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# PHILADELPHIA EARLY CARE & EDUCATION COLLABORATION

## Strategic Roadmap

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June 2023



## Acknowledgements

This strategic roadmap would not be possible without the time, dedication, and leadership of the design team convened to envision and author this roadmap, the participants in the landscape scan, and the coalitions and advisory groups that welcomed discussion. This project was supported by a generous grant from the William Penn Foundation.

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Suggested Citation: Philadelphia Early Care & Education Collaborative. Philadelphia Early Care & Education Collaboration Strategic Roadmap. Philadelphia, PA, 2023

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This work was supported by a grant from the William Penn Foundation. The opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the William Penn Foundation.

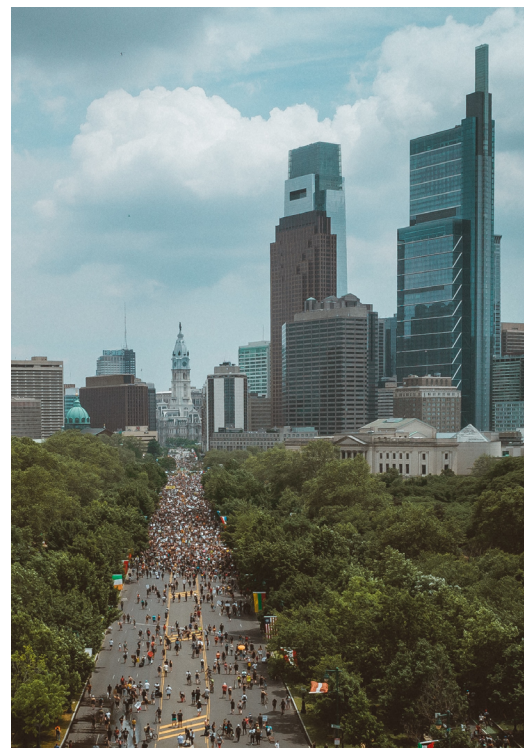




## BACKGROUND

Vital Village Networks at Boston Medical Center (BMC) is a collaborative that includes educators, caregivers, medical professionals, community residents, and community-based organizations acting synergistically to improve well-being, prevent adversities, and advance health and educational equity for children.

In Spring 2021, this project began through a connection to Vital Village Networks as a member of the Networks of Opportunity for Child Wellbeing (NOW) Learning Community, which partners with coalitions across the country working to promote child wellbeing and align early childhood systems of care and education by using a trauma-informed lens to advance equity. Guided by the belief that coordinated, community-based support will increase caregiver access to resources, knowledge, and skills to improve parent-child interactions and engagement with ECE centers (which jointly promote literacy), Vital Village Networks, with support from the William Penn Foundation, designed and facilitated an inclusive strategic visioning process to convene early learning program administrators who have pioneered innovative community collaborations and community-based organizations that have implemented engagement strategies, with the goal of collectively designing a scalable strategic roadmap to increase access to community-based supports for families that holistically support school readiness.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

Vital Village Networks, with support from the William Penn Foundation, designed and facilitated a process to support leaders from Philadelphia early learning programs (ELPs) and community based organizations (CBOs) to develop a strategic roadmap to collaborate to support the developmental needs of enrolled children.

In order to develop a strategic roadmap for how Philadelphia early learning programs and community-based organizations might collaborate to support the developmental needs of children, Vital Village Networks proposed a phased approach with four key components:

### 01 Landscape Analysis

Conduct a series of interviews with community-based organizations and early learning programs.

### 02 Vision & Strategic Planning

Conduct a series of workshops (two in-person days) to define a collective vision, identify challenges, name strategic priorities, and launch implementation.

### 03 Partner Review & Reflections

Host community-wide town hall for reflections and feedback.

### 04 Learning Journey Report

Compile a summary of learnings, priorities, and recommended action steps.

## LANDSCAPE SCAN RESULTS

From the interviews conducted, priority themes emerged regarding the current landscape of partnerships between early learning programs and community-based organizations in Philadelphia. First, the efforts within Philadelphia to address inefficiencies and inequities through unification initiatives, such as the central intake system for home visiting services, were elevated as a bright spot for cross-sector collaborative partnerships. Second, leaders shared how partnerships can increase access to

support services for families and children and effective strategies for engaging families in these partnership services like programs that are neighborhood-specific, culturally responsive, strengths-based, dignity-centered, and led by trusted messengers. Last, the urgent issue of workforce development and sustainability was named in the majority of conversations with stakeholders as a barrier to developing and maintaining partnerships.



## OUTLINED VISION

The Design Team, consisting of 15 leaders from early learning programs and community-based organizations, was charged with drafting a strategic roadmap for how Philadelphia early learning programs and community-based organizations can work together to promote parent engagement and child development.

### *Strategic Roadmap Focus Question:*

*What do successful partnerships between Philadelphia early learning programs (ELPs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) that promote family engagement and support child development look like?*

Over the next three to five years the design team would like to see the following elements in place as a result of the collaborative actions of Philadelphia early learning programs and community-based organizations:

- Early-learning resource engagement center
- Sustainable workforce
- Sustainable and equitable funding
- Accessible service for children and families
- Wellness and equity policies and practices

## RECOMMEND STRATEGIES

The three key strategies identified to move Philadelphia early learning programs and community-based organizations toward their vision to promote family engagement and support child development are:

- Catalyzing a sustainable workforce
- Coordinating and enhancing accessible services for children and families through a central community hub that aligns data, communication, and partnership opportunities
- Revamping and revising infrastructure to foster community and family leadership



## CALL TO ACTION

In order to achieve this vision, the design team calls for the following actions:

