

EARLY MATTERS:

**2025**

**EARLY CHILDHOOD**

**ACTION PLAN**



**Early Matters**



AN ACTION TEAM OF CHATTA NOOGA 20



**Bright Start TN**  
Powered by TQEE

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Early Matters members are grateful to the parents, teachers and child care educators, service providers, and community leaders who contributed to this action plan. We could not have created this report without the opportunity to learn about what it's like to raise, serve, and educate young children in Chattanooga-Hamilton County.

We recognize that parents are young children's first and best teachers and central to the early childhood system. This plan is the result of listening to the stories and challenges that families, teachers, and leaders shared in focus groups, interviews, and surveys.

Additional thanks goes to members of the Early Matters action team who contributed to the creation of this action plan through data gathering, survey distribution, factors analysis, story sharing, focus group and interview conducting and participation, and draft review.

Community leaders, city officials, and early childhood teachers and providers gave us clear insight into Chattanooga-Hamilton County's early childhood landscape. Their shared advocacy for early learning and diverse perspectives illuminated the community's deep commitment to young children and families.

Our appreciation goes out to Tennesseans for Quality Early Education for funding this statewide network of Bright Start fellows, providing technical assistance and data gathering, and for investing in a bold idea to improve outcomes for our state's children.

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Lastly, thank you to our [Early Matters-Bright Start Steering Committee](#) for their steady, child-centered leadership and commitment to work towards a Chattanooga-Hamilton County that serves all children equitably.

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# FORWARD TO THE COMMUNITY

Just as each child is unique, each child’s journey from birth to adulthood is unique.

There are many impactful organizations working to support children in our community, but each faces barriers to offering the highest-quality services and education to meet the needs of all children in our community. The personalized approaches needed and the array of service providers creates a complicated, tangled web that is difficult to navigate.

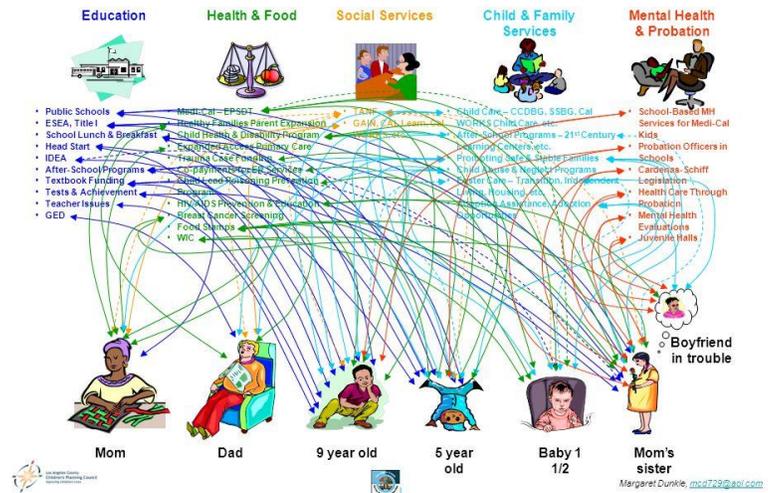
In this three-year plan to support early childhood, we’ve identified strengths, barriers and gaps, proposed some collaborative solutions, and committed to the continuous assessment of what’s working for families in our community. If you do not feel that your experience as a family or service provider is captured in this plan - raise your voice. Share with us the community’s strengths that we’ve missed and the systemwide challenges that are holding families back.

## Understanding LA Systems That Affect Families

*A Look at How 40+ Programs Might Touch One Los Angeles Family*

Margaret Dunkle

The George Washington University  
& The LA County Children’s Planning Council  
2002



We all have a vested interest and stake in supporting our youngest residents. Whether or not children live in your home, if you live in Chattanooga-Hamilton County, you are a part of this community and you play a role in the early childhood system.

There is no one-size-fits all solution to ensure children will grow up to be successful, productive members of society. What we *can* do as a community, however, is try to make sure that children have access to the high-quality services and educational opportunities to meet their individual needs, that will give them their best start in life. Whether you choose the moral imperative or the empirical evidence - the children of today will be your doctors, lawyers, mechanics, pilots, mayors, and teachers of tomorrow.

Simply put, our children are our present *and* our future.

Sincerely, Members of the Early Matters-Bright Start Steering Committee

# LETTER FROM THE CHAIRS OF THE HAMILTON COUNTY CHILDREN'S CABINET

In Chattanooga-Hamilton County, we are in the fortunate position to build upon a rich local history of research and advocacy efforts aimed at improving the odds for our county's children. Beginning in the 1980s, early childhood advocate Mai Bell Hurley worked tirelessly for decades to impress upon businesses, politicians, and the general public that children are the future. And that they are a worthy investment.

Since that time, this community has seen a few iterations of collaborative early childhood groups whose work resulted in strategies intending to prepare children for school and measure the impact of reading programs, various curricula, and wraparound supports. Each of these initiatives was valuable in that they brought awareness to the fact that children do actually learn a great deal about the world before they start Kindergarten, so there is a great need for quality learning opportunities for all young children, if they are to succeed in life.

But for too long, programs and collaborative efforts have worked on one system of influence at a time. We now know, a reading program alone will not equip children to be successful in school and life. Parent engagement programs alone will not equip children to be successful in school and life. A true shift for our children will only be realized when multiple systems are working together to address the individual needs of children and remove the barriers to their innate ability to thrive and experience a future without limits.

Early Matters and the Bright Start Steering Committee, with the input of stakeholders from across the county, have compiled a plan that would simultaneously address the many influencers to a child's academic and life outcomes. This plan builds on the work of Chattanooga 2.0 but is just the beginning of a coordinated and aligned effort to support children and families in our community across systems.

There are many more needs than can be addressed in one plan, but by working together we can all play a role in ensuring children have the supports needed to be successful in third grade and beyond.

Justin Robertson  
Hamilton County Schools  
Superintendent

Weston Wamp  
Hamilton County Mayor

Tim Kelly  
City of Chattanooga Mayor

## WHAT WE KNOW

### **Children are born with great potential for development and learning.**

The evidence is clear—experiences during the first few years of life have a profound and lasting impact. During the period from birth to age three, the developing brain forms more than one million new connections per second.<sup>1</sup> These connections form the foundation for all future learning.

### **Positive early childhood experiences make a difference.**

Research shows that brain development is influenced by each young child's environment and experiences.<sup>2</sup> Positive early childhood experiences—especially within high-quality early childhood services—are essential for child health, learning, and overall well-being. A child's developing brain depends on secure attachments and serve-and-return interactions, in which adults reliably and appropriately respond to a child's cries, babbles, and other bids for connection. Persistent absence of warm, reciprocal interaction increases the likelihood that a child will experience poor outcomes of health and wellbeing.<sup>3</sup>

### **For young children to thrive, families must have the resources and support they need.**

Families are the primary source of children's earliest learning experiences and their means of connection to all that they need to thrive. Early childhood services can support family stability and strong parent-child connections—the primary context in which children learn, develop, and form secure attachments during their earliest years.<sup>4</sup> When families are connected to the early childhood programs and services they need, it not only benefits children but also enables families to participate in the workforce and access other services in the community.

### **Unfortunately, not all children and families have equal access to positive early childhood experiences.**

Families across the United States face high costs and limited availability of early care and education. These challenges are exacerbated for families with no or limited incomes, those living in rural areas, and those that lack access to reliable transportation. Inequitable distribution of wealth and resources, the increasing financial strain on low- and middle-income families, and persistent racial segregation contribute to a reality in which early childhood opportunity gaps occur systematically and impact the community broadly.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile,



chronic underfunding of the early childhood system ensures that high-quality early childhood experiences remain out of reach for many children.

**However, political and organizational leaders across public sectors in Chattanooga-Hamilton County refuse to accept this as an inevitability.** Instead, those entrusted with decision-making that impacts children and families desire for Chattanooga-Hamilton County to be the best place for a child to be born and raised. They recognize that, if Chattanooga-Hamilton County is to be a city-county where families, programs, and communities are thriving, now is the time to build a strong local network of early childhood and family supports and to invest wisely in strategies that will make a positive impact on tomorrow's generation of leaders. To ensure that the children of Chattanooga-Hamilton County have what they need to thrive, community leaders and decision-makers must first understand the critical issues young children and families face. Thus, the Early Matters-Bright Start steering committee set out to uncover just that for our community.



**90%**  
**of brain**  
**development**  
**happens**  
**before age 5**

## STATEMENT OF NEED

Little more than one-third of Chattanooga-Hamilton County students are on track in reading or math by the third grade. For students who are economically disadvantaged, the number is one in six. With over 32% of our region's children living in or near poverty, this is a gap we cannot ignore.<sup>26</sup>

Students' lack of academic preparedness, despite best efforts by many stakeholders, is a crisis with widespread ramifications. Research shows that when students are not at grade level by the third grade, they are more likely to suffer negative life outcomes such as lower earnings, poorer health, and higher rates of high school drop-out and even incarceration.

The cost is high for communities as well. The economic impact of these academic deficits is hard to calculate, but many estimate a financial toll in the billions. For every child that does not graduate high school, a community can anticipate a loss of \$260,000 in future taxes, revenue, and productivity<sup>6</sup>. As well as the significant loss in potential individual earnings had a child been better equipped with the skills necessary to attain a thriving wage job.

Improvements such as the implementation of a high-quality reading curriculum, multi-tiered systems of support, and the Hamilton County Schools Future Ready 2025 plan, which have led to great strides towards building an infrastructure capable of meeting an individual student's needs, are moving in the right direction, but we're still not seeing the high proficiency numbers that children deserve. There are many contributing factors for this, such as poverty; high teen birth rates; lack of access to transportation to and trust for medical services; and the lack of a coordinated, affordable, and aligned early childhood system that supports families, children, and the providers who serve them.

The bottom line is that thousands of families in Hamilton County do not have access to key supports needed in the first years of a child's life — years that we know are crucial in brain development. Early childhood services can support family stability and strong parent-child connections—the primary context in which children learn, develop, and form secure attachments during their earliest years. When families are connected to the early childhood programs and services they need, it not only benefits children but also enables families to participate in the workforce and access other services in the community.

The crisis of continually low academic preparedness and social-emotional skill development is a complex problem, but not a hopeless one. Evidence shows that investing heavily in quality early childhood education is a cost-effective solution to many of these issues. The early years of a child's life have lasting effects, setting the foundation for all future learning. In order for Chattanooga-Hamilton County students to come to school prepared with the skills and supports needed to succeed, we must act earlier.

In 2020, Hamilton County Schools became the fastest improving district in the state. Over the course of four years, schools saw a three-percentage point increase in ELA proficiency. As we come out of the pandemic, and with a statewide focus on foundational reading skills, now is the time to build on this momentum and continue to strengthen the foundation of learning.

Working together as partners across the community, we will implement strategies to support economically disadvantaged children and students from birth to age eight. The collective impact of these strategies will: increase access to the services and supports Hamilton County families need to ensure our young children are happy and healthy; increase support of schools to have the resources in training to support the most disadvantaged children; and ensure that our community is addressing the full range of needs to ensure that all families can thrive.

*“Research is clear that a child’s readiness for school and subsequent school success is dependent upon physical, social, emotional and cognitive well-being and development, and that these dimensions of school readiness are interrelated. A child with **dental pain** cannot concentrate fully and is likely to act out. A child with an **untreated learning disability** is likely to struggle socially and emotionally as well as cognitively. A child whose parent suffers from **mental illness** is less likely to receive the nurturing needed to foster resiliency and development across all the dimensions of school readiness. Parents who are **living in poverty** and in a marginal or unsafe community may be expending additional time and their own resources simply trying to get through the day, with little in reserve to seek out new opportunities for development for their children. Children who start school **behind their peers** on more than one dimension of school readiness are at much greater risk of falling further behind; and children are rarely behind on only one dimension. Up to half of future school problems are already evident by the time children start school.*

*When children need services in multiple areas, an aligned, coordinated response produces the best results.”*

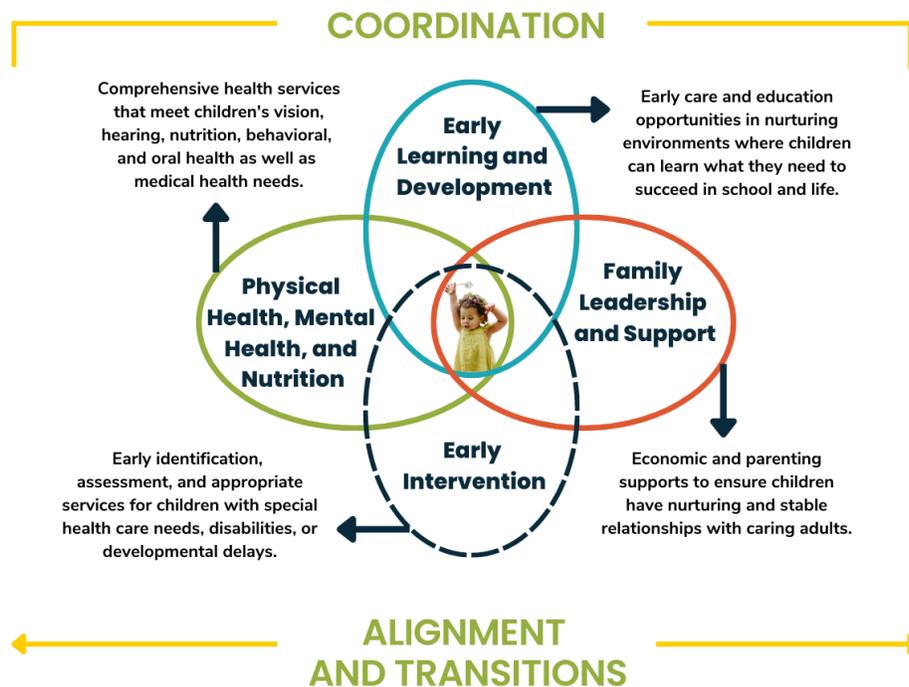
- Charles Bruner, PhD, Child and Family Policy Center<sup>7</sup>

# EARLY MATTERS CHATTANOOGA

Chattanooga 2.0 was formed in 2015 as a cradle-to-career collaborative action network aimed at transforming education and workforce development outcomes. For seven years, this cross-sector network in our community has continually engaged and created collaborative partnerships among stakeholders representing community, business, nonprofit, public, faith-based, and educational institutions. Chattanooga 2.0 was established to ensure that all children and youth receive a quality education and career opportunities that help them realize their full potential from birth to the attainment of a thriving wage. Leaders in our community have taken up that call and continue to come back to the table year after year to do what is right for the next generation.

