An Early Education and Care Strategic Plan for Springfield’s Children

June 30, 2016

Background

Springfield Public Schools (SPS), one of thirteen communities across the State receiving funding from Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, received a grant to develop a community-wide plan to improve the early childhood education system in Springfield.

Springfield Public Schools led the planning effort in partnership with HCS Head Start, Square One, YMCA of Greater Springfield, Springfield Partners for Community Action, The Children’s Creative Center, Irene A. & George E. Davis Foundation, private and family early education providers in Springfield, and other state and local stakeholders (“The Partnership”). [For a full list of contributors, see Appendix A.]

* The Partnership is supported in its work by Strategies for Children, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, New England Farm Workers Council, and Jeffrey Greim, Director of Nonprofit Management and Philanthropy & Strategic Fundraising, Bay Path University.
* Anne Kandilis served as the project strategic planning consultant.

The Partnership values the diversity and independence of the mixed-provider model and has built a plan that offers a common vision for collaborative work to improve and expand early education in Springfield with specific strategies and action steps.

The Partnership met on a weekly basis beginning in January 2016 with representatives from the mixed-provider model to identify opportunities for further collaboration. We held a SWOT[[1]](#footnote-1) workshop with Early Childhood Education and Care providers and professionals serving over 80% of the children in group education centers and fifty children in family care in Springfield to develop an understanding of our strengths and opportunities. We also conducted a survey of parents with young children to learn more about their early childhood education needs.

*The Vision*

*In Springfield, we work together in a birth through third grade continuum framework, so that all children receive a high quality education beginning with an early childhood experience in a safe, supportive and nurturing environment that considers the whole child – their family, culture, experiences, abilities, and needs – in preparation for academic and life success.*

1. ***Executive Summary***

The Partnership proposed five goals for achieving a PEG-like model (Preschool Expansion Grant-like) to serve all children ages 2.9 through entry to kindergarten. These five goals identified strengths within the community to build quality programs and address systemic issues that are obstacles to achieving high quality early education and care.

To build on the community’s strengths, including a strong collaboration among partners invested in educating our children and helping families succeed, we need systemic support from the State to address the teacher workforce crisis and the costs associated with achieving PEG-like quality for children and families in three key areas:

* First, we have dedicated, qualified early education professionals, but we do not have enough of them. Our community experiences high turnover among early education professionals and is struggling to attract new high quality teachers. If we are to meet the quality demands of PEG-like, the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC), the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) and local communities must find a way to pay our teachers a salary that is competitive with Springfield Public Schools.
* Second, while our community offers families a variety of programs and services for quality education and care, too often, they are not affordable or accessible for our families. Without more financial and systemic support for teachers, providers and families, a high quality early childhood education experience for all of our children is impossible to achieve.
* Third, our community is dedicated to serving the “whole child.” To do this, we need a comprehensive service model, similar to the Head Start model, to help families access services. The current system of comprehensive services is very fragmented making continuity of services unmanageable for families.

Plan Organization

Our strategic plan builds on our strengths, addresses some of the weaknesses in our system, and offers solutions to guide expansion and improvements to early education and care in Springfield. The Plan is organized around five goals with specific strategies and action steps to guide implementation. Organized according to the plan template provided by the EEC, the five goals are:

Goal 1: Establish an effective birth through third grade governance & leadership structure

Goal 2: Attract and retain qualified early education teachers to the profession

Goal 3: Increase access to high quality, affordable early education and care

Goal 4: Build stronger connections with families and comprehensive service partners Goal 5: Build consensus around the definitions of high quality early education and kindergarten readiness and strengthen the alignment with Springfield Public Schools

The Plan, designed to be dynamic, pursues the five goals which are achievable over varying spans of time. Interwoven in these goals are important major components of the Department of Early Education and Care’s strategic plan including Preschool Expansion Grant (PEG) further expansion, the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), and Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R). Our hope is that state level decision makers align funding streams, integrate program resources and create policies to produce and support effective collaboration and system integration.

*PEG Expansion*:

Our initial focus is to bring PEG-like standards and quality to half of the children already attending early childhood full day programs[[2]](#footnote-2). When this is accomplished, we will increase Springfield’s capacity to our preschool population. We can improve quality by addressing the workforce crisis as described in Goal #2 and by bringing more providers into the PEG system as outlined in Goal #5.

*QRIS*:

While we recognize that QRIS is a complex system, our hope is that it can become a system that sets standards for quality that provides financial support to enable providers to move up the quality scale. We have outlined suggestions for a more effective QRIS under Goal #2 and Goal #4.

