcomes	Leading Indicators	Baseline
1. Programs are stabilized and increase their sustainability	a) Growth in licensed capacity (slots) by region, program type b) Growth in licensed agencies by region, program type c) Decrease in program closings  Source: EEC Administrative Records	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FY19: 236,237 licensed EEC slots available for children and youth across MA</li> <li>FY19: 8,699 there were licensed EEC organizations providing early care and education services across MA</li> <li>In FY19, there were 755 EEC program closings across program types in MA (See Table A)</li> </ul>
2. Families gain equitable access to needed supports	a) Increase in licensed capacity in areas of greatest need b) Increase in #/% of children in low-income families receiving childcare subsidies c) Increase in #/% of infants and toddlers in low-income households receiving childcare subsidies d) Increase in children ages 9-35 months receiving developmental screening with parent-completed tool like ASQ  Sources: EEC Administrative Records, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates- Age by Ratio of Income to Poverty in the Past 12 Months, 2017-2018 National Survey of Children's Health, Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In 2019, there is an estimated EEC capacity gap 45,901 slots for ages 0-4 in 'childcare deserts' across the state (See Table B)</li> <li>FY19: 48,025 or ~36% of all low-income children aged 0-5 received childcare subsidies</li> <li>FY19: 19,198 or 24.6% of all subsidies were for infants and toddlers</li> <li>In 2017-18, 37% of parents completed a developmental screen for their children</li> </ul>
3. Increased supply of professionally qualified EEC workforce	a) Increase in professionally qualified EEC workforce across MA b) Increase in qualified EEC workforce diversity by race, ethnicity, primary language c) Increase in average compensation by professional category  Sources: EEC Professional Qualifications Registry; 2018 Bureau of Labor Statistics State Occupational & Wage Estimates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In 2019: there were 139,877 qualified professionals registered with EEC across all program types</li> <li>In 2019: For 16% of all EEC-registered professionals, their primary language was other than English (23 other languages)</li> <li>EEC is not yet collecting workforce information by race, ethnicity- the PQR system must be revised to collect.</li> <li>In 2018, the average wage in MA for:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a preschool teacher was \$39,180 annually (\$18.84/hour)</li> <li>a preschool administrator was \$53,990 (\$25.96/hour)</li> <li>a childcare worker was \$30,090 (\$14.47/hour)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
4. Children are on track to 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade success	a) Increase in 4 <sup>th</sup> grade reading proficiency levels b) Increase in 4 <sup>th</sup> grade math proficiency levels  Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2019: 56% of all students and 33% of economically disadvantaged students are meeting or exceeding state proficiency standards for Reading</li> <li>2019: 49% of all students and 31% of economically disadvantaged students are meeting/exceeding state proficiency standards for Math</li> </ul> Note: See Table E for more detail about educational proficiency levels by sub-groups

<sup>1</sup>Areas of greatest need are defined as:  
a) Childcare deserts: those areas of the state that EEC has determined have high gaps between the supply and demand for childcare for children aged 0-2 AND children aged 3-4. See full list of MA Childcare Deserts in Table B that follows.  
b) Gateway Cities: 26 MA cities that have been designated as "Gateway Cities" by the legislature, which face "stubborn social and economic challenges" while retaining "many assets with unrealized potential." See Table C for a list of these communities.  
Source of low-income children estimate (131,381 children) is the 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates- Age by Ratio of Income to Poverty in the Past 12 Months. "Low-income" is defined here as families with incomes that are up to 200% of the Federal Poverty Levels. See Table D for breakdown of wage estimates by region across the Commonwealth.

Appendix B – Supplemental Tables

Table A: FY19 EEC Licensed Agency Closings Across Program Types by Region

	Family Childcare	Foster Care	Group	Large Group	Small Group	Temporary Shelter	Totals
Central	137	0	1	9	1	1	149
Metro Boston	127	0	0	18	0	0	145
Northeast	166	2	2	12	1	0	183
Southeast & Cape	113	0	4	14	0	0	131
Western	130	0	5	9	1	2	147
<b>Statewide Totals</b>	<b>673</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>755</b>

Source: FY19 EEC Administrative Licensing Records

Table B: Massachusetts Childcare Deserts, 2019  
 Cities/Towns with High Full System Gaps for Ages 0-2 AND Ages 3-4 (n=25)

	Ages 0-2				Ages 3-4			
	Need	Capacity	Gap-N	Gap-%	Need	Capacity	Gap-N	Gap-%
<b>Statewide</b>	212,118	53,239	158,879	75%	150,055	105,029	45,026	30%
Agawam	645	124	521	81%	752	269	483	64%
Attleboro*	1,388	239	1,149	83%	1,198	676	522	44%
Bridgewater	662	43	619	94%	486	244	242	50%
Brockton*	4,000	728	3,272	82%	2,714	1,250	1,464	54%
Chelsea*	1,953	275	1,678	86%	1,704	538	1,166	68%
Chicopee*	1,722	321	1,401	81%	1,182	702	480	41%
Everett*	1,759	256	1,503	85%	1,189	802	387	33%
Fall River*	3,339	397	2,942	88%	2,425	1,236	1,189	49%
Haverhill*	2,847	547	2,300	81%	1,594	841	753	47%
Ludlow	634	70	564	89%	490	264	226	46%
Medford	2,066	359	1,707	83%	1,194	642	552	46%
Medway	588	69	519	88%	360	177	183	51%
Middleboro	611	66	545	89%	451	200	251	56%
New Bedford*	3,504	577	2,927	84%	2,387	1,406	981	41%
Randolph	1,151	204	947	82%	689	326	363	53%
Reading	763	109	654	86%	818	393	425	52%
Revere*	1,756	271	1,485	85%	1,329	461	868	65%
Taunton*	2,169	284	1,885	87%	1,561	764	797	51%
Wareham	725	119	606	84%	479	306	173	36%
Webster	592	84	508	86%	446	236	210	47%
W. Springfield	954	112	842	88%	668	364	304	46%
Westfield*	1,243	226	1,017	82%	1,051	506	545	52%
Weymouth	1,824	224	1,600	88%	1,139	555	584	51%
Winthrop	664	97	567	85%	388	167	221	57%
Yarmouth	744	77	667	90%	366	159	207	57%
<b>Estimated Need for Childcare Deserts</b>	<b>38,303</b>	<b>5,878</b>	<b>32,425</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>27,060</b>	<b>13,484</b>	<b>13,576</b>	<b>50%</b>

