

# THE NEXT PHASE FOR CT'S EARLY CHILDHOOD STATE-LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS:

Building a Strong Statewide Early Childhood Network  
through Early Start CT's Local Governance Partners

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THE CT EARLY CHILDHOOD FUNDER COLLABORATIVE

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# Executive Summary

The Next Phase for Connecticut's Early Childhood State-Local Partnerships: Building a Strong Statewide Early Childhood Network through Early Start CT's Local Governance Partners

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The Connecticut Early Childhood Funder Collaborative (CT ECFC) and its members have had a long history and interest in state-local partnerships to inform and strengthen Connecticut's early childhood system. As Karen Ponder described in her 2016 report commissioned by CT ECFC, "(l)ocal partnerships are created to convene their communities around early childhood issues to assure that all children **have their developmental, health, and early learning needs met** and that their families are supported and engaged as leaders. A local early childhood partnership table is where planning, coordinating, and problem solving take place" with families included as an integral part of this work.

Legislation was passed during the 2024 session establishing the Early Start CT program which includes the creation of Local Governance Partners (LGPs) as of July 1, 2025. These new LGPS will replace the current long standing early childhood collaboratives and School Readiness Councils (both dating back to the 1990's). Currently, Connecticut has a fragmented network of early childhood collaboratives and School Readiness Councils, which cover only 91 of the state's 169 towns.

This restructuring of state-local partnerships provides an opportunity to define a clear common understanding of the scope, role, and functions of LGPs and how their work at the local level can lead to improved state systems and outcomes for young children. In addition, we can address inherent inequities in our current structures by making an explicit plan to create a network of LGPs that serve and engage ALL 169 Connecticut towns.

CT ECFC has prepared this paper (a) to provide background – both on Connecticut's history and the experiences of two other states (Colorado and North Carolina) – and (b) to make recommendations regarding the design, implementation, and development of Local Governance Partners and its statewide network.

A summary of the report's recommendations can be found at the end of this Executive Summary. These recommendations have been informed not only by past experiences in Connecticut and other states, but also through input from key stakeholders in Connecticut, especially School Readiness Liaisons and the Local Early Childhood Collaboratives, as well as what CT ECFC learned from families last year from our parent and family input project for the Governor's Blue Ribbon Report on Child Care.

We also wish to acknowledge the ongoing partnership with the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood and their invitation to engage with them on the planning and implementation of this new network.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Vision and Purpose of Early Childhood State-Local Partnerships*

- A **clear vision and purpose** need to be defined for Local Governance Partners (LGPs), including a clear articulation and alignment of the expected outcomes to which all partners, including state partners, will work towards.
- The **scope** of Connecticut's state-local partnership should also be clearly defined to address a broad array of early childhood system issues (not just early care & education) but only require a minimal threshold for all Local Governance Partners.

### ***Functions of Local Governance Partners***

- Local Governance Partners **basic required functions** need to be clearly defined (e.g., convening of community's early childhood stakeholders, work with families, work with providers, relationship with OEC and LGP network).
- LGPs should be given the **authority to address local issues**, especially those that emerge from the Local Needs Assessment.
- The OEC should have **clear processes of how LGPs can influence policy and practice** such as assignment of state-funded early care and education funding to providers in their area.
- The OEC might consider **some funding that could be distributed locally** (e.g., quality enhancement).

### ***Structure and Cost of an Integrated State-wide Network***

- There should be a clear plan to **build a statewide early childhood Local Governance Partner system** that covers all 169 town/cities in CT within 5 years and provides each LGP a **"meaningful minimal" that pays for adequate staffing** to fulfill the required functions of an LGP.
- Funding should be provided for **current Local Early Childhood Collaboratives (LECCs)** that do not currently have School Readiness Councils so that current capacity is **maintained through FY25** until the LGP network is established.
- Over time, state funding should **incentivize LGPs to cover multiple towns** (and that those decisions be made by the communities) with a goal of creating a network that does not exceed a certain number of LGPs statewide.
- A mechanism should be created to regularly **review the required responsibilities of an LGP and the cost** to provide those services; state funding should be adjusted accordingly.
- There will be **additional costs related to statewide supports**, most notably a statewide convener and technical support organization (the statewide intermediary) and a reliable, easy to access data source with timely data sets for individual communities.

### ***Support for the Local Governance Partner Network***

- The **state intermediary needs sustainable funding** from the state to carry out its essential functions as convener of the network, provider of technical assistance and training, and promoter of clear communications among LGPs and with the OEC and other state partners.
- The state intermediary should be included as part of a state level cross agency body – ideally the CT Early Childhood Cabinet - and **develop relationships with other state agencies** whose work is prioritized in communities.
- The **OEC will need adequate capacity** to support the relationships and contracting with LGPs and the state-funded ECE providers in the Early Start CT system. Clear and consistent communications are key.
- There should be a **statewide data organization or a partnership** that could include the CT Data Collaborative, CT Voices for Children, United Way of CT, the OEC and other state agencies (especially the State Department of Education) to create an ongoing data dashboard with core data that all LGPs should be able to easily access and use for the needs assessment and to assess the impact of the work of the LGPs.

### ***Next Steps: Planning & Implementation***

- **Engage the current LECC/School Readiness networks together** to help in planning for this transition. In addition to the planned listening sessions, an independent party might facilitate more in-depth discussions to help create greater understanding of the nuances of transition planning - “the devil is in the details.”
- **Improve communications** among the current LECCs/School Readiness Networks (horizontal) and with the OEC (vertical). Actively engage the current state intermediary – the Connecticut Children’s Collective - for this work.
- **Roll out new functions** over time and ensure there is capacity at the LGP level and at the state level to carry out these functions.
- Ensure there is **a plan and timeline to build a statewide network** that includes ALL CT communities. Engage communities and LGPs to build multi-town LGPs that can work together well and will ensure statewide coverage.





*The Connecticut Early Childhood Funder Collaborative (CT ECFC) is a diverse coalition of members of the Connecticut philanthropic community committed to bringing the collective voice and resources of philanthropy to build and sustain a comprehensive and equitable early childhood system that works for all children, families, communities and the workforce in Connecticut.*

*CT ECFC is a project of the Connecticut Council for Philanthropy, for which the Council serves as a fiscal sponsor.*

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