One of many Chattanooga 2.0 action teams, Early Matters, is a coalition made up of more than 30 child- and family-serving organizations invested in early childhood and positively impacting the systems that ensure happy and healthy childhoods in Chattanooga-Hamilton County, Tennessee. Working together, these organizations promote equitable access to early childhood programs and services through systems building and advocacy efforts.

## CHATTANOOGA-HAMILTON COUNTY'S EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM





## Bright Start TN

In 2021, Bright Start TN, powered by Tennesseans for Quality Early Education (TQEE), endeavored to tap the power of communities across our state to collaboratively design, implement and scale high-quality early care and education (ECE) systems locally while informing and advocating for state policies that support children and families. Recognizing the existing early childhood alignment work led by Early Matters, Hamilton County, TN was selected as one of six pilot communities in the Bright Start TN network.

Adapted from the North Carolina Pathways to Grade-Level Reading framework, TQEE provided technical assistance to communities as they identified current assets, barriers, and gap within three early childhood domains. Each community has selected potential strategies to mitigate barriers and increase access to quality early childhood services within their local context.



This plan outlines existing impactful initiatives, the gaps we’ve found by listening to the community, and promising evidence-based strategies that, together, will comprise our community’s “recipe for success” for young children.

# VISION, GOALS, AND TARGET POPULATION

## The Bright Start TN Vision

A continuum of high-quality early care and education for the 41,000 children aged birth to eight in Hamilton County, TN is available to all, and opportunity gaps by race and income are eliminated, making Chattanooga-Hamilton County the best place in the nation for a child to be born and raised.

## The Growth Goals

Our goal as community leaders is to ensure every child has the individualized support they need to thrive. And while a test score is not fully indicative of whether or not a child is thriving, we must identify some measures to track progress. The top-level indicators we will use to gauge the collective impact of both existing strategies in place, plus the new strategies outlined in this action plan, are third-grade math and English Language Arts (ELA), Kindergarten readiness, and child well-visits.

1) By the end of the 2024-2025 school year, Hamilton County will see a 15 percentage point increase in the number of third-grade public school students scoring on-track or mastered in ELA and math on the state's TCAP test, with a reduction in opportunity gaps by race and income.

We hope to see an increase in Math from 38% to 53% proficient and ELA from 36% to 51% proficient. This equates to an additional 60 students each year testing proficient. While any growth will be celebrated, we will pay particular attention that gains are not only realized by students of affluence, but also by those students in subgroup categories.

2) By the start of the 2025-2026 school year, Hamilton County will see a 10 percentage point increase in the number of public-school Kindergarten students regarded as having been equipped with the skills necessary to be successful in Kindergarten, using the new state-approved Kindergarten entrance screener.

Previously, Hamilton County Schools has used the Read 20 "readiness" assessment tool, but this was not nationally normed. The results of the Fall 2023 assessment will become our baseline.

3) Increase by 3 percent the number of Hamilton County, TN TennCare-eligible children receiving the recommended amount of well-child screenings by age 3.

TennCare is the name for Medicaid in the state of Tennessee. Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT) offers a way to ensure that children birth to age 21 receive appropriate physical, dental, developmental, and mental health services—from prevention to treatment. This will require an impact of 560 more screenings.

While these numbers might not seem ambitious, they are, given the set of strategies outlined in this action plan. Many of the early childhood strategies in this action plan are geared towards infants and toddlers, and therefore will not begin to show an impact on the above indicators until the end of the three-year plan.

## **The Target Population**

For this plan, the Early Matters - Bright Start Steering Committee has chosen to target evidence-based interventions for economically disadvantaged (ED) children, particularly those who fall within additional subgroups as defined by the state of Tennessee's Department of Education. The category of economically disadvantaged includes children who are directly certified for specific state and federal assistance programs, and those who are identified as homeless, migrants, or runaways as well as students in foster care. Students who are directly certified are those whose families are participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, or Head Start.

To select this target population, the steering committee reviewed and discussed an extensive collection of data covering disaggregated datasets such as: third-grade reading and math from the TN State Report Card; population demographics, income, and health standings from the US Census; local child care and food deserts from a joint United Way project with Early Matters; elementary school vision screening results from Hamilton County Schools; and IEP percentages.

It became apparent that in every category, it is children who fall in the category of economically disadvantaged that remain the farthest behind.

## **The Target Geography**

In addition to tailoring many of the strategies included in this plan to students who fall in the economically disadvantaged subgroup, Early Matters-Bright Start will begin implementation with a place-based approach. Year 1 will include a focus in two geographic areas within Hamilton County where strategies will be concentrated, evaluated, and revised, before scaling to the entire county. This will ensure that only the most effective strategies that work in the context of our community will be invested in and scaled countywide in Years 2 and 3.

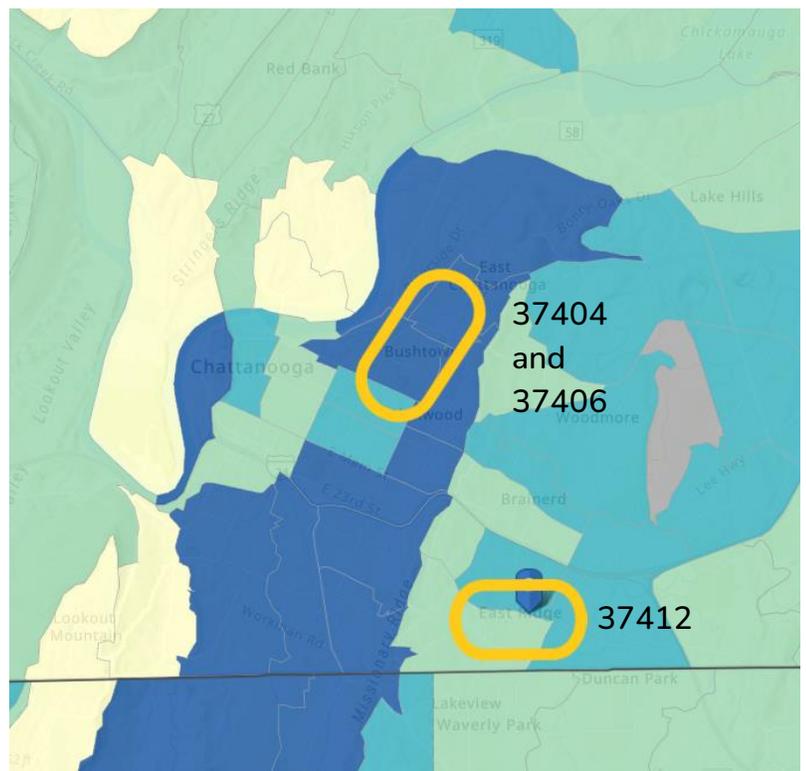
To begin, we will focus on two footprints with existing supports that will complement the intention to provide whole-child wraparound services to economically disadvantaged children and their families. Our strategies will bring together community stakeholders around three elementary schools where young children will enroll. These schools are located in tracts with a “high” vulnerability level on the CDC’s social vulnerability index.

- Brainerd high school feeder pattern (Hardy\* and Orchard Knob\* elementary schools) in zip codes 37404 and 37406.
- East Ridge high school feeder pattern (East Ridge Elementary School) in zip code 37412

\* These elementary schools are included on the TN Department of Education Priority School list

These two areas are also a part of the existing P-16 initiative, which aims to increase the number of students who graduate from six high schools (Brainerd, East Ridge, Hixson, Howard, Red Bank, and Tyner) and attain a postsecondary credential or degree. Contained in this early childhood action plan are evidence-based strategies to work with young children, families, child care, and healthcare providers, which is a complimentary collaboration to give children a strong foundation before they enter grade school.

In the Orchard Knob area, the Enterprise Center is helping to facilitate a community-led improvement project around the social determinants of health through a grant from TVA. The “Connectivity and Health in Orchard Knob: A Smart Community Model for Equitable Access to Services for the 21st Century” program has agreed to align their work for an even greater impact in 37404 over the next year. Other partners involved in this place-based project include Parkridge Health System, Habitat for Humanity, green | spaces, and EPB.



# LOCAL DATA SNAPSHOT & SURVEY RESULTS

## WORKING PARENTS



OF THE 23,983 CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF 6 HAVE ALL AVAILABLE PARENTS IN THE WORKFORCE

## Chattanooga-Hamilton County, TN

'21-'22 3rd Grade ELA Proficiency

On Track or Mastered

All Students



Economically Disadvantaged



'21-'22 3rd Grade Math Proficiency

On Track or Mastered

All Students



Economically Disadvantaged



\$10,800 / YEAR

The typical cost of center-based care for an infant in TN

20% of the median household income in Chattanooga-Hamilton County

72% of the income for a single parent earning minimum wage

For families with an infant and a child in pre-k, child care costs rise to

35% of the median household income in Chattanooga-Hamilton County

129% of the income for a single parent earning minimum wage

## CHATTANOOGA - HAMILTON COUNTY

21,300 CHILDREN UNDER 5

12,950 REGULATED CHILD CARE SEATS (TRUE COUNT IS LOWER)

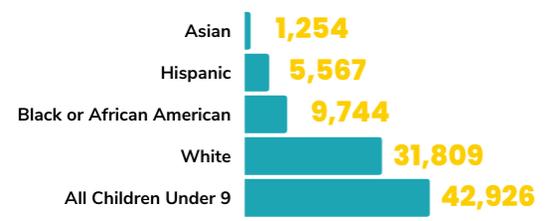
900 VOLUNTARY PREK (VPK) SEATS

44 ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS ACROSS 550 SQ MILES

44% OF CHILDREN AGES 0-5 LIVE IN LOW INCOME HOUSEHOLDS (200% Poverty Rate or less)

### TOTAL POPULATION OF CHILDREN UNDER AGE 9

Source: 2021 Census Bureau Population Demographics

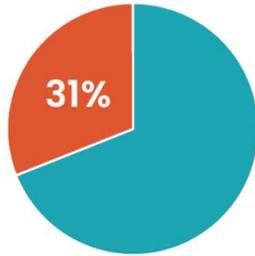


Average annual salary for an early childhood educator in Chattanooga–Hamilton County:

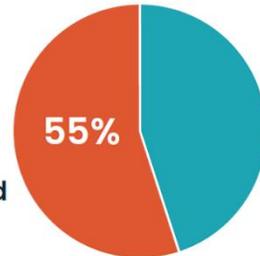
**ABOUT \$21,000, WITHOUT BENEFITS**



Representing **31% of a living wage** for a single parent, two-child home



Representing **55% of a living wage** for a two working adults, two-child home<sup>39</sup>



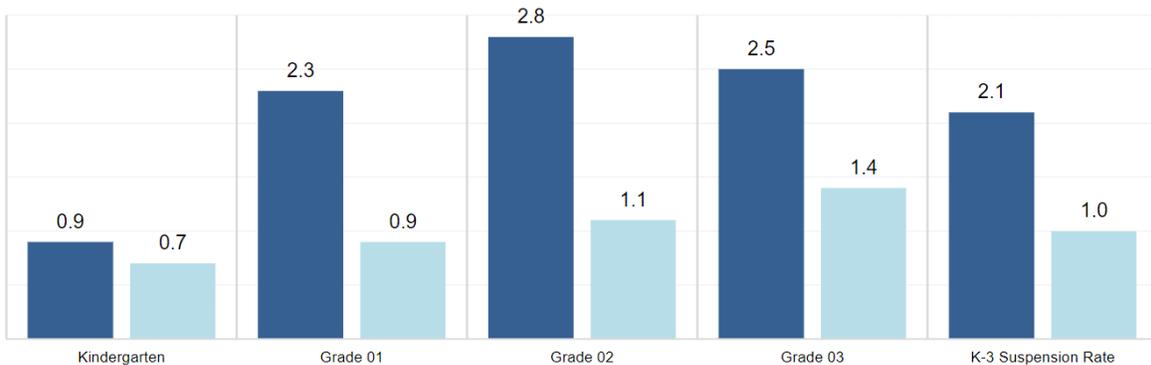
The starting salary for the majority of public-school teachers in Tennessee, who play equally critical roles in developing young minds, however, is close to double that with benefits.

Poverty rate for early childhood educators in Tennessee: **22.9%**

➔ Much higher than for Tennessee workers in general (10.5%) and 10.2 times as high as for K-8 teachers (2.3%)<sup>40</sup>

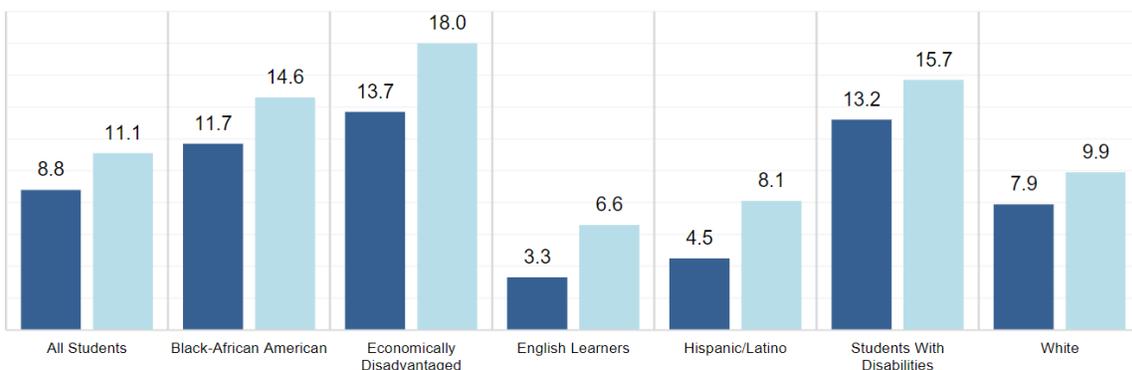
### Suspension Rates, Grades K-3, SY19-20

■ Hamilton County ■ Tennessee



### Percent Chronically Absent, Grades K-8, SY19-20

■ Hamilton County ■ Tennessee



# EARLY CHILDHOOD SURVEY TAKEAWAYS

1



**96%**

of families indicated that early childhood education was **important to children's development.**

2

## DEFINING QUALITY CARE

Healthy, safe, & clean environment **89%**

Nurturing & affectionate staff **84%**

Open staff-parent communication **84%**

Playground areas & other facilities **72%**

Families define quality care for their child as a place where their **child is safe and loved and where the center communicates with families.** However, when asked what they most considered when looking for care, location and cost factored into the top 3, along with safety.