*Child Care Resource &Referral: (CCR&R):*

To serve families more effectively, EEC must allocate resources and oversight capacity through the enhanced use of NACCRRAware[[3]](#footnote-3), and through a central early education resource and referral center as outlined in Goal #3. Currently, the enrollment process is managed through a waitlist, an inefficient method because:

* The waitlist becomes outdated very quickly
* The waitlist system requires an inordinate amount of time and resources to maintain
* Seats remain unfilled for weeks or even months while providers look for a qualified family
* There is no system to support families not on the waitlist
* The CCR&R process does not have the capability to match families with available openings

*Costs:*

Expanding PEG-like quality to serve half of our full day group center early education students (720) over the next five years will create new jobs and/or help develop our teacher workforce including 36 bachelor degree level lead teachers, 72 EEC licensed assistant teachers and 15 new positions to help families access, coordinate and maintain comprehensive services. See Pages 25-26 and Appendix B for cost estimates.

# Leadership Plan

*Leadership Plan*

Springfield has a strong collaboration among partners but lacks a formal governance or leadership structure. We agreed that there is a need for a formal partnership with shared goals.

Current challenges to advancing early education in Springfield include:

* Lack of city or district ownership of early childhood education because early education in the Springfield Public Schools is controlled by special education regulations
* Early education funding relies on complex streams of funding, each with different reporting requirements and regulations
* Public and private early education systems are fragmented and encumbered with many disparate sets of rules and regulations

The leadership structure must value the many segments of the community. Families, for example, value the diversity and individuality of the mixed- provider model and want to have options for early education and child care to accommodate their varying needs. Providers want a leadership structure that respects and maintains program individuality and independence while allowing them to work together to pursue shared goals. The Partnership agreed that to make lasting change without creating an unnecessary layer of administration and oversight, strong leadership is needed to achieve the vision for a high quality, accessible, early childhood education system for all children in Springfield.

**Goal 1: Establish an effective birth through third grade governance & leadership structure**

**Strategy 1:**

Establish an Early Education and Care Leadership Structure (“Springfield Early Education Success Collaborative”) that will guide the creation, implementation and oversight for improving the quality of early education in Springfield.The goal of the Collaborative is to combine current efforts to create a system of goals, incentives, rewards and support to attain incremental, measurable, lasting improvements. The ultimate goal of this effort is to increase the percentage of Springfield children entering kindergarten “ready to learn.”

* A Board of Advisors will represent the full range of stakeholders in Springfield’s early education and care community who will oversee the development and implementation of a roadmap to better outcomes.
	+ Board of Advisor Representation in Alphabetical Order:
		- Baystate Children’s Hospital
		- Behavioral Health Network
		- Coordinated Family and Community Engagement (CFCE)
		- Educator Provider Support (EPS)
		- HCS Head Start, Inc.
		- Irene A. & George E. Davis Foundation
		- Mayor’s Office
		- New England Farm Workers Council
		- Parent (s) with a child enrolled in Preschool
		- Pediatrician (TBD)
		- Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
		- Regional Employment Board
		- Springfield Partners for Community Action
		- Springfield Public Schools – New Director of Early Education
		- Springfield College
		- Square One
		- Valley Opportunity Council
		- The YMCA of Greater Springfield
		- Other early education providers who wish to participate
		- Higher education institutions (TBD)
		- Preschool teacher (s)TBD
		- Health Insurance subject matter expert (TBD)
* What would need to happen to establish and support the Collaborative?
	+ - Stakeholders agree to participate in the Collaborative and appoint a senior member of their organization to the Board
		- The Collaborative hires a full time experienced Program Manager to provide continuous support
		- The Board creates a set of by-laws to govern the operation of the Collaborative
			* The term for Board Chair and officers will be one year with new elections held annually
		- SPS establishes a Department of Early Education with the following positions and/or supports:
			* Director of Early Education to continue to serve as PEG Lead Education Agent, represent SPS in the Collaborative and the community, and oversee SPS early education support functions
			* Allocate resources to provide the following additional supports:
				+ Act as Fiscal Agent for applicable grants, PEG and other certain funding streams
				+ Provide resources to implement a centralized platform for pre-school enrollment and referral
				+ Manage centralized platform for data collection and communication
				+ Provide coaching and learning support in the PEG community
				+ Develop and manage centralized platform for economies of scale and efficiencies: shared services, purchasing power; shared family service coordinators and other agreed to areas of service [To be identified at a later date]
			* Funding and Fiscal Agent:
				+ Request start-up funds and subsequent funding for two additional years from EEC and/or ESE to establish Collaborative structure and positions
				+ The Fiscal Agent will earn their standard rate of 3.5% indirect cost /administrative fee on grants awarded within the collaborative structure
				+ Local financial support has been strong in Springfield and certain funds from the State could be awarded under a matching funds incentive program whereby local and/or in-kind funds contributed to the Collaborative and for other priorities would be matched by the State.
				+ Over the medium to long term, better outcomes for children entering kindergarten will reduce remedial costs and generate cost savings that can be used to fund future Collaborative initiatives. We need to develop a formal, reliable, measurement system to quantify gains. Perhaps we partner with Educare or a research institution to develop a measurement/assessment process that can evaluate, for example, whether our investment in early education reduces the number of SPED/IEPs referrals. If we reduced special education referrals by 5%, how much would we save?
				+ To the extent that funds are required for specific initiatives, the Collaborative will seek to raise the funds through grants, philanthropic resources, and State matching funds.
				+ Combining community initiatives will increase stakeholder staff productivity and reduce costs associated with separate efforts
			* Open Issues:
				+ Need to determine whether to establish a separate 501(c) (3) to allow the Collaborative to apply for grant/funds or whether Collaborative should be embedded in another organization.
				+ Need to develop a formal, reliable, measurement system to measure outcomes in order to assess whether Special Education diagnoses/IEPs have been reduced.