- 01** Develop an advisory committee to provide guidance and support to increase capacity and accountability for ELRC Region 18 to stakeholders, providers, and families.
- 02** Create a single point of entry to increase accessibility to high quality early childhood education for families.
- 03** Create a universal pipeline so that no child falls out of the early childhood continuum from 0–5 years. Every child living in the city of Philadelphia gets an early care and education (ECE) slot, regardless of citizenship status and household income.
- 04** Dedicate funds for sustainable workforce development that would focus on:
  - a. Increasing child care pay rates in order to
    - Ensure digital equity to increase access to technical assistance, and improve comprehensive and linguistically accessible guidance by aligning with existing provider support and outreach efforts and funding dedicated support and evaluation of provider experience.
    - Restructure the eligibility requirements for merit awards and retention awards to ensure racial/ethnic equity, and measure outcomes.
    - Reinstate the education and retention awards.
    - Subsidize the costs of medical benefits for child care providers and offer stipends for housing and transportation.
    - Improve parent understanding of the STAR system and requirements.
  - b. Developing and supporting mentorship and scholarship programs for new child care staff.
  - c. Expanding and improving recruitment of teacher candidates, teacher development, and pipeline programs.
  - d. Sharing professional development opportunities between early learning programs and community-based organizations.
  - e. Developing robust health and wellness benefits packages for child care providers.
- 05** Develop a framework for providing mental health support to child care providers, including collecting and analyzing data related to post-COVID mental health and wellness needs of child care providers.

This visionary roadmap uplifts specific strategies to enhance and build upon successful practices, as well as opportunities to develop innovations designed specifically to meet the needs of Philadelphia's children.



# INTRODUCTION

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

This work is guided by a key assumption:

*Coordinated, community-based support will increase caregiver access to resources, knowledge, and skills to improve parent-child interactions and engagement with early care and education (ECE) Centers to promote early literacy and positive child development.*

Early learning program administrators and community-based organization leaders who have pioneered innovative community collaborations that yielded successful family engagement strategies were convened by Vital Village Networks to collectively design and implement a scalable strategic roadmap to increase access to community-based supports for families that holistically support school readiness—including but not limited to literacy, wellbeing, and socioemotional development for children—across Philadelphia. This co-design process developed a strategic roadmap for building a community-based infrastructure to align systems of care and education for early childhood and ultimately increase access to reliable, sustainable, and comprehensive support for children and families.

The outlined priorities aim to support the implementation of integrated, cross-sector partnerships and coordinated efforts between community-based organizations and ECE programs that better equip providers to support children

and families and engage caregivers in coordinated and comprehensive support. Increasing cooperation between early care and education (ECE) and community-based programs that are synergistic and intentional is a core objective.

## BACKGROUND & SIGNIFICANCE

The neighborhoods where children live are associated with their health, educational, and economic opportunities over the life course.<sup>1</sup> Access to high-quality preschool and community-based programs have been shown to have positive impacts on health and development and high rates of economic return.<sup>2,3</sup>

Community-based partnerships have the potential to improve child development and school readiness through strategies that improve authentic and ongoing engagement with caregivers and families.<sup>4-6</sup> Linguistically and culturally responsive interventions guided by local, community-based knowledge have also

been shown to have a positive impact on family engagement and early childhood development.<sup>7</sup> In Philadelphia, programs such as Grace Kids Academy—a bilingual center that emerged in response to a gap in the field of care to honor the language and culture of Latinx families—has numerous community partnerships to support housing, financial literacy, language learning, and health services for families through a dignity-centered referral process rooted in a shared cultural understanding. The Brightside Learning Center utilizes inclusive practices and provides caregivers opportunities to work as staff at their center. Although research has shown that community-based programs can support language development and literacy and improve parent-child engagement in reading, they are often untapped assets that receive relatively lower levels of investment as a central strategy.<sup>4-6,8</sup>

Combined preschool and community-based organization efforts have been shown to support kindergarten readiness.<sup>9</sup> For example, the Philadelphia-based The Norris Square Community Alliance (NSCA) has a comprehensive approach to supporting education and school readiness by integrating economic mobility and whole-family support in its early learning programs. In addition, interventions to support the professional development of providers and provide a curriculum for community-based child care centers are favorably received. The Children's Village, an early learning center based in Philadelphia's Chinatown neighborhood, is one such program that views itself as a partner in the life of the community. Children's Village engaged in civic action efforts, such as the 2020 census outreach and voter registration, and focus on increasing the diversity of the ECE

workforce and supporting parent education through a grant to support secondary education for caregivers.

The Cambodian Association of Greater Philadelphia (CAGP) supports the entire family unit through a community health initiative, advocacy for health and social services, and preschool programs that integrate culture and community. CAGP was spotlighted nationally for innovation in business and community development. It designed multilingual and culturally rooted programming to support key engagement, such as a workshop to support parents in the preschool-to-kindergarten transition. These successes only reinforce the importance of working collaboratively with community-based organizations and early learning programs to understand community assets that promote family engagement and preschool readiness.<sup>10,11</sup>



## PARENT & CAREGIVER PERSPECTIVES

Existing research characterizes child care, preschool, and kindergarten decision-making processes among parents and clearly establishes that these processes are developed in a broader social context and weigh numerous environmental factors,



including neighborhood conditions, safety, resources, and opportunity structures.<sup>12-14</sup> Integrated partnerships that remove barriers to access and enrich social networks to effectively share guidance, advice, and information can be critical elements to increase engagement in ECE. Interviews with leaders in Philadelphia made clear that how partnership programs are structured and led significantly influences family and caregiver willingness to engage. Characteristics such as culturally responsive, neighborhood-specific, dignity-centered, and strengths-based partnership programs were named by leaders as significant to a program's success.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGAGING CBOs & ELPs

Early care and education providers often have strong and well-established relationships with caregivers and families and have adapted programs to best meet needs identified by families. Early care and education providers often have a deeper understanding of the perspectives and practical considerations of parents that can help guide the development of