3

## TOP BARRIERS TO ACCESSING QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

**Cost, long waiting lists/ limited spots, and lack of quality care options.**

However, in the bottom two income brackets, the lack of access to financial assistance moves up the list to the top.



4

**10%** of respondents listed **cost as a barrier** to accessing health care services.



6

## THE RATIO OF TEACHERS TO STUDENTS



caused the **most dissatisfaction** for families, which is largely connected to the current child care staffing shortage.

5



**27%** of respondents were **unaware of parenting groups and postpartum services.**

7

## MEAL SECURITY

was an issue for **only 4%** of respondents, but families at all income levels reported not serving complete meals to their children.



8



The use of educational resources such as museums, libraries, zoos and aquariums was **significantly lower for children in low-income households.**

9

## CHILDREN UNDER 5



in Hamilton County are **NOT** receiving enough sleep.

**47%** of families reported that their young children received less than **9 hours of sleep per day.**

The American Academy of Pediatrics **recommends 11-14 hour per day for this age group.**

The percentage of children regularly receiving 7-9 hours of **sleep increases with income.**

10

## ONLY ONE THIRD

of each demographic responded that they were **familiar with some developmental milestones** leading up to Kindergarten readiness.

And **24%** of Hispanic respondents indicated they were **unaware** of developmental milestones for their children.



## WHOLE CHILD & BUILDING RESILIENCE IN CHILDREN

In the Chattanooga 2.0 2021 Forward Together strategic plan, the coalition opted to broaden its focus to prioritize addressing the whole-child needs of our community's children and students, rather than those that are purely academic. The Whole Child approach acknowledges that developing and preparing students for life and career requires a focus on ensuring that every child, in every school, is **healthy**, **engaged**, **supported**, and **challenged**.<sup>9</sup>

The target audience for this plan is economically disadvantaged children who we know will face more adversity than their peers. These children are more likely to experience ACEs, or adverse childhood experiences. Reducing the effects of significant adversity on children's healthy development is crucial if they are to prosper and thrive in learning and life.

Protective experiences and coping skills are required to counterbalance significant adversity in a child's most formative years and build their resilience. The single most common factor for children who develop resilience is at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive parent, caregiver, or other adult.

Research also shows that in order to optimize resilience across multiple contexts, the following factors can predispose children to positive outcomes in the face of significant adversity.<sup>25</sup>

- facilitating supportive adult-child relationships;
- building a sense of self-efficacy and perceived control;
- providing opportunities to strengthen adaptive skills and self-regulatory capacities; and
- mobilizing sources of faith, hope, and cultural traditions.

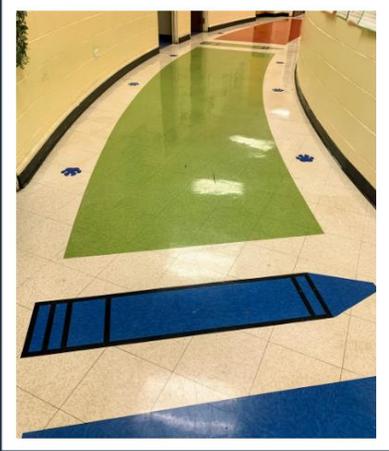
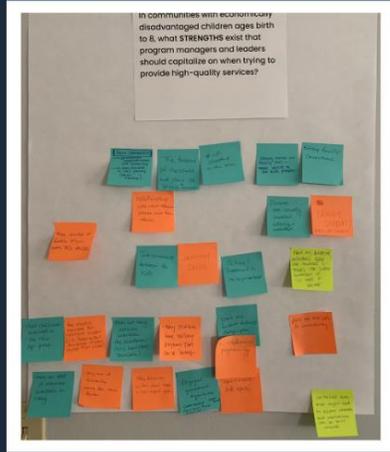
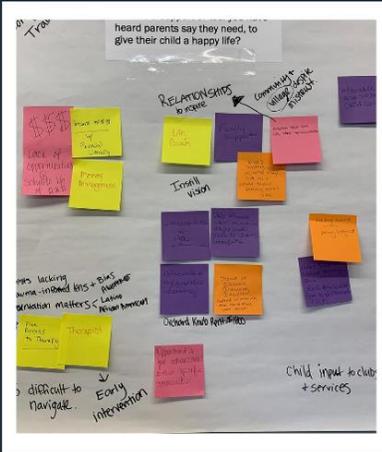
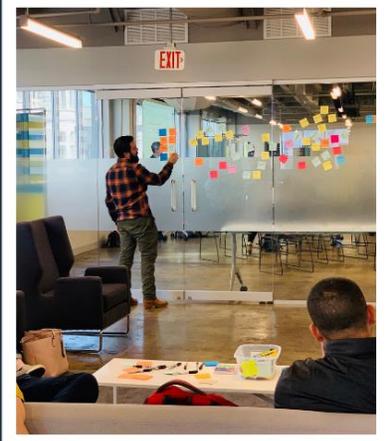
From families, to teachers, service providers, faith leaders, and elected officials - we can all play a role in fostering resilience in our county's children. Both inside and outside of school and child care, service providers can take a similar approach to strengthening the "whole child" and their families by providing care and fostering supportive environments aligned to the CDC's protective factors model<sup>10</sup>. Protective factors reduce the effects of stressful life events. These factors also increase an individual's ability to avoid risks or hazards, and promote social and emotional competence to thrive in all aspects of life, now and in the future.



Carnivorous  
George

and Friends

Illustrations by  
[Name]



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

# THE PROCESS

Decades of research show what children need to build strong brains and a solid early learning foundation: 1) high-quality birth through-age-eight learning environments, 2) health and development on track from birth, and 3) supportive and supported families and communities.

In Chattanooga-Hamilton County, there are a plethora of programs and initiatives in place that are working to enable children and families to realize their full potential by supporting them with resources and removing barriers that stand in the way of their success. The Early Matters - Bright Start Steering Committee intentionally sought to identify these existing programs, listen to various stakeholders and community groups, and begin to pinpoint sectors where there are either needs not being addressed or programs that may be working, but that simply need to be scaled.

After learning of the gaps and needs, the steering committee identified evidence-based strategies from the Clearinghouse, compiled by Bright Start TN Network staff, for all measures of success across the three early childhood domains. These fifteen measures of success are described in the “What We Heard” section.

The group then assessed the various strategies for their community “ripeness” and conducted multiple exercises with stakeholders around the final set of strategies described in the following pages. [We heard from over 650 local residents during the creation of this plan.](#)

To read a list of the community engagement strategies utilized for assessing the needs, see Appendix B.

## EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION SYSTEM DESIGN PROCESS





# WHAT WE HEARD

# KEY TAKEAWAYS

## SO HOW CAN WE BETTER SERVE CHILDREN?

We must increase [access](#) to high-quality services for families, increase the [capacity](#) of caregivers and service providers, and increase [communication](#) between all stakeholders.

## ACCESS + CAPACITY + COMMUNICATION

### Access

Factors impacting **ACCESS**, as defined in our Access to Quality Child Care needs assessment are:

- Cost
- Hours
- Location
- Transportation
- Language
- Availability
- Knowledge of Services

HIGH-QUALITY implies:

- Qualified, quality workforce
- Quality programming or service
- Secure in a safe space
- Promotes healthy outcomes<sup>11</sup>
  - Effective – providing evidence-based healthcare services to those who need them;
  - Safe – avoiding harm to people for whom the care is intended;
  - People-centered – providing care that responds to individual preferences, needs and values

### Capacity Building

For a service provider, this is the process of developing an organization's strength and sustainability. Factors include increasing and retaining quality, qualified staff, receiving reimbursement rates that match the cost of care, and securing sustainable funding.

For a caregiver capacity building might look like equipping them with the tools to support a young child's development, so they arrive at school with the foundational literacy and social skills required to be successful and adjust to a new environment of learning.

## Communication

Due to the fragmented nature of all the various systems that support young children, communication, coordination, and alignment is the glue that holds the health, learning, and family support sectors together.

Communication can be improved via business-to-business, business-to-consumer, and community-wide. To know that we have improved communication across any systems, we would expect to see changes in caregivers' knowledge, skill or confidence (self-efficacy), changes in practice or behavior, or an increase in the perception by families that they are surrounded by supportive environments.

### But How? When? Where?



During key life events for families, there are opportunities to expand knowledge of available tools, programs, and resources through trusted sources. Examples of key life events are prenatal care, childbirth, pediatric checkups / home visitation, child care enrollment, and Kindergarten registration. Trusted sources could be faith leaders, doctors, teachers, sports coaches etc.

Knowledge and tools are most likely to be put to use when received from a trusted source. To this end, Early Matters coalition members are committed to growing our coordinated and aligned early childhood network to encompass faith-based organizations, community centers, family service and health care providers.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

JOIN US! Reflect on the steps you can take within your own household or organization to increase access, capacity, and communication. Will you commit to making a change to improve the early childhood experience in our community?

WHAT WE HEARD:



# PHYSICAL HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH, & DEVELOPMENT

Healthy child development encompasses physical, emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and language development. Thus, frequent assessment to track all domains of child development is essential during the earliest years of life. The second year of life, in particular, is the period for the fastest language acquisition as the child’s brain develops, and research has shown that differences in language skills based on socioeconomic status are already evident in children at 18 months old. Identifying and treating early indications of disability or developmental delay during a child’s early years can improve childhood outcomes, increasing the likelihood of long-term benefits.<sup>3</sup>

Bright Start TN Measures of Success (MOS):

These five measures, which will be tracked annually at the local and state level by the Bright Start TN network, are indicators by which we can tell if a child’s health and development are on track beginning at birth.

HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT ON TRACK BEGINNING AT BIRTH				
				
<b>HEALTHY BIRTH WEIGHT</b> Percent of babies born weighing less than 2500 grams (5.5 lbs.)	<b>PHYSICAL HEALTH</b> Percent of parents reporting their child’s health is excellent or good	<b>SOCIAL &amp; EMOTIONAL HEALTH</b> Percent of children exhibiting self-regulation, good interpersonal skills	<b>ORAL HEALTH</b> Percent of children with untreated decay in primary teeth	<b>EARLY SCREENING &amp; INTERVENTION SERVICES</b> Percentage of children screened and improving with early intervention services

To begin by understanding the work already happening on the ground, existing programs and initiatives were mapped against five measures of success. We then proceeded to learn from the community through surveys, focus groups, and stakeholder interviews. The following pages contain a summary of the strengths and gaps for children and families within this domain, as explained to us by members of the community.

### Existing Initiatives to Impact MOS

DOMAIN 1: Increasing Health, Mental Health & Development	
MEASURE OF SUCCESS	EXISTING PROGRAMS / INITIATIVES
<p><b>HEALTHY BIRTH WEIGHT</b> Percent of babies born weighing less than 2500 grams (5.5 lbs.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Forward (formerly Baby University)</li> <li>• Erlanger Nurse-Family Partnership program (NFP)</li> <li>• Catholic Charities providing support to pregnant moms</li> <li>• Evidence-based home visitation programs like Nurture the Next, CHANT, and Nurse Family</li> </ul>
<p><b>PHYSICAL HEALTH</b> Percent of parents reporting their child’s health is excellent or good</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• YMCA Nutrition grant to assess local child care programs</li> <li>• Early Childhood Health Equity working group nutrition needs assessment</li> <li>• Hamilton County Schools (HCS) Howard Health Clinic</li> <li>• MNGK Garvey program, teaching music and movement in child care</li> </ul>
<p><b>SOCIAL &amp; EMOTIONAL HEALTH</b> Percent of children exhibiting self-regulation, and good interpersonal skills.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Panorama social-emotional learning measurement tool given to HCS students</li> <li>• Social Emotional &amp; Academic Development (SEAD) Framework at HCS</li> <li>• Paper Tiger ACEs Documentary Screenings</li> <li>• HCS Multi-Tiered Systems of Support</li> </ul>
<p><b>ORAL HEALTH</b> Percent of children with untreated decay in primary teeth</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health Dept. dental sealant program</li> <li>• Vision Screenings &amp; Referral to Lions Clubs</li> <li>• Head Start partners with Colgate trucks for dental education</li> </ul>
<p><b>EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES</b> Percentage of children improving with early intervention services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TN Early Intervention Services</li> <li>• Preschool Assessment &amp; Learning Services Center (PALS) HCS assessment department</li> <li>• Helen Ross McNabb Therapeutic Preschool</li> </ul>

## DOMAIN ASSETS:

### WHAT HELPS CHILDREN AND FAMILIES THRIVE IN THIS DOMAIN?

- Chattanooga boasts a local children's hospital and is the only public, non-profit hospital in the region.
- In the early childhood survey, one third of low-income families reported being aware of and having used evening pediatric services. This is a convenient service for working families and helps mitigate unnecessary emergency room bills.
- Hamilton County Schools has a dedicated [Preschool Assessment and Learning Services \(PALS\)](#) center for children with disabilities and developmental delays. Referrals to the PALS Center can be made by parents, Tennessee Early Intervention System (TEIS), and Head Start Programs. A family is provided a IFSP or Individual Education Plan (IEP) that follows their child throughout school until services are no longer needed.
- In recent years, PALS has not met the 60-day target for timely evaluation of children, however, recent restructuring and a commitment to improvement and collaboration with families, holds promise that this will soon greatly improve for families.
- Starting October 2022, families of children who are eligible for IDEA Part B services will have the choice to continue with TEIS services until the start of the school year following the child's 4th birthday. This extension offers families an additional option to consider as they help their children develop and prepare for school.
- Siskin Children's Institute has two bilingual developmental pediatricians and utilizes HIPPA-approved postcards mail to non-English-speaking families with the message "we've been trying to reach you, please call."
- Helen Ross McNabb runs a [Therapeutic Preschool](#) that provides 10 weeks of intensive group treatment to children ages 4-6 who have suffered abuse, neglect or other adverse childhood experiences.
- Family Forward, is a program that **prepares children and families for lifelong success mentoring & coaching, resource connections, education to support healthy pregnancies and early childhood development**
- The cost of a visit to the emergency room can equal more than a month of wages for a family of four living at the Federal Poverty Level. For Latino families, they may

not be able to communicate with the doctors and the health system may be confusing and hard to navigate. Hamilton County has multiple clinics with bilingual staff providing affordable care, such as LifeSpring Community Health and Clinica Medicos, some of which offer charity when needed.