*Benefits to Stakeholders and Desired Outcomes:*

* A formal collaboration will allow the community to align and scale current efforts for maximum impact on the early childhood population.
* An alignment of interests in a strong governing body will increase the effectiveness of early education by creating shared goals and the requisite action steps to achieve those goals, including centralizing communications, increasing purchasing power, agreement on school readiness standards, collecting and sharing performance data and more.
* Aligning interests in a formal collaborative structure for the pursuit of shared goals will result in a more efficient system by reducing the number of meetings, duplication of efforts and costs.
* A central fiscal agent will make a stronger platform for advocacy and raise the visibility of early education in Springfield.
* A more centralized, coordinated enrollment system will improve family access to early education and improve student data collection and tracking.
* A centralized platform that includes a strong connection to Springfield public schools will strengthen expectations for the delivery of early education.
* Demonstrated success in early education will benefit the entire community when children enter kindergarten ready to learn.
1. ***Program Design and Development***
	1. *Needs Assessment Results*

The Partnership conducted a needs assessment for children ages 2.9 – 5 while considering birth through third grade services and programming in Springfield. The Partnership’s needs assessment revealed these fundamental concerns:

* Springfield has a strong collaboration among partners but no formal governance or leadership structure.
* An educator/teacher workforce crisis exists in early childhood education resulting from a lack of qualified teachers, an undeveloped pipeline for educator development, and salaries too low to attract teachers to the workforce.
* Current funding for early education is insufficient to achieve PEG-like quality.
* Access to early education is inefficient, difficult to navigate, and burdensome to families.
* Little to no institutional or academic link exists between early education and kindergarten readiness.
* No formal alignment of birth to third grade strategies.
* No sustained follow through to ensure the consistent delivery of comprehensive services and supports.
* Current data collection system is insufficient to fully understand and serve Springfield’s pre-k population.

The assessment indicated that early education and care providers want to:

* Establish a formal leadership structure to create, implement and oversee a roadmap for improving the quality of early education in Springfield
* Attract and retain qualified early education teachers to the profession
* Improve access to early education and care by designing a more centralized enrollment and referral system
* Define, agree and implement an effective quality measurement system that is consistent throughout the mixed-delivery system
* Better align federal and state standards and tools
* Centralize and improve data collection capabilities

*A look at Springfield’s Early Childhood Population and Early Education Center Based Programs*

The Partnership conducted data research to better understand Springfield’s early childhood population (aged 2.9 - 5), and Springfield’s current supply of early education and care group center based programs to evaluate whether existing programs are meeting the needs of children and families.

With help from the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission’s neighborhood census data and mapping capabilities[[4]](#footnote-4), Strategies for Children Fast Facts/2016 and New England Farm Workers Council Department of Early Education and Care licensed capacity data, we were able to learn where our preschool aged children (2.9 – 5) live by neighborhood, where children are enrolled in public, private, family child care and group center based early education programs by neighborhood, the location of group center based early education programs, and their licensed capacity by neighborhood. We attempted to learn more about family based education and care providers, however, we were unable to obtain information by age groups. The information obtained allowed us to make some preliminary conclusions about the supply and accessibility of early education and care services in Springfield.

What we’ve learned so far:

Children Enrolled

Springfield has 5,169 children aged 3, 4, and 1/3 of 5 year olds (“preschool aged children”) enrolled in early education programs. 53% of 3+ year olds are enrolled in a public, private, family or group center based early education program. [Figure 1: Snapshot of Springfield’s Early Education and Care Population by Neighborhood]

Kindergarten Reading Readiness

We examined the September 2015 Kindergarten Reading Assessment (KRA) results administered to all children by Springfield Public Schools, a measure to determine whether children are entering kindergarten with early literacy knowledge and skills. The percentage of kindergarten children who received a score of “proficient” or higher on the Kindergarten Reading Assessment exam was 11.7% [Figure 2: Percent of Children Scoring Proficient or Higher on Kindergarten Reading Assessment by Neighborhood].