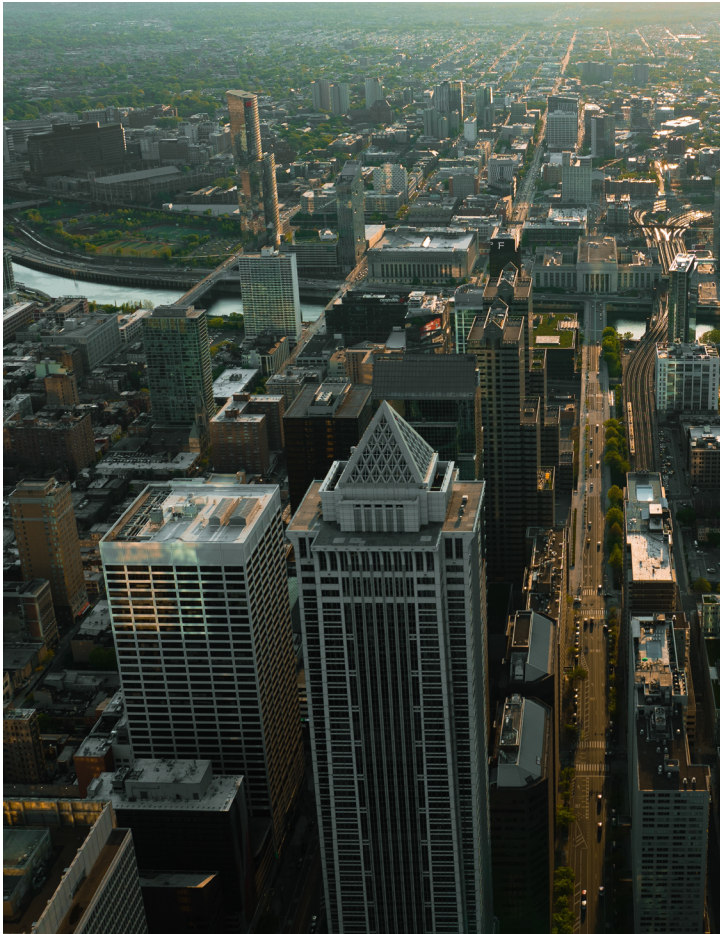
programs to meet the needs of families and increase access to high-quality early education, but they are not always at the table to build a city-wide infrastructure to promote family engagement. The role of “trusted messengers” emerged in many conversations with leaders in Philadelphia in the landscape analysis. Utilizing trusted messengers has alleviated overwhelm for parents and promoted sustainable community programming by layering parent and caregiver outreach onto existing messengers, programs, and supports. Grace Kids Academy plays this trusted messenger role in its partnership with NSCA and Temple University to build bridges across agencies, acting as mediators to center the dignity of families and children. Lastly, leaders have identified areas where children outside of early learning programs can be supported in school readiness, such as parent and caregiver outreach through physician office visits.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE DESIGN TEAM

A diverse group of early learning program providers and social service leaders in the Philadelphia area was selected for the design team through a targeted, open expression-of-interest process. Invitations were shared with all 33 organizations contacted through phase 1 interviews. The 15 members of the design team included:

- 3 early learning program administrators
- 4 community-based organization leaders
- 8 representatives from organizations that support both early learning programs and community-based programming





## CONDUCTING THE LANDSCAPE SCAN

To understand the current landscape of partnerships between early learning programs and community-based organizations in Philadelphia, brief interviews were conducted with leaders from the two key stakeholder groups: administrators of early learning programs and leaders of community-based organizations. Over 30 organizations were contacted to participate in the landscape scan, and 27 interviews were conducted. Interview subjects included leaders from family child care providers and center-based providers, head start and early head start programs, and representatives from community literacy, public health, and other social services and

community-based programs. The focused interviews examined existing community-based, cross-sector partnerships and their impacts on family engagement, as well as initiatives that enable, promote, sustain, and scale such partnerships.

## LANDSCAPE SCAN SUMMARY

The landscape scan analysis uncovered three primary factors that are foundational to developing and sustaining community partnerships that cultivate trust and nurture strong relationships with families: workforce sustainability, stable funding that incentivizes collaboration rather than competition, and learning from and acknowledging past collaboration efforts that were unsuccessful. These building blocks for sustainable community partnerships and action steps to address them were also reinforced in the design team's outlined strategy.

### Workforce Sustainability

Stakeholders named the urgent issue of workforce sustainability as a barrier to developing and maintaining partnerships with community-based organizations. Frequent staff turnover was also noted to have a significant impact on family engagement. One partner stated, "Staff turnover wrecks trust and relationship building with families." Consequently, this challenge became a primary focus for early learning programs and community-based organizations when discussing strategies for developing and sustaining meaningful partnerships.



### Funding to Support Collaboration

Stakeholders shared that scarcity of resources, retention of qualified staff, and challenges engaging families created a general sense of competition that prohibited collaboration between organizations. Moreover, building the required trust and a shared vision to intentionally and effectively collaborate takes a substantial investment of time. While this challenge was named as a barrier to partnerships between early learning programs and community-based organizations, stakeholders also shared examples of successful collaborative efforts overcoming competition, such as the Child Care Hiring Days for PA. One stakeholder shared that this event had “The common goal ‘all children deserve good people.’ It wasn’t seen as competition.” Incentivizing collaboration can promote trust, catalyze the development of meaningful and sustainable partnerships, and allow programs to focus on families.

### Reckoning with the History of Past Efforts

Some interviewees reflected that “past coordination efforts” were regarded as a factor in the degree to which new initiatives are welcomed or perceived with some level of mistrust. Acknowledging how past efforts have contributed to stakeholder hesitation or apprehension for city-wide or community-based initiatives is necessary for advancing new efforts. Additionally, it will be critical to demonstrate what learning and understanding has grown from past efforts.

These interviews made evident that there are current efforts, structures, and systems that could be utilized to move forward a vision for community-based partnerships, and that leaders are eager to see action that builds on existing assets and strengths.



**EMERGENT THEMES  
REGARDING PARTNERSHIPS****Single-Door Access Points**

To address inefficiencies & inequities, leaders discussed centralization and other unification efforts as both a product & a benefit to cross-sector partnerships. Philly Families CAN was named as a bright spot of such collaborative city-wide work.

**Service Provided Through Partnerships**

Interviewees highlighted how partnerships can increase access to support services for families and children such as early intervention services, literacy resources and language access and justice. Additionally, these leaders named the importance of partnerships in helping families navigate pre-K to Kindergarten transitions, accessing resources and services, and promoting whole household wellbeing.