## DOMAIN CHALLENGES:

### WHAT IS NOT WORKING AS WELL AS IT SHOULD?

#### THE UNADDRESSED NEEDS

Navigating the healthcare industry can be a challenge on its own. For parents or other caretakers of children, the additional concerns about addressing their child’s pain, finding a timely appointment, and coordinating between work and school schedules can make the task of taking a child to see a provider seem nearly impossible.<sup>12</sup>

Insurance companies that do not reimburse providers for the true cost of care have led to provider shortages, especially in specialized service areas. This, in turn, creates longer wait times for families seeking help with what they suspect might be a developmental delay for their child. It does not help that school nurses and psychologists can currently only give “educational diagnoses” which often do not qualify for insurance coverage, though they will get a child an IEP.

It’s also hard for parents to know what resources are available to them, because there is no single source for this type of compiled information. Some communities have resource navigators dedicated to helping economically disadvantaged families navigate the convoluted web of services, but we currently do not.

Families also do not know what they do not know regarding child development, which is why forming trusted relationships with health professionals early on in a child’s life is imperative. During community conversations, we found a lack of knowledge of developmental milestones and the impact of nutrition on dental hygiene.

More research is required to fully comprehend the myriad of barriers families face to access quality health services. Some components, however, we already know: Lack of transportation; Location of services inconvenient; Cost for quality

# 37%



High cost is the number one barrier low-income families cited for not accessing dental, hearing and vision care. For Hispanic or Latino families across incomes, 37% responded that cost was a barrier to accessing dental care.

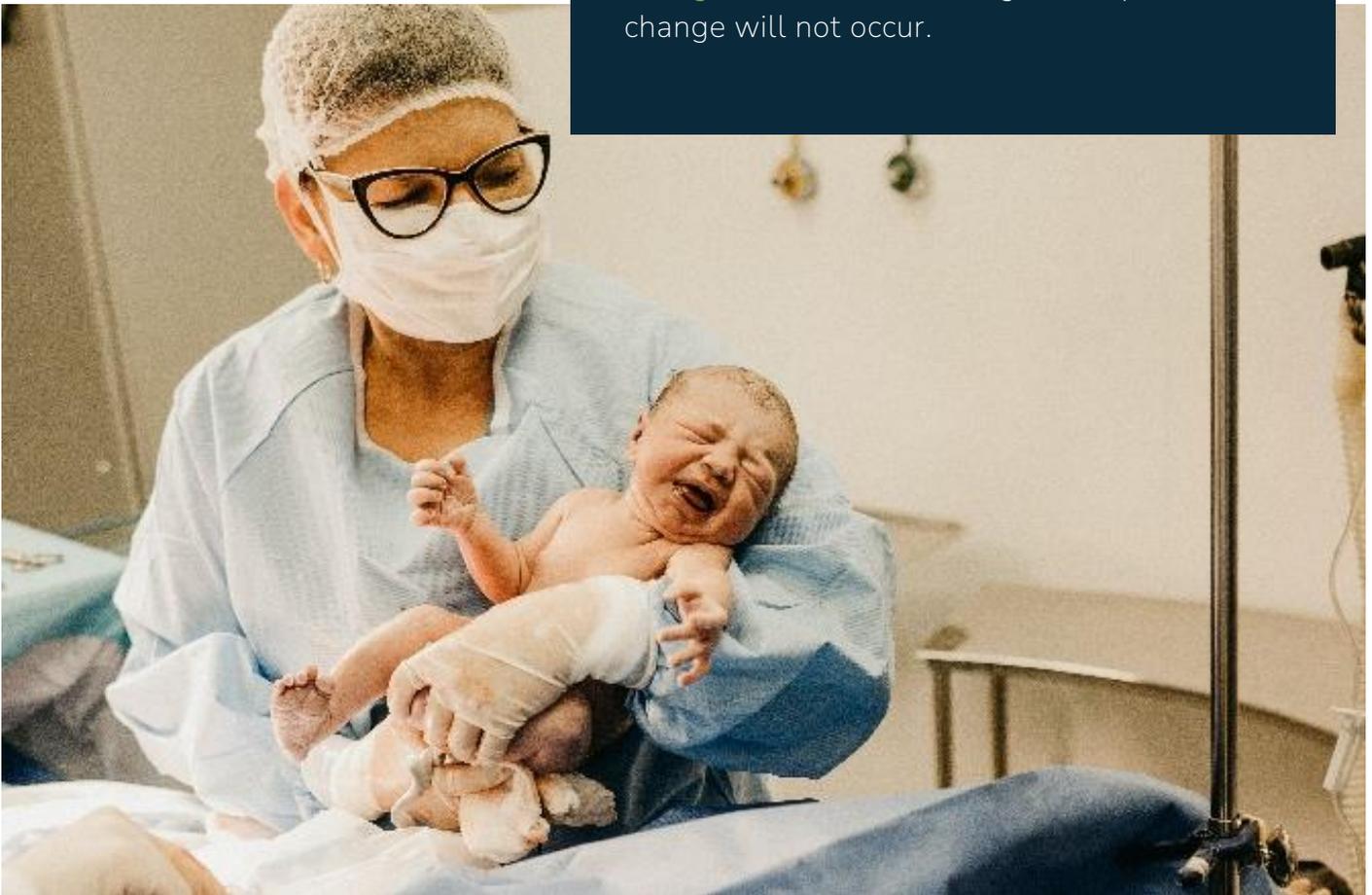
services; Limited availability (child care, mental health, etc); The need for trauma-informed service providers who can interact with families in hardship without cultural competency.

The impact of the hardships created by the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of both children and adults in our community cannot be understated.

Between March and October 2020, emergency department visits for children with mental health emergencies rose by 24% among kids aged 5-11.<sup>17</sup> A comprehensive mental health needs assessment will be conducted by Early Matters early childhood health equity working group to better understand the specific mental health crisis impacting infants, children, and their families and what we can do about it.

## WHAT IS SYSTEMIC CHANGE?

A systems change approach ensures that we are not simply treating the *symptoms* of systems that don't serve our children, students, families, employers, and community overall. Instead, we work together to solve our greatest challenges permanently, moving from a "Band-Aid" approach to **lasting change**. In order to change systems, however, we often need proof-points and programs to show how the system *can* change and **why it must change**. If those are missing, then systems change will not occur.



## SYSTEMIC BARRIERS AND NEEDS IMPACTING EARLY CHILDHOOD HEALTH

- Hamilton County, TN is facing an early childhood sleep crisis. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends children under 5 receive a total of 10-14 hours of sleep per day, including naps, for optimum development and health outcomes. In the early childhood survey conducted this Spring, 47% of families reported that their children received less than 9 hours of sleep per day. The amount of sleep reported increased with income, however, 37% of Black and African-American households across income levels reported at least one of their children under 5 receives less than 7 hours of sleep per night.
- The public school system in the United States is legally required to provide an education for all children, regardless of citizenship. For undocumented children, however, unaddressed health needs due to a lack of insurance eligibility and familial fear of medical institutions can make it extremely difficult to excel in the classroom. It takes a very long time to determine TennCare eligibility and typically the majority of undocumented students do not qualify. Additionally, many undocumented children are now not eligible for CoverKids. LifeSpring accepts children without insurance and without documentation along with Clinica Medicos and Cherokee Health. Without navigators and insurance, school teachers are required to go above and beyond to follow up and make sure children get the health care they need.
- The Dept. of Children's services is legally obligated to provide for all health needs of undocumented children while they are in the custody of the state. For the majority that do not qualify for TennCare, DCS must pay providers directly to cover this cost. Due to a history of slow payment processing, many providers will not serve children in foster care whose bill will be paid by DCS.
- When families in deep poverty have Medicare health insurance through the state, they must make the hard choice between meeting basic needs like food, clothing, and housing, or paying a co-pay to receive much-need health services. Ultimately, many in deep poverty go without healthcare.
- There is an increasing pattern of behavior of families not taking their children for well visits and instead only using pediatricians for sick visits.
- Due to the insufficient reimbursement rate for clinical psychologists to diagnose autism spectrum disorders, there are fewer medical professionals willing to do so, creating a backlog in diagnostic appointments for families.
- Using a phone interpreter service is a current solution for serving families who do not speak English, but there are many complications with the logistics of this service and families' ability to understand what services their child is being recommended to receive.
- Early intervention is a child's best chance for correcting developmental delays before they begin school. Hispanic and Latino families, however, tend to be referred for developmental delay assessments later than other families.



## Systemic Barriers (cont.)

- Hamilton County used to have a countywide Ages and Stages questionnaire that was mailed to families of young children to direct families to their primary care physician with any developmental concerns. This countywide collection no longer exists. Now families with concerns about their child's development can call TN Early Intervention Services if their child is under three, or can have their child diagnosed during regular well-checks, but there is still no countywide awareness campaign around developmental delays.
- In every stakeholder interview, service providers working with families cited a lack of available and accessible mental health supports.
- The majority of students ages 3 to 8 with IEPs are served in classes with other students with IEPs and do not have access to typically developing peers, when research shows inclusive classrooms are beneficial for all children enrolled.
- Children with developmental delays in child care and those with IEPs in public school can be sent home for behavioral issues, which is especially challenging for children being raised by grandparents without access to transportation. There is a need for educator training on the difference between developmental issues and challenging behaviors and the appropriate response to those behaviors.

## SPOTLIGHT ON WHAT'S WORKING

### Inclusive Preschool Programming

Siskin Children's Institute - The center educates children with special needs and developmental disabilities, such as Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, and autism spectrum disorders, as well as typically developing children in an **inclusive environment** where children learn and play together. In this model, typically developing children learn the important value of acceptance and diversity, while children with special needs often model their behaviors based on typically developing children, helping them become more **independent, social and engaged**.

Signal Centers – Signal Centers, Inc. partners with the Hamilton County Schools to provide care for 55 children between the ages of 3-5 years who have IEPs and to provide vision, orientation & mobility, and other assistive technology services for children of all ages. A NAEYC accredited site, the agency also collaborates with the City of Chattanooga's Head Start and Early Head Start programs, and serves private-pay families, creating a fully inclusive environment for children and families to thrive.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

### AS INDIVIDUALS

- Learn the developmental milestones for children
- Do simple activities (like those found at [ChattanoogaBasics.org](http://ChattanoogaBasics.org)) every day with children to help aid in brain development
- Read to children every day or sign up to tutor students in early literacy or math
- Ensure the young children in your life attend their recommended well-visits, not just go to the doctor when they're sick.

### AS ORGANIZATIONS

- Commit to waiting rooms and business practices that are trauma-informed and considerate of children and adults who might be overstimulated easily
- Implement family-friendly business policies for your employees
- Offer implicit bias, cultural competence, and poverty simulation trainings for public-facing employees

### AS ELECTED OFFICIALS

- Require government agency staff training on ACEs and trauma-informed customer service.





# HIGH-QUALITY BIRTH-8 LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

To begin by understanding the work already happening on the ground, existing programs and initiatives were mapped against five measures of success. We then proceeded to learn from the community through surveys, focus groups, and stakeholder interviews. The following pages contain a summary of the strengths and gaps for children and families within this domain, as explained to us by members of the community.

## BRIGHT START TN MEASURES OF SUCCESS (MOS)

These five measures, which will be tracked annually at the local and state level by the Bright Start TN network, are indicators by which we can tell if a child is benefiting from high-quality learning environments from birth to age 8.