The results vary widely by neighborhood and indicate that merely attending preschool may not equate to reading readiness. 48% - 64% of the children in Six Corners, Metro Center and Old Hill attended an early education program, however, only 1.1% – 4.8% were reading ready. Conversely, only 11% of children from East Forest Park attended a preschool or nursery program yet they had the highest score of 27.3%. [Figure 2]

The neighborhoods with only 1.1% - 4.8% serve an extensive population of students who come from families in which English is a second language. As the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission explained in its September, 2014 Data Atlas By Neighborhood, “…underlying causes, such as socioeconomic instability and low attendance rates, leave students academically precarious.”

Research shows that poor or low quality programs can have a negative impact on children’s school readiness, or at best, no impact on school readiness (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Jim Minervino – Ready on Day One, September 2016). Our initial focus will be to bring PEG-like standards and quality to existing programs serving preschool children. When this is accomplished, we will focus on increasing Springfield’s capacity to serve a greater percentage of our preschool population.

Capacity and Expansion

Learning where children live and whether they are enrolled in a preschool program will help us gain a greater understanding of where we can increase access and expand programs for families and children [Figure 3: Enrolled Preschool Aged Children by Neighborhood].

Springfield has done a remarkable job in expanding preschool programs in many of our poorest neighborhoods. [Figure 4: Preschool Group Center Locations by Licensed Capacity and Neighborhood).

Metro Center, Old Hill and McKnight have more licensed capacity (274, 591, and 481, respectively) than children (181,180 and 164, respectively). The high capacity numbers along the State Street corridor between Old Hill and McKnight may be attributed to the close proximity of commercial businesses and public transportation routes where some of the children who attend these programs but may not live in the neighborhood. However, our data found that there are 241 SPS and city-wide group center preschool vacancies[[5]](#footnote-5) and most were due to either an oversaturation of seats located along the State Street corridor, afternoon only sessions, and/or closed classrooms due to a lack of available qualified teachers[[6]](#footnote-6).

Conversely, neighborhoods like Six Corners, Sixteen Acres and Pine Point appear to be underserved, with the licensed capacity in those neighborhoods (96, 190 and 98, respectively) [Figure 4], well below the number of children living there (350, 620 and 337, respectively). In some cases, providers know that these areas are underserved, however, expanding programs in these neighborhoods is difficult. Access to public transportation and a lack of facilities have been cited as reasons that expansion has not been possible. And, most importantly, expanding preschool programs is impossible without additional qualified teachers.

* 1. *Teacher Capacity and Classroom Quality*

Teacher capacity and classroom quality begins with addressing the educator/teacher workforce crisis in Springfield. Our workforce is underpaid, overwhelmed with a wide array of expensive federal and state licensing requirements, and in some cases – undereducated. The outcomes we expect from a high quality early education experience will be impossible to achieve without high quality teachers.

Expanding high quality early education cannot happen without investing in ongoing training, a focus on attracting and retaining high quality teachers by increasing salaries, and developing a pipeline of early childhood educators.

### Goal 2: Attract and retain qualified early education teachers to the profession by investing in training, developing a pipeline of early childhood educators, increasing salaries and creating a career path to ensure Springfield has an adequate number of highly qualified early educators.

#### Strategy 1:

Develop a tiered financial incentive and compensation support system to provide existing early education teachers a means and a path to obtain certification and/or higher education degrees.

* Expand and link access to monetary support from EEC, ESE and private sources to provide early childhood educators access to and support for pursuing higher education
* Work with EEC to modify the QRIS program so that it becomes a model for continuous improvement with meaningful financial incentives that can be used to help providers “move up the quality scale” to achieve and afford PEG-like standards of high quality
* Align EEC and DESE early education teacher requirements to provide “stackable” credentials

**Strategy 2:**

Reduce teacher turnover and increase the pipeline of bachelor degree level early education teachers

* Develop financial strategies with support from EEC, ESE, and private sources to reduce teacher turnover by paying teachers a salary that is competitive with Springfield Public Schools including consideration for working a full year
* Develop a plan with education partners such as EPS, Higher Education Institutions, SPS, EEC, ESE, Regional Employment Board and private foundations to produce bachelor level early education professionals
	+ Work with providers to identify and offer career development services to targeted early education professionals
	+ Develop a student cohort of these targeted professionals and partner with local colleges to deliver on-line, hybrid and on campus classes that can accommodate our diverse workforce
	+ Collaborate with education partners and colleges to increase teacher diversity by developing professionals with English as a second language
* Evaluate federal and state financial resources currently used for Educator Provider Support and align QRIS standards of quality for professional development, accreditation and higher education degrees in a relevant field
* Ensure our early education professionals are accessing ESE and EEC teacher scholarships
	+ Identify challenges and policies that prohibit teachers from furthering their careers and provide support to alleviate those barriers

### Goal 3: Increase access to high quality, affordable early education and care by decreasing financial barriers and simplifying access points.