Source of data: Hardy, B. (2019). The Geography of Early Education and Care in Massachusetts. Unpublished Internal Report Prepared for The Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care. Notes: 1) These cities all had absolute gaps AND percentage gaps that exceeded the statewide averages, demonstrating higher than average need in these communities. 2) EEC added “estimated need” by summing the need in the areas highlighted in the report with high gaps for 0-2 and 3-4 age groups. 3. 11 out of 26 of MA-designated Gateway cities are also included in the childcare deserts list above.

**Table C: Massachusetts Designated Gateway Cities List, 2019**

1	Attleboro	10	Holyoke	19	Pittsfield
2	Barnstable	11	Lawrence	20	Quincy
3	Brockton	12	Leonminster	21	Revere
4	Chelsea	13	Lowell	22	Salem
5	Chicopee	14	Lynn	23	Springfield
6	Everett	15	Malden	24	Taunton
7	Fall River	16	Methuen	25	Westfield
8	Fitchburg	17	New Bedford	26	Worcester
9	Haverhill	18	Peabody		

Source: Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth (MASSINC) website on 2.25.20: <https://massinc.org/our-work/policy-center/gateway-cities/about-the-gateway-cities/>

**Table D: Massachusetts EEC Workforce Average Compensation by Metropolitan Statistical Area, 2018**

	Preschool Teachers		Preschool Administrators		Childcare Workers	
	Annual	Hourly	Annual	Hourly	Annual	Hourly
Statewide	\$39,180	\$18.84	\$53,990	\$25.96	\$30,090	\$14.47
Barnstable Town, MA	\$34,060	\$16.38	n/a	n/a	\$31,950	\$15.36
Boston-Cambridge-Nashua, MA-NH	\$39,540	\$19.01	n/a	n/a	\$30,050	\$14.45
Leominster-Gardner, MA	\$31,830	\$15.30	n/a	n/a	\$28,070	\$13.68
New Bedford, MA	\$32,470	\$15.61	n/a	n/a	\$28,890	\$13.89
Pittsfield, MA	\$27,860	\$13.40	n/a	n/a	\$26,080	\$12.54
Providence-Warwick, RI-MA	\$32,330	Sta	n/a	n/a	\$27,770	\$13.35
Springfield, MA-CT	\$39,930	\$19.20	n/a	n/a	\$28,740	\$13.82
Worcester, MA-CT	\$40,580	\$19.51	n/a	n/a	\$29,110	\$14.00
Massachusetts nonmetropolitan area	\$40,080	\$19.27	n/a	n/a	\$26,930	\$12.95

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics May 2018 State Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates Massachusetts.

**Table E: MCAS Tests 2019 Percent of Students at Each Achievement Level for Massachusetts)**

Student Groups	English Language Proficiency			Mathematics Proficiency		
	% Exceeding	% Meeting	Total	% Exceeding	% Meeting	Total
All Students	10	46	56	8	41	49
Students w/ Disabilities	1	16	17	2	16	18
English Learners (EL) and Former EL	4	29	33	5	30	35
Economically Disadvantaged	3	30	33	3	28	31
African Amer./Black	3	30	33	2	26	28
Amer. Ind. or Alaska Nat.	6	34	40	5	32	37
Asian	19	51	70	23	53	76
Hispanic/Latino	3	30	33	3	28	31
Multi-Race, Non-Hisp./Lat.	12	45	57	10	42	52
Nat. Haw. or Pacif. Isl.	7	42	49	13	28	41
White	11	48	59	9	47	56
Foster	2	21	23	2	21	23
Homeless	2	19	21	1	18	19
Migrant	5	30	35	5	48	53
Military	7	38	45	5	44	49

Source: 2019 Next Generation MCAS Results by Subgroup by Grade and Subject Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Website on 2.25.20 at: <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/mcas/subgroups2.aspx?link-id=25&orgcode=00000000&fycode=2019&orgtypecode=0&>

**FY19 EEC Licensed Agency Capacity Gains & Losses Across Program Types**

	Family Childcare	Foster Care	Group	Large Group	Small Group	Temporary Shelter	Totals
<b>Capacity Gains</b>	2,280	n/a	164	8,494	76	27	11,041
<b>Capacity Losses</b>	4,417	n/a	139	2,693	16	47	7,312
<b>Net Change</b>	-2,137	n/a	25	5,801	60	-20	3,729

Source: FY19 EEC Administrative Licensing Records  
 \*Foster Care Agencies do not have capacity counts.

**FY19 EEC Licensed Agency Openings & Closings Across Program Types**

	Family Childcare	Foster Care	Group	Large Group	Small Group	Temporary Shelter	Totals
<b>Openings</b>	366	1	10	162	8	3	550
<b>Closings</b>	673	2	12	62	3	3	755
<b>Net Change</b>	-307	-1	-2	100	5	0	-205

Source: FY19 EEC Administrative Licensing Records





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