**Family Engagement Strategies In Partnerships**

Certain practices emerged as key to successful family engagement in collaborative programming. Partner programming should be:

- Neighborhood-specific
- Culturally relevant
- Strengths-based
- Dignity-centered
- Led by trusted messengers

**Successful Partnership Characteristics**

In order to engage in partnerships, leaders named valuing efforts of sharing power, intentional representation, supporting common values, utilizing existing structures and leading with inclusive co-design processes. Three examples of successful partnerships are described below.

- 01 Philly Families CAN:** In designing and implementing the central intake for all home visiting providers (Philly Families CAN) the Philadelphia Department of Public Health utilized a community co-design process with half of the network being community lived experience (CEL)



EMERGENT THEMES  
REGARDING PARTNERSHIPS

experts. Throughout this design process they instituted practices of equitable decision making, including ensuring the CEL experts had final word in discussions before any vote was taken by the steering committee. This community example demonstrates the partnership characteristics of intentional representation, shared power, and inclusive co-design processes in their governance and decision-making structures.

**02** **Norris Square Community Alliance:** As a multi-service community development corporation, Norris Square Community Alliance (NSCA) integrates goals of economic mobility and whole family support through early learning programs. In their partnerships with multiple community-based organizations, NSCA prioritizes meaningful and reciprocal collaborations that enhance and improve their goals. Through their early learning literacy work with Read by 4th (Free Library of Philadelphia), projects with Temple University and Esperanza College on speech, dual-language, and literacy in early childhood, and their commitment to community health and wellbeing through partnership with Philadelphia Fight, NSCA has demonstrated the impact partnerships can have in providing comprehensive approaches to education and school readiness.

**03** **ParentChild +:** ParentChild + organized a collaboration with Smith Memorial Playground to promote literacy by bringing everyday literacy to places not usually thought of as being literacy rich environments. Through this informal literacy initiative, parents and families were supported in connecting to community spaces around Philadelphia, demonstrating the power of innovative partnerships in supporting family and community connections through early learning initiatives.



### Early Learning Program Funding

Funding requirements can impact what elements are present in early learning programs (i.e. family engagement programming) which can lead to different experiences for families and children depending on the funding sources accessed by the provider.



**EMERGENT THEMES  
REGARDING PARTNERSHIPS****ECE Workforce Development & Sustainability**

Local leaders named issues with the early childhood care and education workforce as recurring challenge and priority area of development. Consequently, building and sustaining a qualified workforce was named as an essential element to maintain partnerships.

**Challenges to Partnerships**

Overwhelm of information and resources, competition between organizations, workforce burn out and turn-over, and lack of trust stemming from failed past coordination attempts were mentioned most frequently as challenges to successful collaborations.

**COVID Impacts**

Various programming and partnership impacts related to the COVID pandemic were named. These included positive outcomes such as peer-support meetings that were started and sustained as well as increased parent engagement through virtual offerings. Negative outcomes included the challenges of managing staff turnover and providers shutting down and not reopening.

**ECE Administrator Advocacy**

Early learning program administrator involvement in advocacy and community engagement work outside of their formal role, allowed some leaders to network and form cross-sector collaboration and partnerships with their programs.

These themes were shared with the design team and utilized in the visioning and strategic direction process.

# STRATEGIC ROADMAP



*Strategies to Expand Successful Practices, Opportunities to Develop Collaborative Innovations*

The Philadelphia design team participated in a two-day design session in February 2023, during which they were asked to collaboratively develop a vision of how they might like to see early learning programs and community-based organizations work together to promote family engagement and support child development. Using a collaborative, participatory process called the Technology of Participation, developed by the Institute for Cultural Affairs, the design team worked to articulate a practical

vision, identify underlying contradictions that currently block the vision, and outline strategic directions to move toward it.

Through this process the team outlined five key elements they would like to see in place in three to five years as a result of their collective actions. The group revised and finalized these recommendations between February and June 2023 through multiple working sessions.



**Early Learning Resource Engagement Center**

The Early Learning Resource Center will evaluate outcomes for children engaged in ECE throughout Philadelphia through an external evaluation process to centralize multiple sources of data and develop and disseminate annual assessments using publicly available data from independent data analytics firms (such as the Reinvestment Fund and PHMC Research and Evaluation Department). The center would provide stakeholders with key data

and analysis and would be overseen and directed by an advisory council. Alternatively, OCDEL or ELRC 18 should publish annual data analysis overseen and advised by an independent council.

Report cards would be prepared about ECE support systems, such as Early Intervention, Behavioral Health, Early Learning Resource Center (ELRC), Public Health Management Corps. (PHMC) City PK, Pennsylvania State



Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) and others, that evaluate their performance.

OCDEL should incorporate family expertise and lived experience by including parents as members of a multi stakeholder advisory council, either as a new body or an expansion of an existing group. The advisory council will have a shared governance process in place to ensure families have a voice in programs that affect them. The multistakeholder advisory council will include equitable representation from government, providers, and families, and across neighborhoods and linguistic and culturally diverse populations in the city. The advisory council should utilize skilled facilitation and offer ample capacity building, leadership training, orientation, and preparation for family representatives. Funding to support the external evaluation and guidance provided by the advisory council would come from philanthropy.

### **Sustainable Workforce**

Comprehensive development strategies ensure an equitable system to support a professional and appropriately compensated workforce. An update to the workforce system will align with and include institutions of higher education to enhance the current systems and create a unified pipeline with multiple entry and exit points. This will allow individuals and programs to create and implement professional development plans that align their skills and education levels with career paths in early childhood education, including coaching and leadership. This system will collaborate with educational institutions to create sustainable workforce training and credentialing programs that engage in

strategies to attract new talent and diversify the ECE field, including developing a Child Development Associate/Early Childhood Education associate's degree program for high school students.

### **Sustainable & Equitable Funding**

Realign the current funding paradigm within an equity framework that supports a viable child care business model, competitive salaries for staff, improvements to the Keystone STAR system, and clear access to professional development and creation of leadership opportunities for child care workers.

### **Accessible Service For Children & Families**

The creation of a racial and culturally aligned prenatal-to-thirteen system that allows all families to access and afford high quality early care and learning that is comprehensive, seamless, and manageable in its scope.