While the need to increase access to early education and care for all children is an important part of our vision, access points to child care and services are varied, fragmented and disjointed because:

* the system determines eligibility and programs based on parent circumstances and not the needs of the child
* there are not enough affordable full day preschool options for working families who do not qualify for subsidies
* there are limited learning environments for children with special needs

#### Strategy 1:

To serve all families during the qualifying and enrollment process, modify the CCR&R system to help families navigate the process in a more efficient, centralized way.

* Create and co-locate a centralized “early education resource center” at the SPS Parent and Community Engagement Center (PACE) enrollment center using existing resources as follows:
	+ Create a full-time early education resource position
		- Utilize the current CFCE grant to help fund a full time position
		- Determine what additional personnel and resulting financial resources are needed to help families navigate through the early education system including providing enrollment assistance, waitlist management and follow-up capabilities
	+ Provide on-site enrollment capabilities: i.e., HCS and Trinity School enrolls on Monday and Wednesday, Square One and Jewish Community Center on Tuesday and Thursday, YMCA and Springfield Partners for Community Action on Friday, etc.
	+ Provide off-site enrollment capabilities at neighborhood schools and provider locations
	+ Serve all families in the enrollment process by allocating resources and oversight capacity to support the use of the NACCRRAware system
	+ Determine staffing logistics and provide training to those who manage and have access to the system
* Determine which additional organizations can be part of the central resource system to facilitate increased partnership/outreach activity
	+ Co-locate and expand existing community outreach programs to reach more families that want or need early education and/or interventions for their children
* Work with the City and other partners to create a communications campaign to provide information about the importance of and how to access high quality early education
	+ Create messaging which emphasizes the importance of early childhood education as critical to their child’s development
	+ Develop communications messaging which emphasizes the connotation of “early childhood education” rather than “child care”

#### Strategy 2:

Improve enrollment and referral experience for families by eliminating long delays in accessing a program.

* Ensure that the data in a centralized system is current and can refer a child to a program for immediate or near immediate enrollment
	+ Ensure that the most at risk children are not disadvantaged
* Co-locate the early education resource center and SPS enrollment center to allow parents to enroll their children in kindergarten and access information and enrollment services for early education at the same time
* Work with EEC to restructure the waitlist system to reduce the length of time it takes to accept a child into an early education program
	+ Modify the waitlist to accommodate families who want their children to be placed immediately, i.e., “first available”. Parents that request a specific provider and/or time slot will be maintained by the provider
	+ Keep the waitlist current by “clearing it out” every 120 days
	+ Ensure a transition plan exists for families who are already on the waitlist
* Reduce program vacancies by allowing a child to enroll into a program immediately

#### Strategy 3:

Make high quality early education available to all families regardless of financial ability to pay, employment circumstance or special needs

###### Improve staff understanding of the current income eligibility criteria of existing EEC licensed programs in the City of Springfield to appropriately refer families to programs that will meet their needs

###### Advocate for the State to reestablish a sliding scale type program to help families that are just over the subsidy income limits access affordable programs

###### Determine whether an opportunity exists to align PEG income eligibility guidelines with State subsidy guidelines to allow more families to access the program

###### Offer an option for Springfield Public School preschool hours to include 4-6 hour days with the ultimate goal of offering full day pre-school

###### Create an outreach program to change the mindset of families so that they think about early education as necessary to their child’s development

###### Use the outreach program to signify the importance of “early education” rather than “child care”

* 1. *Family Engagement and Comprehensive Services*

The Partnership identified an increased need to help families access and receive continuous and coordinated physical and social emotional health and human services. Head Start provides "health, educational, nutritional, social, and other services that are determined, based on family needs assessments, to be necessary”[[7]](#footnote-7) and staff coordinates and delivers these services as part of a "whole child" approach to child development. As a first step, the Partnership would like to restructure and/or build a system that emulates the Head Start model to help families access and stay connected to the services they need.

Medical and health professionals describe the current delivery system of care as “fragmented, subject to interruptions, and overly dependent on a family’s ability to maintain stable insurance.” Early education and health service providers noted that while there may be an adequate number of mental, physical and human health providers, there is no “glue” to allow for continuous care from birth through grade twelve. Planning participants indicated a desire to build stronger partnerships among and between service agencies.

### Goal 4: Build stronger connections with families and comprehensive service partners to help families and children succeed.

#### Strategy 1:

Create an ongoing, comprehensive approach to promote family success by ensuring that children and families receive the necessary supports to access, coordinate and maintain the services they need.

###### Develop a centralized family services support network based on Head Start’s family support service and cost model that that can be accessed by licensed early education providers.