HIGH-QUALITY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS BIRTH TO AGE 8				
				
<p><b>HIGH QUALITY EARLY CARE &amp; EDUCATION (AGE 0-5)</b> Percent of children birth-through-age-five receiving high-quality early care and education outside the home (centers, family homes, schools)</p>	<p><b>POSITIVE EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION CLIMATE</b> Percent of early care and education programs and schools integrating social-emotional strategies</p>	<p><b>REGULAR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE</b> Percent of children with regular attendance/not chronically absent (PreK-3)</p>	<p><b>GRADE LEVEL PROFICIENCY PRE-K to 2nd GRADE</b> Percent of children PreK-2nd grade on-track in reading, math and social-emotional competencies/ self-regulation, and good interpersonal skills.</p>	<p><b>SUMMER LEARNING</b> Percent of children who maintain reading and math gains over the summer</p>

**EXISTING INITIATIVES TO IMPACT MOS**

<b>DOMAIN 2: Increasing High Quality 0–8 Learning Environments</b>	
MEASURE OF SUCCESS	EXISTING PROGRAMS / INITIATIVES
<p><b>HIGH QUALITY EARLY CARE &amp; EDUCATION (AGE 0-5)</b> Percent of children birth-through-age-five receiving high quality early care and education outside the home (centers, family homes, schools)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality Matters Fund</li> <li>• Child Care Provider Network ChACEE</li> <li>• Creative Curriculum investment and implementation training by the City of Chattanooga’s Office of Early Learning for 50 child care providers in 2019</li> <li>• City’s OEL provider Financial literacy training and relationship introduction to local funders</li> <li>• City’s OEL racial equity training for teachers</li> <li>• Creative Discovery Museum’s STEAM Fellows program</li> <li>• Johnson Foundation grant for child care teacher PD</li> <li>• Wolftrap Teaching Arts in child care</li> <li>• TN Dept. of Human Services (TDHS) expansion grants for inclusion classrooms</li> <li>• TDHS-funded CCR&amp;R Small Business Academy</li> <li>• Tech Goes Home TN (for child care)</li> <li>• Chambliss Center - Shared Service Alliance</li> </ul>
<p><b>POSITIVE EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION CLIMATE</b> Percent of early care and education programs and schools integrating social-emotional strategies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Midtown Learning Community Building Strong Brains 6 Pillars pilot</li> <li>• ACEs awareness training by Early Matters working group to teacher and parent groups all over the County</li> <li>• Lena Professional Development for Literacy Improvement/ UTC research study</li> </ul>
<p><b>REGULAR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE</b> Percent of children with regular attendance/not chronically absent (PreK-3)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student Success Plans (HCS)</li> <li>• Community Schools &amp; Community Forward</li> <li>• HCS First Day Ready / Countdown to Kindergarten</li> <li>• HCS Field Trips for vocabulary expansion</li> </ul>
<p><b>GRADE LEVEL PROFICIENCY PRE-K to 2nd GRADE</b> Percent of children PreK-2nd grade on-track in reading, math and social-emotional competencies/ self-regulation, and good interpersonal skills.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student Success Plans</li> <li>• HCS and Early Matters “Camp K”</li> <li>• My Minutes Matter - implemented in MidTown</li> <li>• HCS EdConnect</li> <li>• New EL Literacy Curriculum at HCS</li> <li>• STEP in-school tutoring</li> <li>• Dolly Parton Imagination Library (Signal Centers)</li> <li>• Teach for America</li> <li>• Connected Literacy Tutoring (Urban League)</li> <li>• HCS’s RTI and Multi-Tiered Support Systems</li> </ul>
<p><b>SUMMER LEARNING</b> Percent of children who maintain reading and math gains over the summer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Out-of-School Time Alliance literacy training and quality assessments (after school)</li> <li>• HCS Summer Reach</li> <li>• GEAR UP Camp through Univ. of TN at Chattanooga</li> <li>• Signal Centers Vision Camp for youth who are blind or have low vision</li> </ul>

## DOMAIN ASSETS:

### WHAT HELPS CHILDREN AND FAMILIES THRIVE IN THIS DOMAIN?

- Local families know child care is good for child development. Among low-income survey respondents, **93.6 %** felt that early childhood education was important for their child's development.
- Families who qualify for a federal child care tuition certificate have long since been required to pay a "copay" for accessing child care - until August 2022. The TN Department of Human Services, who oversees child care licensing and funding in the state, has done away with the copay for families accessing child care certificates until at least the end of the year.<sup>14</sup> This will, however, go back to normal after December 31, 2022.
- The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act has been put into place in order to help protect and provide services for children and families who are experiencing homelessness. For example, Head Start makes provisions to allow a student to be enrolled even though they may not have all of the required paperwork. Hamilton County Schools has a homeless liaison in place to provide services and support for homeless families, including providing transportation from homeless shelters to a student's school or origin to provide stability and continuity.

### A NOTE ABOUT TISA

In 2022, Tennessee lawmakers passed historic legislation bringing \$1 billion in new, recurring dollars for Tennessee's students, the largest recurring investment for public education in our state's history. Tennessee's K-12 public schools will now transition to a student-based funding formula starting in the 2023-24 school year. Under the Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement (TISA) law, base funding is set at a rate of \$6,860 per pupil, then additional funding is distributed to districts for students who are from economically disadvantaged families, have unique learning needs, or live in rural or impoverished communities.

This is a *funding* calculation, however, not a *spending plan*, so it will be up to the local school districts as to how they allocate the increase in funds across schools. Our children deserve to benefit from the funding generated by their unique needs. When the time comes, we urge school districts to equitably allocate these increased funds to benefit students falling in the economically disadvantaged category to provide them the support and quality learning they need to thrive.

## SPOTLIGHT ON WHAT'S WORKING

### ISAIAH 117 HOUSE

At Chambliss Center for Children - Children who are removed from their homes out of concern for their welfare are typically taken to the Department of Children's Services Offices to await foster placement. This wait can be several hours to nearly a full day. These children often have nothing with them and are scared and lonely.

The new Isaiah 117 House at Chambliss Center for Children will provide a calming home environment where these children instead can be brought to wait – a place that is safe with friendly and loving trained volunteers who provide clean clothes, smiles, toys, food, and more. This much needed resource is set to open this Winter.

- CCR&R Services provide referrals, resources, and a variety of trainings for early educators at DHS licensed centers and to families.
- If a child is in foster care, they are automatically considered categorically eligible for Head Start and are considered a family of one. Therefore, the income of the foster parent does not come into play when applying for a slot.
- Head Start accepts children with varying disabilities for their program. They also receive more points in terms of selection criteria. Head Start also sets aside 10% of their enrollment for children with disabilities. Therefore, a child that may be over income may still qualify based on this provision. They also provide transportation to speech services for those sites that do not offer it in the building. This helps to remove barriers to services. Family Support Advocates can also attend meetings and/or provide transportation to PALS meetings.(IFSP/IEP)
- Nationally, parents of young children with special needs are three times more likely to experience job disruptions because of lack of access to child care.<sup>18</sup> In Tennessee, the Dept. of Human Services is offering training and funding to child care providers who will modify their classrooms and accept children with disabilities, in an effort to increase the number of inclusion classrooms.
- In some schools, family engagement and communication, along with overall school culture are leading to academic growth in some of the traditionally lowest performing elementary schools in Hamilton County. [Don't miss the case study on two of TN's former priority schools, Woodmore and Clifton Hills, being published Fall 2022.](#)

# WHAT'S RIGHT WITH LITERACY?

We talk a lot about what's wrong with literacy, both in our community and across the country. Here's a look at some of our local literacy assets that are tipping the scales in our favor.



**TENNESSEE'S "SOUNDS FIRST" APPROACH.** The State of Tennessee's comprehensive and evidence-based vision for literacy, Reading 360, prioritizes the science of reading, foundational literacy training for educators, and screening and interventions for students who are falling behind their peers. The *Tennessee Literacy Success Act*, passed in January 2021, strengthens this vision, requiring all teachers, including those in teacher prep programs, be trained on foundational literacy skills, and all school districts adopt high-quality instructional materials.



**HIGH-DOSAGE, LOW-RATIO TUTORING.** Children in Hamilton County now have access to more free tutoring opportunities than ever before, made possible by the Tennessee Department of Education's All Corps grants. The tutoring programs are administered by Hamilton County Schools, the Urban League of Greater Chattanooga, and the United Way of Greater Chattanooga both in school and during out-of-school time.



**VOLUNTARY PRE-K.** One in four 4-year-olds are enrolled in the Hamilton County Schools Voluntary PreK program. For children who do not have early childhood education or PreK experience, HCS offers a summer program called CampK for rising Kindergarten students.



**DOLLY PARTON IMAGINATION LIBRARY.** 57% of children under 5 in Hamilton County are enrolled in the Dolly Parton Imagination Library monthly mailing book program.



**PUBLIC LIBRARIES.** Adults and children alike can benefit from the 6 public library branches in Hamilton County, with pop-up locations in library deserts, and storytime programs taking place downtown.



**READ 20.** A local program encouraging families to read aloud with their children at least 20 minutes each day. Read 20 distributes free books throughout the county and conducts read-alouds from their Readmobile. They also developed Hamilton County's first Kindergarten screener used by child care providers, charter schools, and homeschool chapters.



**PARENT LETTERS.** As a part of each school district's foundational literacy skills plan, Hamilton County Schools now sends letters explaining areas for growth to the parents of all K-5 students who are found to be "at risk" for significant reading deficiencies, based on the universal reading screener.



**TVAAS.** While the district's ELA growth score was low, the overall number of children reading on-track or mastered in third grade has continued to climb and once again was higher than the state average.



**OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME.** Over 30 afterschool and summer program providers participating in the Chattanooga 2.0 Out-of-School Time Alliance were trained this year on how to incorporate foundational literacy skills into their programs.



**CREATIVE CURRICULUM.** In 2019, the City of Chattanooga's Office of Early Learning purchased the same high-quality curriculum being used in Hamilton County Schools pre-k programs for 50 local child care providers.



**READY4K TEXT MESSAGING.** Through the Governor's Early Literacy Foundation (GELF), Hamilton County Schools' families with pre-K through 3rd grade students receive three weekly text messages with facts, easy tips and activities on how to help each child learn and grow by building on existing family routines. Text messages are matched with each child's age and offer developmentally appropriate facts and suggestions.



**CHATTANOOGA BASICS.** In 2018, the Early Matters action team of Chattanooga 2.0 partnered to create a local evidence-based campaign aimed at equipping parents with brain boosting tools. The Basics are five, simple activities that any adult can do with a young child to encourage brain development. This program, while on hiatus during the pandemic, will now be hosted within the City of Chattanooga's Department of Early Learning. Interested parents and caregivers can visit [www.chattanoogabasics.org](http://www.chattanoogabasics.org) to learn more.

# DOMAIN CHALLENGES:

## WHAT IS NOT WORKING AS WELL AS IT SHOULD?

### THE UNADDRESSED NEEDS

It cannot be ignored that child care is currently in a crisis. And the only people not suffering from this crisis are those privileged to not depend on child care. But in Hamilton County, the parents of over 16,544 children under 6 (69%)<sup>19</sup> depend on child care for work, innumerable employers depend on child care for their employees to be engaged in the workforce, and 1,045 child care teachers depend on this broken system for a paycheck that will barely cover their bills. Addressing the care crisis has the potential to improve families' economic security and well-being while accelerating economic growth in the short and long term.

Families struggle to access affordable and high-quality early care and education. There are 12,950 regulated child care seats and approximately 900 Voluntary PreK (VPK) seats in 44 classrooms for the 21,300 children under 5 in Hamilton County and community leaders suggest that there are significant access gaps. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, **child care is affordable if it costs no more than 7% of a family's income.**



By this standard, only **13.8%** of Tennessee families can afford infant care.<sup>14</sup> Currently, in Hamilton County, child care burden for a household with two children equates to **21%** of median household income.<sup>22</sup>

The number of family child care homes is decreasing across the nation and in Tennessee which is concerning, because this is typically an affordable option for families who cannot afford center-based care.<sup>23</sup> And **child care deserts are a real issue**, both in the urban core and the rural areas.

### \$\$ COSTLY CARE

Providing high-quality child care is expensive—especially for infants and toddlers—making it difficult for the child care market to respond to the needs of parents who cannot afford high prices.

Safe and age-appropriate care for the youngest children requires low staff ratios and small group sizes, which are costly to deliver.

The most sustainable solution for child care is federal and state investment. Babies today could be in kindergarten by the time that comes to fruition, however, so every year we kick the can down the line, more children show up to kindergarten ill-equipped with the skills necessary to excel.

High turnover in conjunction with the lack of substitute child care teachers means that implementation supports like coaching, planning, and technical assistance are not happening regularly for those teachers who do remain in the field. High turnover also means that children are not receiving that continuity of care that is so important for optimum brain development.

**\$10,800 / YEAR** 

The typical cost of center-based care for an infant in TN

- 20%** of the median household income of Chattanooga-Hamilton County
- 72%** of the income for a single parent earning minimum wage

For families with an infant and a child in pre-K, child care costs rise to

- 35%** of the median household income in Chattanooga-Hamilton County
- 129%** of the income for a single parent earning minimum wage

In the public school realm, there is also room for improvement regarding economically disadvantaged children. One such area is the need to decrease the suspension and expulsion of students with disabilities, particularly those who are students of color. Another is the challenge of transporting - both the cost and logistics - children in transition and children in the foster care system who are living away from their home school to their school of origin.

While we are fortunate to have Voluntary pre-K classrooms at all, **75% of Hamilton County's 4-year olds do not attend the free pre-K programs in our public schools.** All children benefit from quality early education environments, but economically disadvantaged children tend to show the most gains when participating in voluntary pre-K programs. And in some of the lowest performing elementary schools in the school district, there are no pre-k classrooms, vastly limiting access to quality early education for economically disadvantaged students.

**SERVING THE GROWING & DIVERSE LATINO POPULATION**

The 1990 Census showed that Latino residents made up less than 1% of Hamilton County's population.

Thirty years later, the 2020 Census showed that Latino residents made up 7%, but a lack of Latinx participation is suspected due to distrust and fear.

Under Federal law, states and local educational agencies are obligated to provide all children – regardless of immigration status – with equal access to public education at the elementary and secondary level.

Hamilton County Schools reports the local Latino student population to be 15-20%. This does not include the parents and siblings that are not in school, or any additional family members that do not have children. Because of this, local leaders believe a more accurate Latino population for Hamilton County is 15%-17%.

There is a rich and diverse heritage among our Latino residents as well. Two thirds have family ties to Guatemala, one-fifth are Mexican, and others hail from Honduras, El Salvador, Colombia, Venezuela, and Puerto Rico.