### **Wellness and Equity Policies & Practices**

All programs, providers, and families should have access to foundational training and education to inform policies and procedures focusing on wellness.



## RECOMMENDED IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

The three key strategies identified to move Philadelphia early learning programs and community-based organizations toward their vision to promote family engagement and support child development are:

1. Catalyzing a sustainable workforce
2. Coordinating and enhancing accessible services for children and families
3. Revamping and revising infrastructure to foster community and family leadership

Each strategy consists of recommended action steps to advance the work by collaboratively building upon existing structures, as well as implementing Philadelphia-specific early care and education innovations.



## 01 Catalyzing a Sustainable Workforce

Annual assessments using publicly available data from independent data sources such as the Reinvestment Fund or Public Health Management Corps (PHMC). Research and evaluation will provide key stakeholders with data elements. An advisory council with Lived Experience Experts will oversee and direct this process.

### 01 Strengthening & Reforming Workforce Development Efforts

- Build relationships with secondary and post-secondary institutions to develop early care and education career pathway options for students, thereby strengthening the workforce pool for early care and education providers
- Develop clear job descriptions, including skills and necessary credentials to better outline career pathway options
- Invest in early care and education frontline staff and workforce pipeline by providing ongoing professional development including coaching, mentoring, peer-to-peer engagement, and credentialing pathways

### 02 Increasing Equity and Compensation

- Create unified, standardized agreements across the state for early care and education jobs, including livable salaries, benefits, professional development, and shared services

### 03 Research and Data-Informed Practices

- Leverage existing database resources to organize and share data across the field
- Strengthen early care and education workforce knowledge and skills using data collected through regular skills assessments
- Collaboratively define quality based upon shared data and research

### 04 Equitable Funding

- Organize an equitable funding commission to provide resources to projects with measurable outcomes





## 02

**Coordinating & Enhancing Accessible Services for Children & Families through a Central Community Hub that Aligns Data, Communication, and Partnership Opportunities**

Organize a centralized virtual location providing information, resources, services, and more needed for children and families.

**01 Align Communication**

- Establish a collaborative communication system with a shared vision of how early learning programs and community-based organizations serve Philadelphia families
- Implement shared data infrastructure & project management system

**02 Create Central Community Hub**

- Create a shared space within communities that can be leveraged by providers and families

## 03

**Revamping and Revising Infrastructure to Foster Community and Family Leadership**

Organize and advocate to revise state infrastructure to unite the early childhood education system to create equitable outcomes for children, families and educators.

**01 Community Engagement & Activism**

- Organize opportunities for community-led advocacy in which families and policy makers collaborate on policy agendas to take to state and federal capitals
- Leverage existing relationships for funding from business, philanthropy, and government
- Support communities in creating spaces for reconciliation and restorative justice

**02 Revamp & revise infrastructure to promote leadership pathways for families and prioritize community engagement**

- Create and foster pathways for community leaders to become policy makers
- Prioritize family and community engagement in the design of policies that directly impact their lives
- Revise state and local infrastructure to be more family and community-centered

## CONCLUSION

This strategic roadmap reflects the collective recommendations and priority action steps needed to meet the urgency of this present moment. Strategic and equitable partnerships between early learning programs and community-based organizations can enable dignity-centered family engagement to flourish. Emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic, which widened structural inequities and catalyzed a national reckoning on racism, this roadmap is unapologetically comprehensive and issues a timely call to action.

In order to engage families and children with dignity, we cannot overlook foundational elements of strong and sustainable community partnerships: prioritizing the stability and wellness of the workforce, acknowledging and learning from historical missteps to develop trustworthy institutional partnerships, and incentivizing collaboration rather than competition across programs and organizations.

To support partnerships that equitably engage families in promoting optimal child development, three core strategies were identified. First, catalyzing a sustainable workforce by leveraging and engaging community partnerships in the process, rather than considering them later. Next, creating a community governed central community hub to coordinate and enhance accessible services for children and families and track benchmarks of success. Finally, revamping and revising ECE infrastructure to center family and community leadership to promote sustained engagement and advocacy as well as pathways for families

to lead the design of programs, systems and policies, equitable business opportunities, and spaces for healing and restoration.

The design team reimagined how Philadelphia early learning programs and community-based organizations can collaborate to center and uphold the needs of the children and families they serve. This visionary roadmap uplifts specific strategies to enhance and build upon successful practices, as well as opportunities to develop innovations designed specifically to meet the needs of Philadelphia's children. This roadmap outlines equity-centered governance strategies that engage families as partners in supporting early childhood systems. If successful, these actions will yield: a centralized early-learning resource engagement center guided by an advisory council that publicly shares and disseminates information; a comprehensive workforce development strategy that leverages formative community partnerships and powers a sustainable and healthy workforce; sustainable and equitable funding that is guided by an equity framework and supports leadership pathways for diverse community members; a racially and culturally aligned system that supports accessible and comprehensive services for families and children; and the full integration of wellness-promoting and equity-centered policies and practices across all programs that engage families.

The design team recommends that Philadelphia leaders with financial resources leverage their funds to support the collaborative focused implementation of these strategies by families, early learning programs, and community-based organization change-makers.

# GLOSSARY

## Coalition

A coalition is a collaborative union of individuals and groups working together to achieve a shared goal. [Contra Costa Health Services, Maintaining Effective Community Coalitions](#)

## Community-Based Organizations

are non-profit, non-governmental, or charitable organizations that represent community needs and work to help them. CBOs may be associated with a particular area of concern or segment of the community. [Carleton University, Community First Glossary](#)

## Early Childhood Education

Early childhood refers to the period between birth and 8 years of age, wherein a child's brain is highly sensitive to the environment around them. This time of "remarkable growth" requires a specialized educational approach to ensure that children learn key skills and foundational concepts to prepare them for later life. [American School of Paris, What is Early Childhood Education?](#)

## Equitable Workforce

Workforce equity means the elimination of racial gaps in employment and income such that the workforce – both public and private – is racially representative of the general population, at all different levels of skill and pay, across occupational groups and sectors. [National Fund for Workforce Solutions, Advancing Workforce Equity: A Guide for Stakeholders](#)

## Keystone STAR System

Keystone STARS (Standards, Training/Professional Development, Assistance, Resources) provides families with a tool to gauge the quality of early learning programs. The STARS program supports early learning programs in the commitment to continuous quality improvement. [Department of Human Services, State of Pennsylvania, STARS for Parents](#)

## Racial and Culturally Aligned Prenatal-to-Thirteen System

A no wrong door, cradle to careers system, that encompasses tenets of racial equity and justice (see definitions below), prenatally through thirteen years of age.