* + Develop a plan that identifies the comprehensive services needed for families and children and create a support network for accessing and delivering these services.
	+ Partner with Springfield Public Schools, Head Start, Behavioral Health Network and other organizations to determine feasibility and cost of a centralized system of family service coordinators for licensed providers.
	+ Partner with other community programs to expand partnerships.
	+ Reduce interruptions of care due to insurance matters by providing insurance management support.
	+ Partner with HCS Head Start and the Strengthening Families Protective Factor framework to develop family service coordinator mission and strategies which builds on the success of the Head Start model to promote positive outcomes for families.
	+ Work collaboratively with parents to establish mutual trust and to identify family goals, strengths, and necessary services and other supports.
* Modify use of family engagement QRIS tools, support and training to include an incentive/reward system for moving up the QRIS quality scale.

#### Strategy 2:

To build efficiencies and help promote family continuity of care, allow family and social service providers access to shared, coordinated systems of medical and
health information

###### Participate in the existing community wide effort to gain access to the Pioneer Valley Information Exchange (PVIX)

###### Ensure that family service coordinators and early education health service providers are able to access other communication and accountability systems that provide a history of care and services for each child

1. *Inclusion*

Children with special needs in Springfield are largely served either by Springfield Public Schools or HCS Head Start. We are concerned that as we expand the number of full day preschool seats, an increased risk of isolation may occur in SPS pre-k classrooms as peer enrollment decreases.  Further, more often than not, educators with licensing in early education through EEC, have limited special education training through their coursework and professional development. This sets the stage for misidentification of students’ needs, in addition to being moved automatically to a public school special education classroom. Finally, the lack of financial, transportation, and human supports limit our ability to expand diversified classrooms outside of SPS. We therefore need to develop a plan which couples expansion with diversifying public-private learning environments.  To do this, we will need systemic state and local support to meet the needs of all of our children. That means including comprehensive services in all settings and facilitating communication between service and early education providers that supports differentiation will improve student outcomes and to strengthen families.

1. *Curriculum and Assessment*

Partners recognize the need for a well-designed system for high quality programs that encompasses curriculum, professional development, assessment, data collection, special education and after-school programming. Providers and partners have spent a considerable amount of time developing indicators for kindergarten readiness which encompasses all domains of early childhood development, although there still may be a lack of understanding or agreement among the broader early education community on what constitutes high quality or kindergarten readiness. This is because community providers have different views of quality/kindergarten readiness, are not aware of SPS baseline skills measures given to incoming kindergarten students, and/or have not aligned their programming with the measures used by SPS for incoming kindergarten students. In addition, planning participants acknowledge that quality is not consistent throughout the community’s early childhood services and providers.

### Goal 5: Build consensus on the definitions of high quality early education and kindergarten readiness and strengthen the alignment with Springfield Public Schools.

#### Strategy 1:

Create a city-wide understanding of the indicators of kindergarten readiness and the Teaching Strategies Gold assessment tool (stages of development) for learning and growth for birth to age 5, starting with 2.9 – 5 year olds.

###### Work together under the Collaborative to agree on school readiness targets and the expectations of early educators on achieving those targets.

###### Align Head Start early learning outcomes framework with Teaching Gold Strategies.

###### Leverage the work of existing organizations and programs, such as Countdown to Kindergarten and Reading Success By 4th grade to assist in developing kindergarten transition goals.

###### Use the new Countdown to Kindergarten website (under development by SPS) to provide a positive transition to kindergarten and school readiness support for students and their families.

###### Tie continuous improvement incentives to achieving readiness targets.

#### Strategy 2:

Align the use of evidence-based assessments to monitor and inform the classroom practices with the goal of moving all participating classes to high standards of quality as measured by tools such as the QRIS, Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), and Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation Pre-K (ELLCO).

###### Continue to align EEC and/or SPS assessment tools, measures and training with provider community.

###### Annually aggregate and report school readiness results and share with early education providers and families.

#### Strategy 3:

Expand the PEG-like model to bring more students and providers into the PEG-like system

###### Expand half of Springfield’s existing full day group center classrooms to PEG-like quality over five years

###### Invite community providers to “apply” for new PEG seats or classrooms.

###### Provide support and financial assistance to help providers access, build and meet PEG quality standards.

###### Reimburse providers at PEG rates if they meet PEG qualifications.

###### Build upon the current SPS coaching and curriculum PEG supports to expand PEG-like practices to more classrooms.

#### Strategy 4:

Expand the AmeriCorps early literacy program, Massachusetts Reading Corps, (replication of the Minnesota Reading Corps) to more providers. The early education community has embraced this program because the program trains highly effective literacy tutors to deliver quality early literacy instruction with social, emotional, and developmental support at the core through tiered interventions to individuals and small groups to the whole classroom.

1. *Birth to Grade 3 Alignment*

Use the new Collaborative to align birth to third strategies that support the needs of children and families. The Collaborative recognizes the importance of alignment of services to children and families from the time children are born or when they begin to receive education and care through the elementary grades. Alignment takes into account processes by which families enroll in or obtain services as well as the implementation of early learning strategies to support social emotional and cognitive skills as identified in goals 4 and 5.