# SYSTEMIC BARRIERS AND NEEDS IMPACTING EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

- There is only one child care provider in the entire county who provides night shift child care on a sliding fee scale, making it affordable to economically disadvantaged families. Only 9 out of 174 child care providers offer a sliding fee scale at all.
- There is no dedicated stream of funding to support the unbalanced early childhood system. Child care funding predominantly comes from families paying tuition, so the cost to provide quality care is passed on to the families. The majority of Hamilton County families cannot afford to pay the true cost of quality care and for economically disadvantaged families, tuition costs are altogether unaffordable. Of those child care providers who do offer the highest quality care, some rely on up to 15 or more additional sources of income to cover the cost of operating, so as not to pass on that financial burden to families.
- The TN Dept. Human Services child care certificate, which is funded by the federal Child Care Block Development Grant, does not cover the cost to provide *quality* child care or pay child care teachers a livable wage.
- In order to receive Smart Steps child care tuition assistance certificate, which end at age 5, a primary caregiver must prove they are currently working or in school at least 30-hours/week. Without a grace period to prove this employment, families in poverty, particularly single mothers, or those without access to family assistance, are often not able to find care for their child while they interview and search for a job to support their family. Families First certificates on the other hand, do provide certificates to families on welfare who are seeking a job.
- Many working families, especially those who fall in the United Way ALICE category (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) are on a benefits cliff, meaning they make too much to qualify for child care tuition assistance, but too little to be able to afford the high cost of care.
- During the pandemic, an unintended negative consequence of federal relief in the form of free school lunches was that many parents did not submit their free and reduced lunch applications. Because the state's Title I funding given to high-poverty schools is based on the number of free and reduced lunch applications, there are approximately five schools that will lose funding they count on for providing individualized supports to their enrolled students. Countless children are also now not receiving lunches this school year.
- Currently, Tennessee does not have a state-level birth-to-18 personal identification database that would allow child care and school districts to input information about a child (like [PEIMS in TX](#)).
- Too often, economically disadvantaged families who are trying their hardest are called to school to be reprimanded for their child's behavior. Doling out punitive action without first recognizing families for what they *are* doing well leads to strained family-school relationships.



## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

### As Individuals

- Advocate for quality education for all by contacting your local school board representative and telling them you want new funding generated by students in subgroups to go towards the schools where those students are enrolled.
- Learn which candidates support improving early childhood and vote in local elections.
- Caregivers: engage with child care or school teachers to learn how to support your children's learning at home.
- Volunteer at your local child care or school in cleanup or other projects
- Donate to donorschoose.org and help teachers stock their classrooms with items that economically disadvantaged families may not be able to afford to contribute
- Donate to local 501c3 child care providers who serve economically disadvantaged children
- Contact your local elementary school to see if you can cover the cost of book fair books for ED students

### As Organizations

- Implement family-friendly business policies for your employees like generous leave policies for maternal/paternal leave or offering alternate work schedules for parents with young children
- Consider how you could host a child care program onsite or work with a child care center to pay for spots for your employees' children

### As Elected Officials

- Create dedicated capital resources to build supply in child care deserts by renovating current facilities and investing in existing programs.
- Work with a strategic public financing manager to better understand the amount of money being spent on children – where it's coming from and where it's going.
- Allocate more funding to hire additional supports for mental health and restorative justice.

## SPOTLIGHT ON WHAT'S WORKING

### DEPARTMENT OF EARLY LEARNING

In 2017, the City of Chattanooga established the first local "Office of Early Learning" to support child care in the city limits and equip families with early childhood resources. In 2020, Mayor Tim Kelly elevated this to a Department of Early Learning. In this expanded capacity, the department also oversees the local HeadStart programs, as well as Foster Grandparents, and the Community Forward community school initiative.



# SUPPORTED FAMILIES & SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

To begin by understanding the work already happening on the ground, existing programs and initiatives were mapped against five measures of success. We then proceeded to learn from the community through surveys, focus groups, and stakeholder interviews. The following pages contain a summary of the strengths and gaps for children and families within this domain, as explained to us by members of the community.

## BRIGHT START TN MEASURES OF SUCCESS (MOS)

Healthy parents who are equipped with the resources and skills necessary to care for their children are likely to engage in higher quality interactions with their children. When families face poverty and economic insecurity, the associated chronic stress can affect the quality of relationships between parents and children, the safety of home environments for children, and longer-term child development.<sup>22</sup>

These five measures, which will be tracked annually at the local and state level by the Bright Start TN network, are indicators by which we can tell if families are supportive of their child's development and feel supported by their community.

SUPPORTED FAMILIES AND SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES				
				
<p><b>SAFE AT HOME</b> Rate of investigated/assessed child abuse or neglect per 1,000 children in the population</p>	<p><b>POSITIVE PARENT/CHILD INTERACTIONS</b> Average number of minutes per day that parents talk or play with their children</p>	<p><b>READING WITH CHILDREN</b> Average number of days parent or family members read to their child</p>	<p><b>SUPPORTS FOR FAMILIES</b> Percent of new mothers reporting access to sufficient social supports</p>	<p><b>SKILLED AND KNOWLEDGEABLE PARENTS</b> Percent of parents reporting sufficient knowledge of child development and parenting skills</p>

## EXISTING INITIATIVES TO IMPACT MOS

<b>DOMAIN 3: Supported Families and Supportive Communities</b>	
MEASURE OF SUCCESS	EXISTING PROGRAMS / INITIATIVES
<p><b>SAFE AT HOME</b> Rate of investigated/assessed child abuse or neglect per 1,000 children in the population</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Forward (formerly Baby University)</li> <li>• SEAD Framework HCS</li> <li>• Children’s Advocacy Center and coordination with local Police</li> <li>• Nurture the Next home visiting</li> </ul>
<p><b>POSITIVE PARENT/CHILD INTERACTIONS</b> Average number of minutes per day that parents talk or play with their children</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chattanooga Basics - 5 principles for every adult who interacts with children</li> <li>• Monthly Free Nights offered at Creative Discovery Museum</li> <li>• Chattanooga Public Library story time programs</li> </ul>
<p><b>READING WITH CHILDREN</b> Average number of days parent or family members read to this child</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read 20 free books &amp; read alouds</li> <li>• Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library fulfilled by Signal Centers</li> <li>• Chattanooga Public Library Storytime Programs</li> </ul>
<p><b>SUPPORTS FOR FAMILIES</b> Percent of new mothers reporting access to sufficient social supports</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Forward</li> <li>• Catholic Charities pregnancy help</li> <li>• Family Connects feasibility study by the City</li> <li>• College Advisement Mentors (CAM) through the Public Education Foundation program</li> <li>• Creative Discovery Museum Parent Interns</li> <li>• Chattanooga Down Syndrome Society, free STEP Training</li> <li>• Family Voices</li> </ul>
<p><b>SKILLED AND KNOWLEDGEABLE PARENTS</b> Percent of parents reporting sufficient knowledge of child development and parenting skills</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chattanooga Basics</li> <li>• Catholic Charities</li> <li>• The former Early Matters Hospital Visitation Program</li> <li>• La Paz Promotores program</li> <li>• Nurture the Next, PAFT, and more home visitation</li> <li>• Tech Goes Home</li> <li>• Nurturing Parent 6-week Classes at PFCA</li> <li>• Urban League of Greater Chattanooga – Parent Classes</li> </ul>



## DOMAIN ASSETS:

### WHAT HELPS CHILDREN AND FAMILIES THRIVE IN THIS DOMAIN?

- Infants and toddlers develop and learn at exponential rates as they explore and engage with the environments and adults around them. In order to best support their health and development, families need access to information and services.
- Families, providers, and communities agree that there are beautiful places and cultural institutions available for families that aid in their young children’s development. From libraries to museums, to places of worship and recreation, Chattanooga-Hamilton County boasts many resources and spaces that make it a place where families can thrive.
- In our 2021 focus groups with families, however, we learned that these safe, high-quality recreational facilities spaces are not always convenient or easy to access for *all* children. Since our Access to Quality Child Care report was published in 2021, City of Chattanooga Mayor, Tim Kelly, committed to reinventing Chattanooga as a city in a park—where a system of parks and protected open spaces connect people to each other, where all neighborhoods have well-loved and well-used parks, and where nature and its benefits are integrated throughout the city.<sup>15</sup>
- The role of school in a community can be so much more than a building for learning, but also a central hub for community connection. Schools such as Woodmore Elementary

School and Clifton Hills Elementary maintain clear and consistent communication with families. In focus groups we conducted, families reported feeling as though the school teachers and leadership wanted to see them and their child succeed, providing them tools to help support their child's learning at home.

- Elsewhere in the county, HCS is home to five “Community Schools” seeking to strengthen students and families by removing barriers and creating opportunities through embedded wrap-around services and high-quality programs. Community Forward is a City initiative to increase community school supports as well.
- Chattanooga-Hamilton County has an extensive network of 527 faith-based organizations that support and uplift families and children.<sup>13</sup>
- This is also one of the most generous communities in the state of TN. In 2020, 2.8% of individuals' net profits were donated to charity. There are also dozens of charitable foundations in Hamilton County.

## SPOTLIGHT ON WHAT'S WORKING

### TECH GOES HOME

Tech Goes Home Chattanooga (TGH CHA) offers programs for adults, school-aged children and preschoolers. The program provides 15 hours of digital skills training to help participants acquire the skills to be able to access information and resources online. Training is available for parents to learn how to better interface with their school and child care.

Upon completion of the course, participants also have the option to purchase a new Chromebook for only \$50. The program also offers assistance in securing low-cost home Internet service.

### EDCONNECT

In 2020, an unrepresented public-private partnership called EdConnect was established. HCS EdConnect is a program that provides no-cost home internet to students in Hamilton County Schools who qualify, in partnership with public utility, Electric Power Board (EPB).

Both programs are facilitated and managed by the Enterprise Center.

## DOMAIN CHALLENGES:

### WHAT IS NOT WORKING AS WELL AS IT SHOULD?

#### THE UNADDRESSED NEEDS

Parents are the child's first and best teacher... and their first and most important nurses, coaches, safety officers, nutritionists and moral guides. They also are their children's first and most important advocates and care coordinators.<sup>13</sup> Most parents, most of the time, are able to fulfill these roles, identifying and coordinating appropriate, affordable services (such as child care and health care) and voluntary supports and activities (such as library visits and recreation and playtime programs) for their children. But there remain far too many instances where parents cannot find or afford the health, education and social services their children need, or the services they locate do not actually meet the children's needs.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, parents and grandparents may desire to help in their child's development, but not know how to read themselves.

The saying goes "it takes a village" to raise a child. Yet despite the seeming "connectedness" of living in the digital age, families find themselves raising children in a disconnected and divided world. In the early childhood survey conducted by Early Matters, parents expressed high levels of dissatisfaction with the lack of parent groups in this community. Across the county, we heard over and over that the majority of parents have a strong, innate desire to see their children excel in school and life and parents of young children want to do what's best to support their child's development.

But as we found in the early childhood survey, many parents of all races are not aware of the developmental milestones in early childhood and/or do not have the tools to nurture their child's brain development. Resources are available, but how do we better connect parents to them?

A child's relationships with the adults in their life are the most important influences on their brain development. Loving relationships with responsive, dependable adults are essential to a child's healthy development. These relationships begin at home, with parents and family, but also include child care providers, teachers and other members of the community.



Parents should not be left alone to raise their children during the most important time for brain development. And yet, few supports exist for parents once they bring a child home from the hospital.

Supporting our community's children will take an intentional partnership between parents and service providers. For this reason, we also recognize the responsibility on the part of the service providers in each of these domains to support parents in their support of child development.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

### As Organizations

- Implement family-friendly business policies for your employees
- Work with community groups to bring education and awareness to economically disadvantaged families about informal education or career exploration opportunities
- If hosting an event in the evening, provide a meal and child care for families so they can truly engage in your program

### As Elected Officials

- Examine policies and procedures to ensure they do not disproportionately impact families with young children.

## SPOTLIGHT ON WHAT'S WORKING

### HAMILTON COUNTY CHILDREN'S CABINET

The Hamilton County Children's Cabinet is a body formed in 2019 to provide space for governmental agencies and community stakeholders to coordinate supports and services, develop common goals, share and compare data and address gaps or duplications in resources. This platform ultimately equips our leaders to craft better policies and decisions, which, in turn, allow the programs and services they govern to have a greater impact on children and youth.

It is currently co-chaired by Superintendent of Hamilton County Schools, Justin Robertson, Hamilton County Mayor, Weston Wamp, and City of Chattanooga Mayor, Tim Kelly.

# SYSTEMIC BARRIERS AND NEEDS IMPACTING EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

- Families who cannot afford housing due to rising rent and home prices face a myriad of issues in supporting their children, despite desires to do so.
- Often, for those families working, yet still living in poverty, taxes, such as property tax, can inhibit a family from paying for other basic needs.
- There is an overarching distrust of Dept. of Children Services by families, particularly those who are undocumented, to the point that families will not accept help.
- Check advance, car loan sharks, and rent-to-own schemes poach on low income families.
- TN now has over 9,000 children in foster care, however the number of foster care homes is insufficient to meet the demand, and the grim reality is that some children are still forced to sleep in the office of their caseworker.
- Employees who work for Dept. of Children's Services or a foster care contractor are not allowed to become foster parents themselves, ruling out many willing and available homes for children.
- Demand for the services of The Department of Children's Services' has continued to increase since 2020 largely due to children being home during the pandemic, resulting in occasional case backlog.
- Language barriers exist between service providers and Latino families.
- Public transportation does not extend across the entire county. While there are many museums, libraries, and enriching activities for children in our community, the downtown location and public parking is a true barrier for economically disadvantaged families, particularly those who do not speak and read English. If a family receives an invitation for free admission, but then receives a parking ticket during their time downtown, they will not return.





**EVIDENCE-BASED STRATEGIES  
& IMPLEMENTATION**

# EVIDENCE-BASED STRATEGIES & IMPLEMENTATION

All strategies within the plan were chosen for their ability to enable better support for economically disadvantaged children from birth to age 8 and their families in Hamilton County, TN.

Implementation partners are those organizations who have agreed to implement or scale the evidence-based strategy and provide continuous feedback on the progress to the Early Matters action team.

Implementation stages are:

- Stage 1) An implementation timeline will be established among partners by the end of the 2022 calendar year. For this reason, measures and scale of strategy may not yet be known;
- Stage 2) Strategy is in planning phase and will launch in 2022;
- Stage 3) Strategy is already in motion.

Type of Impact: Each strategy is labeled as to whether it will increase [access](#), [capacity](#), or [communication](#).

## POLICY CHANGES REQUIRED TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO QUALITY SERVICES

As we think critically about how best to support children in their community, we must also consider the systems within which we conduct our daily lives. For lasting, impactful change, some policies and procedures will need to be updated and improved so that they truly work for children and families.