## Racial Equity

Means race is no longer a predictor of outcomes, generally because of more equitable policies, practices, attitudes and cultural messages. That is, racial equity refers to what a genuinely non-racist society would look like. In a racially equitable society, the distribution of society's benefits and burdens would not be skewed by race. Racial equity demands that we pay attention not just to individual-level discrimination, but to overall social outcomes. [National Association of Counties, Diversity, Equity And Inclusion: Key Terms And Definitions](#)

## Racial Justice

The systematic fair treatment of people of all races, resulting in equitable opportunities and outcomes for all. Racial justice is not just the absence of discrimination and inequities, but also the presence of deliberate systems and supports to achieve and sustain racial equity through proactive and preventative measures. [National Association of Counties, Diversity, Equity And Inclusion: Key Terms And Definitions](#)



# GET INVOLVED

If you are interested in learning more about this strategic roadmap, or if you would like to become involved or be informed about next steps, please reach out to us by email at [projecthopecsc@gmail.com](mailto:projecthopecsc@gmail.com).

We welcome your feedback and suggestions.



# APPENDIX

## DESIGN TEAM MEMBERS BIOGRAPHIES



### Damaris Alvarado-Rodriguez

Damaris Alvarado-Rodriguez is an exceptional leader who demonstrates innovative thinking and a strong commitment to community empowerment. As the Executive Director/Owner of two highly regarded early childhood programs in Philadelphia, she has demonstrated remarkable business acumen and a deep understanding of diversity, equity, inclusion, marketing, coaching, consulting and advocacy. Her passion for education reform initiatives is evident in her work with Innovative Educational Consulting Services and Latinos Educando Juntos. Through these organizations, Damaris provides valuable support to Hispanic/Latin X Childcare Providers and small businesses by removing barriers that hinder their growth. Her approach to problem-solving is both creative and empathetic; this unique combination has enabled her to set up multiple new businesses throughout the years successfully. Damaris's leadership style encourages collaboration among educators on best practices while also directing them towards empowering children through education. She serves as an advocate for educational reforms that promote inclusivity within our communities while creating opportunities for future growth.



### Stephanie Blake

Dr. Stephanie Blake is an accomplished Early Childhood Professional with over 15 years of experience. Dr. Blake has experience in consulting, technical assistance, and training in culturally and socio-economically diverse settings. She serves as the Early Childhood Racial Equity Coordinator at Children First (formerly PCCY), where she works to close the racial equity gap in early childhood education. Recently, Dr. Blake served as a workforce fellow at Philadelphia's Office of Children and Families as part of Temple University's Diversifying Early Education Leadership Fellowship program. Previously, she worked as a preschool program specialist at the Pennsylvania Keys, supporting state-funded preschools and Head Start programs.

In addition to that, Dr. Blake teaches courses in early childhood education at Harcum College. She is also an adjunct faculty member at Rowan University and Arcadia University, where she supervises pre-service teachers. Also, Dr. Blake belongs to three honor societies: Golden Key, Pi Lambda Theta, and Kappa Delta Pi.

Dr. Blake holds a doctorate in Educational Leadership with a focus on higher education and a master's degree in education with a focus on early childhood education from Gratz College. As part of her dissertation, Dr. Blake discussed how diversity initiatives can increase African American women's representation in early childhood leadership. As a result, she won Gratz's graduate subject prize in Ed.D. for Educational Leadership. In addition, she earned a Master of Business Administration from Arcadia University.



### Zakiyyah Boone

Zakiyyah Boone is CEO of Wonderspring Early Education, a nonprofit provider of high-quality, safe, convenient, and affordable early childhood education throughout Greater Philadelphia. With more than 20 years of experience, Zakiyyah is an innovative and passionate leader who wholeheartedly believes that education is the best way to eradicate poverty.

Zakiyyah previously served as Wonderspring's Interim CEO and Chief Program Officer. Prior to joining the organization, she served as Vice President of Early Childhood at the Greater Philadelphia YMCA where she managed a budget of \$20M, identified growth and partnership opportunities and ensured the appropriateness of facilities to deliver high-quality programs. She has cut the ribbon on 10 child care centers and launched multiple evidence-based youth development programs across the Greater Philadelphia region.

She holds a BS in Elementary Education from Millersville University and an MBA from Kaplan University. She is also active in numerous education-focused organizations and serves on the Board of the Pennsylvania Child Care Association and Elevate215 (previously the Philadelphia School Partnership).



### Samia Bristow

Samia Bristow is the Associate Vice President of Programs at Maternity Care Coalition. She is a dynamic leader who is passionate about affecting change in under-resourced communities. She was born and raised in Philadelphia where she has dedicated her career to advocating and supporting pregnant women, children, and families. She holds a bachelor's degree in criminal justice and a master's degree in human services and nonprofit leadership from Lincoln University. In her current role, Samia oversees a number of direct service programs including staff training. Samia is passionate about the health and well-being of birthing people, women, and children and is committed to advancing health and social equity.



### Dionne Wright-Chambers

Dionne Wright-Chambers develops programs for children, families and fellow educators who are struggling for educational liberation. As the Co-Founder/ Principal Consultant of Learn, Empower, Grow Consultant group, she creates a strength-based approach to the company's services.

Her work at Thomas Jefferson University, developed a sustainability protocol for inclusive practices for early childhood environments. She is leading The Education Committee for "The National Council of Negro Women" Philadelphia Chapter and developed a STEAM curriculum for the documentary "The Invisible Warriors" African American Women in War World II.