###### Strengthen community efforts to share the importance of bringing children into the early education system at birth and into a formal education program by age three

###### Expand the data collection system to capture information for each child in Springfield beginning at birth and continue tracking the progress of each child through grade 12

###### Work with SPS to expand their ability to assign State Assigned Student Identifiers (SASIDS) to early childhood students

###### Align early education enrollment requirements with those of SPS requirements to create a smooth transition from pre-k to kindergarten

###### Facilitate the provision of SASIDs for children in early childhood settings by providing a list of their students (with parent permission) who reside in Springfield to SPS

###### Ask providers to submit a list of their students (with parent permission) who reside in Springfield to SPS to obtain a SASID

###### Develop plan to address parent concern with “tracking/labeling” their child

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*Transportation*

This section begins to address the challenges to provide transportation to our early education population. We did not include them in any of the five goals set forth in the plan above because:

* The public transportation system is inadequate to serve neighborhoods effectively.
* The cost and regulations associated with provision of transportation are prohibitive.

Accessing an early education program for families that do not own a vehicle or who live in isolated areas is a serious challenge in Springfield. Public transportation is limited, there is no coherent system of transportation and a number of individually administered programs in Springfield are not linked in meaningful ways. While SPS provides transportation to children with special needs and Head Start, Square One and the YMCA each provide their own transportation services, most of the smaller providers do not provide transportation due to cost prohibitions. The rules and regulations for transporting children are complex and unaffordable and Massachusetts reimbursements rates are not enough to provide transportation to the many families that need it.

Springfield is a small city that would benefit from a coordinated, city-wide transportation system in collaboration with the school system and other programs that transport similar populations. Public or contracted service agencies could be utilized if the rules and regulations were streamlined and reimbursement rates were increased.

# Plan for Costs and Sustainability

The Early Education and Care Plan for Springfield’s Children offers a common vision with articulated goals and strategies to build a high quality early education system for our community. Our hope is that state level decision makers align funding streams to help produce and support effective collaboration and system integration.

Costs

Estimated annual five year costs are presented in Appendix B for each strategy achievable within one to five years. Costs for strategies that rely on policy changes at state and/or local levels or that need to be further developed have not been estimated at this time.

Create the Early Education Success Collaborative (Goal 1, Strategy 1):

Establish the Collaborative by end of year 2, operate within an existing 501(c)(3) organization and partner closely with SPS to provide support services. The Collaborative will operate with a Board of Advisors, support from SPS, and a program manager who will be employed by the Collaborative. To set up the Collaborative, we expect to need assistance from state and local resources.

###### Implement by end of year 2

###### Year 2 estimated cost: $177,650 (does not include in-kind)

Centralize and Co-locate Early Education Resource Center (Goal 3, Strategy 1 & 2):

Using existing human and financial resources that can be redirected to increase efficiency and effectiveness, we will serve more families while keeping costs low. SPS has embraced the co-location strategy and a willingness to provide space and assistance at the Parent and Community Engagement Center (PACE).

###### Implement by end of year 2

###### Year 2 estimated cost: $75,408 (does not include in-kind)

Expand half of Springfield’s existing full day group center classrooms to PEG-like quality over five years (Goal 5, Strategy 3), add Head Start-like Comprehensive Services (Goal 4, Strategy 1) and invest to recruit and develop 108 teachers and assistant teachers (Goal 2, Strategy 2):

Convert thirty-six (36) existing full day classrooms (720 students) to PEG quality over a five year period, 160 students each year for four years, and 80 in year five. For year one, EEC current average reimbursement rates of $10,000 per child (as reported by plan partners) for 160 students, equals $1.6 million. This number does not include EEC current funding for education, scholarships, training, or family services. A PEG-like experience would cost $3.8 million, a difference of $2.2 million. The additional investment would be used to fund an increase in teacher compensation, classroom start-up costs, initial and ongoing teacher professional development, teacher recruitment, career planning and development, and a family comprehensive services pilot program:

###### Implement over 5 years: 8 classrooms per year for 4 years and 4 classrooms for year 5

###### Develop 36 BA level teachers and 72 EEC licensed assistant teachers over a five year period

###### Hire 15 comprehensive services staff over a five year period

###### Year 1 estimated costs: $3,817,081

Create a Comprehensive Services Network (Goal 4, Strategy 1)

Our first step in creating a comprehensive services network for all 5,169 children ages 2.9 – 5 and families modeled after Head Start, provides access to a family service coordinator. We assumed one family service coordinator (FSC) for every 60 families and one family service supervisor for every 12 FSCs, without regard to the 720 families included in the PEG-like classroom strategy above. Step 2 in our model would support dedicated nursing, mental health, clinical and disability resources to the early education community. We do not have an implementation strategy or estimated costs for step 2 at this time.