In each section below, we have listed the policies and procedures recommended to improve access to quality early childhood care, education, and services.

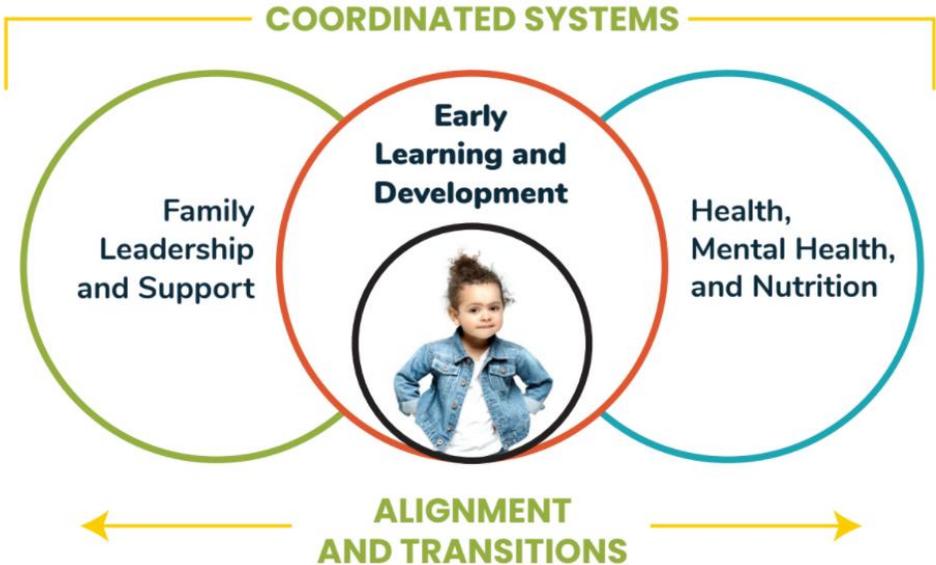
*Not all strategies have partners identified at this time. If you're interested in getting involved, email [jennifer@chatt2.org](mailto:jennifer@chatt2.org).*

# CONDITIONS TO ENABLE SUCCESS

Over the last few decades in Hamilton County, many programs have started and stopped as it relates to addressing systemic issues in the three early childhood domains: **Family Leadership and Support**, **Early Learning and Development**, and **Health**. Passionate, skilled people in our community have worked to make an impact in the lives of children and families, but eventually, funding for even the most promising programs will run out if a significant impact is not shown. For the proposed strategies and initiatives in this plan to make the GREATEST impact in our community, they must:

- Be two-generational, building family well-being by intentionally and simultaneously working with children and the adults in their lives together;
- Utilize a whole child approach to addressing needs across all three early childhood domains (Healthy Development; Quality Learning Environments; and Family Supports);
- Become **institutionalized, sustained, and made available to all children**, if proven to make a positive impact locally;
- Be accepted and championed by the community members who benefit from them;
- Include evaluation and coordinated data / recording of progress;
- Be implemented by partners willing to elevate barriers and roadblocks;
- Include a coordinated and continuous communications campaign;

## CHATTANOOGA-HAMILTON COUNTY'S EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM





# STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING PHYSICAL HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH, & DEVELOPMENT

- School-Based Health Clinics
- Scale evidence-based home visiting programs like Nurse Family Partnership
- Scale the Reach Out and Read program
- Onboard pediatricians into the Chattanooga Basics network
- Increase the number of family service providers adopting trauma-informed practices
- Recruit Colgate Dental Trucks to visit more child care providers

## POLICY CHANGES REQUIRED TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO QUALITY SERVICES

- Eliminate co-pays for medical services for all families (including undocumented families) below 200% of the poverty level.
- Adequate insurance reimbursement for cost of care for clinical psychologists to diagnose autism spectrum disorders.
- Increase access to mental health supports for children and families.
- Ensuring support for parity in telehealth reimbursement for mental and physical health visits.

## SCALE SCHOOL-BASED HEALTH CLINICS

### (INCREASING ACCESS)

Datapoint: Youth living in impoverished communities have higher rates of asthma, substance use, anxiety and depression, and obesity and are at elevated risk of not having regular health maintenance visits.<sup>14</sup>

Strategy Description: In the Fall of 2022, Hamilton County Schools will open two school-based health clinics at Howard Connect Academy middle school and Calvin Donelson Elementary. These two clinics will serve as a health hub for the community and allow families to access a nurse practitioner without having to pick up a child from school and drive them to a separate appointment. Many families in these communities do not have a primary care doctor, so when they get sick with something minor, they often go to the emergency room. To qualify, all students need is TennCare and parental consent. Howard

Connect will be the primary hub and will have a nurse practitioner on site to see students, staff and families, and the Calvin Donaldson location will offer tele-health to the Howard Connect site. Placing critically needed services like medical, behavioral, dental, and vision care directly in schools ensures all young people, no matter their zip code, have equal opportunity to learn and grow.

Estimated number of families and children served: Thousands

Measure of Success impacted: Improve Physical Health; Reduce Chronic Absenteeism

Implementation Partners: Hamilton County Schools; Erlanger Children's Hospital

Implementation Stage: Stage 2

Funding: Self-funded through existing sources such as TennCare, but additional infrastructure funding needed to expand to more schools

## SCALE ERLANGER NURSE FAMILY PARTNERSHIP (NFP) HOME VISITATION PROGRAM

### (INCREASING ACCESS)

Datapoint: 28% of low-income families who responded to the early childhood survey were not aware of pregnancy or postpartum home visitation services. A 2018 research synthesis found strong evidence that early childhood home visiting can improve children's socioemotional development, reduce rates of postpartum depression, and increase access to pre- and post-natal care for mother and child. These effects are long-term, lasting at least until the child is 7 years old.<sup>30</sup>

Strategy Description: NFP is a free program for WIC-eligible women who are pregnant with their first baby who enroll before 28 weeks. Mothers are connected to a registered nurse who will provide the support, advice and information needed to have a healthy pregnancy, a healthy baby and be a great mom. The nurse works with the mother on goal setting and mothers can earn points to spend on baby-related items. The in-home service is provided until the child is 24 months old. The program currently serves 110 mothers with the capacity to serve 200 mothers. There is one Spanish-speaking nurse.

Estimated number of families and children served: 200

Measure of Success impacted: Decrease infant mortality, decrease low birth weight, increase the number of children improving with early intervention services

Implementation Partners: Erlanger Hospital

Implementation Stage: Stage 2

Funding: Funding already acquired through federal grants

## SCALE REACH OUT AND READ

### (INCREASING CAPACITY)

Datapoint: Children in low-income families lack essential one-on-one reading time. The average child growing up in a middle-class family has been exposed to 1,000 to 1,700 hours of one-on-one picture book reading. The average child growing up in a less economically stable family, in contrast, has only been exposed to 25 hours of one-on-one reading." (McQuillan, 1998).

Strategy Description: At the beginning of the visit, the pediatrician gives each child a new, developmentally-appropriate book to take home with them. The doctor conducts their developmental assessment during the appointment, using the book, while modeling for parents how to read with their nonverbal child. Books are offered in 28 different languages. Books can even be useful for families who don't read—we encourage them to talk about the story that the pictures tell. At the end of the program, every Reach Out and Read child has a home library of books—each given with the advice to families that they are their child's first and most important teacher. As they read and spend time together, families form lasting connections and children learn new skills that serve them well throughout their lives. To further collaborative efforts, pediatricians could then offer to sign up families for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library free monthly book delivery service.

Estimated number of families and children served: 500 new children per year

Measure of Success impacted: Positive Parent / Child Interactions: Average number of days parent or family members read to this child

Implementation Partners: Seeking Partners

Implementation Stage: Stage 1

Funding: Seeking Funding



## CHATTANOOGA BASICS FOR MEDICAL PROVIDERS pt. 1

(INCREASING CAPACITY)

Datapoint: 80% of brain growth happens within the first three years of life.

Strategy Description: The Basics are five fun, simple, and powerful ways that every family can use to help every child have a great start in life. Integrate the Basics principles routinely in prenatal, well-baby and behavioral visits, to give parents an easy resource for boosting brain development.

Measure of Success impacted: Positive Parent / Child Interactions; Percent of parents reporting sufficient knowledge of child development and parenting skills; Average number of days parent or family members read to this child

Implementation Partners: City of Chattanooga's Department of Early Learning; seeking medical partners to pilot

Implementation Stage: Stage 1

Funding: Seeking Funding

## SCALE NUMBER OF FAMILY SERVICE PROVIDERS ADOPTING TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES

(INCREASING CAPACITY)

Datapoint: Between March and October 2020, emergency department visits for children with mental health emergencies rose by 24% among kids age 5-11.

Strategy Description: Trauma-informed care is important for achieving health equity because it helps traditionally marginalized people or people who have experienced trauma to trust their healthcare providers and engage more deeply with their care. There are multiple surveys and assessments, along with best practices in trauma-informed care, that can be adopted by local service providers.

Estimated number of families and children served: Dependent upon adoption

Measure of Success impacted: Social-emotional health; Positive care and climate

Implementation Partners: Hamilton County Children's Cabinet members; seeking partners to pilot

Implementation Stage: Stage 1

Funding: This strategy is self-funded by those providers who opt in

## RECRUIT COLGATE DENTAL TRUCKS FOR CHILD CARE

### (INCREASING ACCESS)

Datapoint: Tooth decay is most common chronic childhood illness. The effects can impede a child's development and impact participation in learning opportunities due to illness caused by lack of treatment

Strategy Description: Solicit Colgate Bright Smiles mobile dental vans to make a tour of stops at local child care agencies, with parental consent. Staffed by volunteer dental professionals, mobile dental vans feature two dental chairs for conducting dental screenings and a waiting area where kids learn about healthy habits before their screening. This is currently a program utilized by local HeadStart programs.

Estimated number of families and children served: 500

Measure of Success impacted: Dental health

Implementation Partners: Child Care Resource and Referral Network of TN

Implementation Stage: Stage 1

Funding: Free of charge



# STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING HIGH-QUALITY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS 0-8

## Birth to Pre-K Strategies

- Micro-Center Networks
- Child Care Finder
- Child Care Talent Development Initiatives
- Adopting Pyramid Model for behavior in more child care
- Support more Family, Friend, and Neighbor Child Care providers on the pathway to licensure
- Increase child care providers sharing Chattanooga Basics with families
- Increase capacity for tracking early childhood data

## Kindergarten to Third Grade Strategies

- Kindergarten Transition and Alignment
- LENA Professional Development for Literacy Improvement
- Scale Hamilton County Schools student success planning and onboard community partners

## Out-of-School Time Strategies

- Comprehensive Community Literacy Plan
- Out-of-School Time Talent Development and Training
- High-Dosage, Low-Ratio Tutoring

## POLICY CHANGES REQUIRED TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO QUALITY LEARNING

- Increase the number of child care providers who provide night shift child care
- Increased funding for the early childhood system including PreK
- Dept. Human Services can adopt a true cost of quality child care calculator on which to base tuition certificate reimbursement
- Dept. of Human Services could allow a one-month grace period, before having to show employment proof of 30-hours/week, in order for single mothers to qualify for a child care certificate
- Extend special scholarships for families on the benefits cliff and cannot afford child care, but do not qualify for child care certificates
- Create a state-level birth-to-18 personal identification database that would allow child care and school districts to input information about a child (like PEIMS in TX)
- School administrators can improve asset framing prior to punitive action to improve family-school relationships

## BIRTH TO PRE-K STRATEGIES

### MICRO-CENTER NETWORKS

#### (INCREASING ACCESS)

Datapoint: Sixty-one percent of children ages 3-4 in Tennessee aren't enrolled in child care or school, due in large part to lack of availability and access. Of child care available to all ages, 11% of licensed programs offer child care that extends after 6 p.m., and less than 5% offer child care before 6 a.m.

Strategy Description: A micro-center network includes multiple, one-classroom child care 'centers' located in an existing public or charter school, hospital, office building, community center, or the like. Ideally, the space and related facility costs (e.g. maintenance, janitorial, utilities), as well as furnishings/equipment, are donated by the school or private sector sponsor—keeping start-up and overhead costs to a minimum.

Each micro-center is equipped and staffed to provide top-quality center-based care under the leadership of a Network Hub.

Estimated number of families and children served: 180 new early childhood seats over 3 years

Measure of Success impacted: High-quality early care and education (age 0-5)

Implementation Partners: Chambliss Center for Children

Implementation Stage: Stage 2

Funding: Tentative funding through TN Dept. of Human Services

### CHILD CARE FINDER

#### (INCREASING ACCESS)

Datapoint: There are 14,297 regulated child care spaces in Chattanooga-Hamilton County for the 21,000 children under the age of 5. Less than 6% of licensed child care programs in Chattanooga-Hamilton County offer a sliding fee scale for families, where tuition is adjusted based on household income.

Strategy Description: By creating the county's first online, interactive map with the ability to filter by individual need and child care feature, we will ease the burden on families to find available child care. Never before has Chattanooga had such a tool. Providers will have the ability to update their number of available slots in real-time. Technical assistance will be provided by TN Child Care Finder, which was created by the Community Foundation of Middle TN.

Estimated number of families and children served: n/a

Measure of Success impacted: Increase the percent of children birth-through-age-five receiving high-quality early care and education outside the home (centers, family homes, schools)

Implementation Partners: City of Chattanooga's Department of Early Learning; Chambliss Center of Children; CCR&R;

Implementation Stage: Stage 2

Funding: Development funding through the City; potential for branded sponsorship to cover annual maintenance fees

## CHILD CARE TALENT WORKFORCE INITIATIVES

### 1. Quality Matters Fund (QMF)

#### (INCREASING CAPACITY)

Datapoint: In 2021, 88% of child care providers in Hamilton County reported to DHS that they needed assistance with staff recruitment and retention supports.

Strategy Description: Fund best-fit recruitment and retention strategies for child care businesses that comply with federal guidelines for ARP funds (professional development, classroom substitutes, bonuses, employee recognition). Through this fund, we will bridge the path to a sustainable wage, by allowing child care teachers the freedom to attend continuing education courses and qualify for the WAGE\$ pay stipend. QMF funds can be used to pay substitutes to cover a class while the teachers attend training. QMF will serve all licensed child care small businesses within Hamilton County, as well as family friend and neighbor providers in the pre-licensure process.