Her leadership with the education and housing committee at Germantown Residents for Economic Alternatives Togetherness (GREAT), a Grassroots neighborhood group and 501 (C) nonprofit organization, has created core values and guiding principles for a living community.

Dionne believes in collaboration work with other educators locally and globally for educational liberation. She is a contributing writer with "Skirt in the Dirt, Global Storytelling Productions Freedom Bloggers" and Senior Board Strategist for Latinos Educando Juntos.

She is passionate about learning and making sure that women of color have a seat at the table

as leaders in education. She has earned a Master's Degree in Early Childhood Education, Pre-K to 8th grade with Special Education Pre-K to 8 Dual Certification, a Master's degree in Educational Leadership from Chestnut Hill College and a degree in Pan African Studies from Temple University.



### **Laverne Cheeseboro**

Laverne Cheeseboro, a devoted wife and mother of two sons, after seeking and finding her purpose, since 2009, has poured every ounce of herself into developing the minds of future achievers. She would strengthen herself through personal and professional development an education in Early Childhood Education. Priding in high quality, Heavenly Made Creations is a Nationally Accredited/Keystone Star 4 Family Group Child Care program located in Philadelphia that serves up to 12 children infant to preschool ages.

In 2015, Laverne created a Facebook group to support Family and Group Early Childhood Educators located in Philadelphia. The group continues to grow offering connections, support, and resources.

In 2017, Laverne was awarded slots from the PHLpreK program to provide tuition free education to preschoolers. In addition, the program created employment opportunities for those within the community.

In 2019, Laverne became co-founder of The Family Child Care Coalition supporting childcare providers in advocacy, training, and mentoring.

In 2020, Laverne founded Heavenly Made Blessings, a nonprofit organization that will provide scholarships for childcare tuition to families that qualify, coaching and training, and consulting in Early Childhood Education.

Cheeseboro continues to build her brand and work closely with political and social leaders to not only provide the best early childhood education for the children in her community, but to advocate for childcare, family providers, and parents in Philadelphia.



### **Ellen Davis**

Ellen Davis, MSW, is the Philly Families CAN Manager at the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, Division of Maternal, Child and Family Health. She obtained her BA from Hope College in Holland, MI and her Master's in Social Work from Temple University in Philadelphia, PA. Working in public health for over eight years, she has experience working in both project implementation and public health research. Her previous work includes public health research at Temple University's College of Public Health, and project implementation at the City of Philadelphia and Philadelphia Department of Public Health. In her current role, Ellen manages the day-to-day operations of the Philly Families CAN centralized intake and referral system. Philly Families CAN connects Philly families to free and voluntary family support services. Primarily connecting families to prenatal and early child home visiting programs, Philly Families CAN also connects families to neighborhood resources and is currently expanding the PF-CAN referral network. Families and referring providers can learn more about Philly Families CAN by calling 215-685-4701 or visiting [PhillyFamiliesCAN.com](http://PhillyFamiliesCAN.com).





### **Markeeta Jones**

As a proud graduate of Morgan State University, School of Education and Urban Studies, Markeeta believes that something remarkable happens when you bring together people who are committed to making a difference. Her education and experiences have guided her to her career in education, focusing on at-risk youth and urban communities.

Markeeta is an early childhood professional working to promote high-quality assurance, sustainability and equity within the early childhood education sector in Philadelphia. In her current role as a Keystone Stars Quality Coach, Markeeta works with state-regulated early childhood learning programs to attain and implement high-quality practices that align with the Pennsylvania QRIS rating system. With 10 years of service in this work, Markeeta continues to promote advocacy to impact change for children and families.



### **Sherilynn Kimble**

Sherilynn Johnson Kimble has more than 35 years' experience in education, administration, and management. She specializes in early childhood education, providing services as a trainer, consultant, mentor, coach, and technical assistant.

She is a passionate leader always striving to empower others. Sherilynn is President/CEO of The Kimble Group, LLC an Educational Consulting Firm. Currently affiliated with First Up she serves as a Senior Consultant specifically leading the Action For Early Learning (AFEL) Initiative in partnership with Drexel University and Community and Partnerships.

Sherilynn is an instructor for Child Development Associate Certificate coursework, she also serves as a PD Specialist for the Council of Professional Recognition. She served as an adjunct faculty member at Community College of Philadelphia and Rutgers's University.

Sherilynn also served on the Professional Development Council of the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs. She has designed and facilitated an educational training series for parents and teachers, and a mentoring project for early childhood directors and teachers. She has served and continues to serve on local boards dedicated to community service on women's and children's issues.

Sherilynn was named a Master Leader by Child Care Information Exchange, is a recipient of The Cecil B. Moore Leadership Award, of the Leadership Institute of The Urban League of Philadelphia, Phi Beta Kappa Early Childhood Excellence Award, Career Wardrobe Leadership Award, The Education Fund Gimper Award, Kappa Alpha Psi Humanitarian Award, Pennsylvania Child Care Association 2002 Award of Excellence and the Judith Rodin Community Education Award, University of Pennsylvania.



### Sharon Neilson

Sharon Mullings-Neilson is a Program Manager, Early Childhood Education (ECE) Client Engagement and Technical Assistance. She provides coaching and technical support to the ECE community by centering the voices of families and early childhood educators as expert stakeholders in the field.

Sharon brings over 40 years of experience in the early childhood field. Prior to joining Reinvestment Fund, she was the Director of Woodland Academy Child Development Center, a subsidiary of Greater Philadelphia Health Action Inc. Under her leadership, Woodland Academy attained the designation of a Keystone Star IV facility and obtained a Fund for Quality Grant to form a partnership with Bartrams Garden to develop a state-of-art environmental-focused early care and learning facility called the NESTT (Nature Engineering, Science, Technology and Theater). Sharon currently oversees the NESTT project and provides staffing support to Woodland Academy.

She is also a consultant for Philadelphia's new early childhood stakeholders organization called Early Childhood Provider Council, which was formed as a result of the BUILD report, Philadelphia's Early Learning Community Speaks Out: An Action Plan for Quality Improvement, which she co-authored. Additionally, she is on the RAPID Survey Team.