###### Implement evenly over 5 years: 17 FCS per year and 1.44 FTE Family Service Supervisor

###### Year 1 estimated costs: $1,132,358 for 1020 families served, or $1,110 per family

Beyond 5 years: All 2,153 group center licensed seats converted to PEG-like quality at $16,000 per child,- $34.5 million.

We have not created an implementation strategy for this goal, but want to continue to increase more full day, high quality options for the families that want it.

*Sustainability*

The governance and leadership structure is designed specifically to address sustainability. Establishing the Springfield Early Education Success Collaborative will combine current efforts to guide the creation, implementation and oversight for improving the quality of early education in Springfield.Our plan outlines specific strategies and action steps that work together to create a system of goals, incentives, rewards and support to attain incremental, measurable, lasting improvements.

**Appendix A – List of Contributors in Alphabetical Order**

Public & Private Early Education Providers, State and Local Agencies and
Philanthropic Organizations

Barbara (Luciano) Agosto – New England Farm Workers Council (CCR&R)

Araseliz Ayala – New Horizons Daycare

Alison Bates – Trinity Preschool

Scott Berg –Chief Executive Officer, The YMCA of Greater Springfield

Nicole Blais – HCS Head Start

Roberto Burgos – HCS Head Start

Lori Chaves - HCS Head Start

Justin Chellman – Springfield Department Health & Human Services

Maria Cloonan – Trinity Preschool

Nicole Coakley – The Children’s Creative Center

Erin Craft – Department of Early Education & Care

Deb Cohen – Springfield Jewish Community Center

John Davis - The Irene A. & George E. Davis Foundation

Tabitha Desplaines – Springfield Partners, Inc (New Beginnings)

Titus DosRemedios – Strategies for Children

Cathy Farrell – Valley Opportunity Council

David Farrell – The YMCA of Greater Springfield

Sally Fuller – The Irene A. & George E. Davis Foundation

Bonnie Gauthier – Boys & Girls Club Family Center

Sara Gavin– New England Farm Workers Council (CCR&R)

Molly Goren Watts – Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

Dexter Johnson - The YMCA of Greater Springfield

Tasha Johnson – Giggle Gardens

Joan Kagan – Executive Director, Square One

Crystal Kerr – In Our Hands

Sherry Manyak – New North Community Center

Anita Moeller – Department of Early Education and Care

Suzanne Morris – The Children’s Creative Center

Katherine Moss – Behavioral Health Network, Inc.

Elizabeth Nystrom – Trinity Preschool

Amy O’Leary – Strategies for Children

Parents via a parent survey (69 respondents)

Michael Paysnick – Springfield Jewish Community Center

Cindy Recoulle – Square One

Gladys Rivera - HCS Head Start

Maria Rodriguez - HCS Head Start

Ann Rogalski – Make Way for Ducklings

Abigail Sanchez – The YMCA of Greater Springfield

Janis Santos – Executive Director, HCS Head Start

Janet Steigmeyer - HCS Head Start

Kathleen Stark – Valley Opportunity Council

Jennifer Teehan Sanford – Home City Families

Kimm Quinlan – Preschool Enrichment Team

Mary Walachy - The Irene A. & George E. Davis Foundation

Springfield Public Schools

Daniel Warwick – Superintendent

Dr. Mary Kate Fenton – Chief Academic Officer

Judy Goodwin – Supervisor of Early Childhood

Susan Gosselin – Director of Literacy

Laura Mendes – Director of PreK-Third Grade & PEG Program Manager

Mindie Richter – Director of Grants

Patrick Roach – Chief Financial Officer

Martha Von Mering – Compliance Officer, Department of Special Education

Rose Waltsak – Supervisor of the Early Childhood and Education Center

1. Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Currently, 1,406 (or 28%) of preschool aged children (2.9 – 5) attend full day preschool. This number does not include Head Start part day or Springfield Public Schools preschool. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. **NACCRRAware - a national data system for childcare that** generates child care referrals and reports, and manages provider, client, community and group data. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Mapping Margin of Error **:** The U.S. Census randomly surveys a sample of the population for each geographic area. The results, as with any survey, possess a margin of error that can be found on the U.S. Census Bureau’s website. Neighborhood data mapping: Data from American Community Survey individual census tracts. In most cases, census tract boundaries are fairly close to neighborhood boundaries, but on occasion, census tracts do not follow the boundaries of a neighborhood, spilling into the adjacent neighborhood and resulting in a margin of error. Despite this imperfection, combining census tracts is the most accurate method available for deriving neighborhood‐level information. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. New England Farm Workers Council, Springfield Public Schools and/or as reported by the Group Center [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. New England Farm Workers Council, Springfield Public Schools and/or as reported by the Group Center [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Head Start Program Performance Standards [↑](#footnote-ref-7)