Throughout her career, she has advocated for quality care and served on the front lines of ECE work, demonstrating how necessary it is for quality care and early learning to be accessible to every child from birth and beyond in any community that is truly committed to securing future growth, advancement, and fiscal stability.

Sharon Mullings-Neilson holds a bachelor's degree in early childhood education and teaching from Antioch University and a master's degree in organizational leadership from Eastern University.



### Malkia Singleton Ofori-Agyekum

Malkia Singleton Ofori-Agyekum serves as the ParentChild+ Pennsylvania State Director. She has been overseeing the Program's successful start-up in Philadelphia, as well as supporting sites elsewhere in the state and working on expanding into new PA communities. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Rehabilitation Services from the University of Maryland Eastern Shore and Master of Science in Early Childhood Education from the University of Pennsylvania. As a program designer, leader and advocate in the fields of early childhood education and homeless services, Mrs. Ofori-Agyekum has dedicated her time and talent to serving underserved communities in Baltimore and Philadelphia.



### Adamary Sosa

Adamary Sosa is the Vice President of Economic Mobility at Norris Square Community Alliance. In this role, Adamary is responsible for the creation and implementation of new projects and programs that enhance the economic mobility of the families served and the improvement of academic outcomes for children and youth. She provides strategic leadership and supervises programs focused on economic mobility that includes education for children through adults, housing, workforce development, youth programs and capacity building. With over 15 years' experience in the education field, and 10 on the development and management of comprehensive federal and state educational programs, Adamary seeks to prepare individuals with the skills and tools necessary to succeed in life and have better opportunities.

As VP of Economic Mobility, she is committed to providing opportunities for others to improve their living conditions, their education, and achieve better employment opportunities. Raised in the "Badlands" of North Philadelphia, Adamary credits her struggles, her childhood experiences, her family upbringing, her faith, her culture, and her hardships, for her commitment and determination to improve the way of life for others in the same Barrio that raised her.

Adamary currently serves on the Latino Equitable Development Collective (LEDC) led by Ceiba. LEDC, a collective comprised of Latino serving and led organizations, acts collectively on equitable development issues impacting the Latin-x community. Adamary also serves as a board member for the Latinos Educandos Juntos (LEJ) nonprofit organization. She is a graduate of Eastern University holding a bachelor's degree in early childhood education and a Master's degree in Education with a concentration in Special Education. In addition to her degrees, she has a Nonprofit Executive Leadership Certification from Bryn Mawr Graduate School of Social Work, and a certificate from University of Pennsylvania on Executive Presence and Influence.



### Savannah Washington

Savannah Washington is the founder of Canvas Consulting, Hair & Bonds and the Author of *Jesus, Not Genie*. Carrying a BA in psychology & a Master of Business Administration she uses the skills, techniques, and resources she developed over the years to create outlets to help the community.

Savannah's career started as an Assistant Teacher at a West Philadelphia childcare center in 2014. There she noticed disparities in the childcare sector and decided to explore advocacy, equity, and especially implementation for families at each social economic status. Savannah has worked in several capacities in the early child care sector. For example, she is an alumnus of the Diversity Early Education Leadership (DEEL) Fellowship at Temple University and currently the Early Learning Program Officer at the United Way of Greater Philadelphia Southern New Jersey.



### **Denota Watson**

Denota E. Watson is currently employed by the School District of Philadelphia Prekindergarten Head Start Program as Parent Engagement Coordinator for over 47 years. She serves as administrative liaison for coordination, planning, mentoring and leadership development for parent/family involvement and engagement as shared governance partners in the management of the program.

Through her leadership and engagement, at the local, state, regional, and national level she has served as advisor, consultant and trainer for numerous initiatives for the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start in development of several parenting curriculums, productions of the Policy Council Governance Training and Fatherhood/Male Involvement curriculum and videos. Other consultative work includes grant proposal reader/evaluator, federal regulations compliance peer reviewer and workshops and professional staff development facilitator.

Denota has been the recipient of numerous prestigious Leadership and Service Awards including; Helen Taylor Distinguished Leadership, Milton Hershey PA Outstanding Leader, Bessie Drapper Parent Involvement Coordinator, Cheyney University Community Service, National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women, Black Women Educators Alliance Philadelphia Chapter Trailblazer, National Head Start Association Leadership & Service, and Citations and Resolutions (Philadelphia City Council and Drexel University).

Denota is the proud parent of four children, legal guardian of one niece and is blessed with twelve wonderful, intellectual grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.



### **Joe Willard**

Joe Willard joined HopePHL™ in 2007 as Vice President for Policy. In this role, Joe has been instrumental in fostering transformative change for families with young children living in Philadelphia's shelter system, leading to the creation of unique public-private sector collaborations like the Children's Work Group Early Childhood Conference and the Building Early Links for Learning (BELL). In previous roles, Willard was associate manager for public policy at the United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania and associate director at The Reinvestment Fund's Regional Workforce Partnership.



## LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS ENGAGED

Members of the following organizations participated in this strategic roadmap development process through interviews, stakeholder meetings, and council presentations.

Acelero Learning	Literacy Partners (La Fuerza)
AFEL Alliance of Childcare Providers	Maternity Care Coalition
AFEL Drexel University	National League of Cities, Philadelphia
Brightside Early Learning	Norris Square Community Alliance
Cambodian Association of Greater Philadelphia	ParentChild+
Caring People Alliance	HopePHL
Children First	School District of Philadelphia
Children's Playhouse	Turning Points
Children's Village	United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey
Chinatown Learning Center	Wonderspring Early Learning
City of Philadelphia, Department of Public Health	Woodland Academy Child Development Center
City of Philadelphia, Office of Children and Families	
ELRC-18	
Family Child Care Advisory Council	
Family Child Care Coalition	
FirstUp	
Grace Kids Academy	
Health Federations of Philadelphia	
Latinos Educando Juntos	
Learn, Empower, Grow Consulting Group	

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This work was supported by a grant from the William Penn Foundation. The opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the William Penn Foundation.