Estimated number of families and children served: N/A

Measure of Success impacted: Teacher retention numbers increase; total number of teachers in the field increase; Percent of children birth-through-age-five receiving high-quality early care and education outside the home (centers, family homes, schools)

Implementation Partners: Early Matters Access to Quality Child Care working group; United Way of Greater Chattanooga

Implementation Stage: Stage 3

Funding: Partial funding the City of Chattanooga's ARP Grant process

### 2. Substitute Pool

#### (INCREASING CAPACITY)

Datapoint: The average annual salary for an early childhood educator in Chattanooga-Hamilton County is \$21,000 without benefits, with no industry standard for paid time off and no extra staff to fill in empty classrooms if they miss a day.

Strategy Description: The county's first-ever substitute pool will ease the operating burden on small business child care providers. Each substitute participates in a quality training program and utilizes a text message system for fulfilling requested child care teacher slots. Participating child care providers must purchase "credits" to use the substitutes. There is a 6-month waiting period before a participating child care provider can hire a substitute full-time. The subs are paid directly by the child care provider and can choose their hours. We intend to recruit parents of elementary school students, college students majoring in the early education field, and those closer to retirement who will not rely on this job as their sole household income.

Estimated number of families and children served:

Measure of Success impacted: Percent of children birth-through-age-five receiving high-quality early care and education outside the home (centers, family homes, schools)

Implementation Partners: City of Chattanooga's Dept. of Early Learning; Chattanooga State Community College;

Implementation Stage: Stage 1

Funding: Funding secured for pilot program.

### 3. Early Childhood Service Corps

(INCREASING CAPACITY)

Datapoint:

Strategy Description: An innovative, intergenerational response to the critical workforce need in the Early Childhood Field and to the unprecedented departure of teachers from the workforce. Chattanooga's Early Learning Service Corps will be a group of residents who complete the TN Dept. of Labor's workforce readiness program. While in the program, participants, who are often senior residents, grandparents, or retirees, can work part-time as a child care substitute. Once they complete the program, they can choose to be a full-time sub, or transfer to a particular child care center to work full time.

Estimated number of families and children served:

Measure of Success impacted: Percent of children birth-through-age-five receiving high-quality early care and education outside the home (centers, family homes, schools)

Implementation Partners: Chattanooga State Community College; City of Chattanooga Dept. of Early Learning; seeking additional partners

Implementation Stage: Stage 1

Funding: Seeking Funding

### Pyramid Model in Child Care

(INCREASING CAPACITY)

Datapoint:

Strategy Description: Local HeadStart and Hamilton County Schools Exceptional Education department currently use this tool. This strategy will scale comprehensive training and support for child care providers to implement the Pyramid Model for challenging behaviors using practical strategies. Pyramid Model for Promoting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children builds upon a tiered public health approach to providing universal supports to all children to promote wellness, targeted services to those who need more support, and intensive services to those who need them. The Pyramid Model Consortium offers facilitated training for teachers with tools and tips to be sent home for parents to use. Research on implementation of the Pyramid Model shows that children have better social skills and less problem behavior in Pyramid Model classrooms. Teachers are able to implement Pyramid Model practices better if they receive training and practice-based coaching.

Estimated number of families and children served: 150 teachers

Measure of Success impacted: Percent of early care and education programs and schools integrating social-emotional strategies

Implementation Partners: Seeking partners

Implementation Stage: Stage 1

Funding: Seeking Funding

## Family Friend and Neighbor Care pathway to licensure

(INCREASING ACCESS)

Datapoint: There are currently no professional development supports available for family friend and neighbor (unlicensed informal) providers, though many exist in our community, which means they are not receiving training on safe and healthy child care practices.

Strategy Description: TN CCR&R started the Small Business Academy for family friend and neighbor (unlicensed informal) providers and thus far 3,000 have participated across TN. To increase the number of quality, licensed seats in Hamilton County, we will help promote this program locally, through networking and sharing the benefits of small business ownership and entrepreneurship.

Estimated number of families and children served:

Measure of Success impacted: High-Quality Birth to 5 Learning Environments

Implementation Partners: TN Child Care Resource and Referral Network; seeking additional partners

Implementation Stage: Stage 1

Funding: Seeking Funding



## Chattanooga Basics (pt. 2) Child Care

(INCREASING CAPACITY)

Datapoint: 80% of brain growth happens within the first three years of life.

Strategy Description: The Chattanooga Basics are five fun, simple, and powerful ways that every family can use to help every child have a great start in life. The national model involves recruiting and equipping partner organizations from multiple sectors. The organizations, in turn, engage parents and caregivers with information and supports for incorporating The Basics Principles into everyday family routines.

Estimated number of families and children served:

Measure of Success impacted: Percent of children birth-through-age-five receiving high quality early care and education outside the home (centers, family homes, schools)

Implementation Partners: City of Chattanooga Dept. of Early Learning; Chattanooga Public Library

Implementation Stage: Stage 2

Funding: Seeking Funding

## KINDERGARTEN TO THIRD GRADE STRATEGIES

### Kindergarten Transition and Alignment

(INCREASING COMMUNICATION)

Datapoint: According to Hamilton County Schools, 89% of children who do not arrive to kindergarten equipped with the skills necessary to be successful are not on grade level by the end of third grade.

Strategy Description: Early Matters will convene a multi-stakeholder working group to inventory PreK experiences and come to consensus on: The definition of Kindergarten readiness; Child care self-evaluation tools for measuring effectiveness and readiness; Pre-K consistency across programs (inventory of program components); Learning Profiles from age 2 through 8 that explicitly lay out what developmental milestones and what kids should know each year, leading up to Kindergarten and through third grade.

Estimated number of families and children served: 3,050 per Kindergarten Class

Measure of Success impacted: Percent of children PreK-2nd grade on-track in reading, math and social-emotional competencies/ self-regulation, good interpersonal skills, and no behavior problems

Implementation Partners: Hamilton County Schools; Head Start; Private Child Care

Implementation Stage: Stage 2

Funding: No funding needed

## Scale HCS student success planning and onboard partners

### (INCREASING ACCESS)

Datapoint: Since its launch in 2019, the student success planning program has created 6,976 individual plans for elementary students. (Each student receives a new plan each year).

Strategy Description: Like a roadmap, personalized Student Success Plans does away with the one-size-fits-all model of education and intentionally addresses every child's comprehensive and personalized needs - in order to truly prepare all Hamilton County students for a bright future. An individualized plan for every child is the cornerstone of Student Success Planning. The plan is created by a school counselor or social worker in partnership with the student's classroom teacher and family; they assess the child's strengths and needs across four domains - academic, family, health, and social/emotional/behavioral - and then continuously work with families to set goals and match students to in and out-of-school services that leverage each child's unique strengths and individual needs.

Between 2019 and 2022, Student Success Plan programs were implemented in 9 elementary schools. The current plan is for all 76 district schools to participate by 2025. Estimated number of families and children served: 12 new elementary schools in the 2022-2023 school year

Measures of Success impacted: Positive Early Care and Education Climate; Regular School Attendance; Grade-Level Proficiency Pre-K to 2nd grade; Physical Health  
Implementation Partners: Hamilton County Schools; Chattanooga 2.0 backbone team; Out-of-School Time Alliance; City of Chattanooga Community Forward Program, child-serving community partners

Implementation Stage: Stage 1

## LENA Professional Development for Literacy Improvement & Research Project

### (INCREASING CAPACITY)

Datapoint: Only 16% of economically disadvantaged Hamilton County third graders are on-track or mastered in ELA.

Strategy Description: Conducted by the University of Tennessee, this project aims to study any gains in ELA simply by changing the amount of direct communication students receive from their teacher. The LENA Grow "talk pedometers" are worn by PreK and Kindergarten students in select classrooms on a single day in the Fall semester. The following week, the researcher presents data to the teacher regarding how many conversational turns they had with each child in the classroom. The teacher is then provided with professional development and tools for engaging every child in the class equally. In the Spring semester, the researcher conducts a follow-up "LENA day" to measure and share improvements with the teacher. The hypothesis, based on research, is that students of color will be able to catch up an entire grade level in ELA over the course of one year.

Estimated number of families and children served: 150 children / year

Measure of Success impacted: Grade-level proficiency, Pre-K to 2nd grade

Implementation Partners: University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

Implementation Stage: Stage 1  
Funding: Funding secured through local philanthropy

## OUT-OF-SCHOOL-TIME STRATEGIES

### Out-of-School-Time Talent Development

(INCREASING CAPACITY)

Datapoint: Children spend 80% of their waking hours outside of the school day  
Strategy Description: To positively impact literacy and math proficiency along with social, emotional, and behavioral development in elementary students, out-of-school time providers who are members of the OST Alliance will be provided stipends for participating in professional development. There are free 21st Century online training opportunities through You for Youth ranging in topics from literacy and math, to SEL, to family engagement. The OST Alliance, a Chattanooga 2.0 action team, is committed to aligning with the local school district, so training for members is a financial incentive to both align with the district and positively impact the out-of-school experience for children. Additionally, this strategy will improve the Talent pipeline ensuring that as OST staff are promoted into leadership positions, best practices will be sustained through leadership turnover.

Estimated number of families and children served: 50 OST professionals

Measure of Success impacted: Percent of children who maintain reading and math gains over the summer

Implementation Partners: Out-of-School Time Alliance Members; Northside Neighborhood House

Implementation Stage: Stage 3

Funding: Seeking Funding

### High-Dosage, Low Ratio Tutoring

(INCREASING ACCESS)

Datapoint: A recent meta-analysis reviewed studies of tutoring interventions that have been evaluated by randomized controlled trials in the past few decades and found that, on average, tutoring increased achievement by roughly an additional three to 15 months of learning across grade levels. Another review of almost 200 rigorous studies found that high-dosage tutoring is one of the few school-based interventions with demonstrated large positive effects on both math and reading achievement.

Strategy Description: Hamilton County students have at least two existing literacy tutoring programs, however this new tutoring program will capitalize on existing partnerships between out-of-school-time providers and their existing relationships with economically disadvantaged students. High-dosage / low ratio tutoring is defined as more

than three days per week or at a rate of at least 50 hours over 36 weeks, with tutors instructing up to 3 or 4 students at a time.

Estimated number of families and children served: 750 elementary

Measure of Success impacted: Grade-Level Proficiency PreK-2nd; Summer Learning

Implementation Partners: United Way of Greater Chattanooga

Implementation Stage: Stage 2

Funding: Two-year grant received through TN Dept. of Education

### Community Plan for Literacy Support

#### (INCREASING ACCESS, CAPACITY, AND COMMUNICATION)

Datapoint: Reading is the gateway to future life success. Research evidence confirms the strong connection between early skill development and later reading success.

Strategy Description: A concentrated effort on literacy should not stop at third grade.

Most strategies in this plan address gaps in services that will have an impact on children's foundational literacy skills. Chattanooga 2.0 will work with community partners to create a comprehensive K-12 literacy plan that complements and aligns with the goals of Hamilton County Schools.

Estimated number of families and children served: 5,000

Measure of Success impacted: Percent of children proficient in reading and math by the end of third grade

Implementation Partners: Chattanooga 2.0 and local literacy partners

Implementation Stage: Stage 2

Funding: Seed funding, but seeking additional funders





# STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORTED FAMILIES & SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

- Empowering families as their child's first teacher and advocate
- Create a Parent Resource Hub
- Scale Dolly Parton Imagination Library

## POLICY CHANGES REQUIRED TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO QUALITY SERVICES

- Enable legislation for cities to implement “property tax circuit breaker” tax credits.
- Do not give tax breaks or incentives to check advance, car loan sharks, and rent-to-own schemes poach on economically disadvantaged families.
- Allow employees who work for Dept. of Children’s Services or a foster care contractor to become foster parents themselves.
- Remove the 6-month state residency requirement that prohibits experienced foster families moving to town from being of immediate assistance.
- Increase staff capacity of TN Department of Children’s Services’ social worker division.
- Allow a one-month proof-of-employment grace period for child care tuition certificates so that single mothers can apply and interview for jobs.

### STRATEGY: EMPOWERING FAMILIES AS THEIR CHILD'S FIRST TEACHER AND ADVOCATE

#### 1. CHATTANOOGA BASICS pt.3 TRAIN THE TRAINER

##### (INCREASING CAPACITY)

Datapoint: 80% of brain growth happens within the first three years of life.

Strategy Description: The Basics are five fun, simple, and powerful ways that every family can use to help every child have a great start in life. We will utilize the Basics framework and branding to provide families with local examples of what families can do with their children to set them up for success. To better serve our Latino community, we will explore

using the Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors program as the Spanish language culturally responsive component.

Estimated number of families and children served: 1,000

Measure of Success impacted: Positive parent/child interactions; Reading with Children; Social-Emotional Development

Implementation Partners: City of Chattanooga Department of Early Learning

Implementation Stage: Stage 2

Funding: Seeking Funding

## 2. PYRAMID MODEL

(INCREASING CAPACITY)

Datapoint:

Strategy Description: The Pyramid Model is a framework for dealing with challenging behaviors in infants and toddlers using a tiered approach. When paired with the Chattanooga Basics messaging, parents can receive tips and tools for how to respond to their child's challenging behavior in the most developmentally appropriate ways.

Estimated number of families and children served: 150 teachers trained

Measure of Success impacted: Increase in the percent of parents reporting sufficient knowledge of child development and parenting skills

Implementation Partners: Seeking partners

Implementation Stage: Stage 1

Funding: Seeking Funding

## 3. SCALE ERLANGER NURSE FAMILY PARTNERSHIP (NFP) HOME VISITATION PROGRAM

(INCREASING CAPACITY)

Datapoint: 28% of low-income families who responded to the early childhood survey were not aware of pregnancy or postpartum home visitation services.

Strategy Description: NFP is a free program for SNAP-eligible women who are pregnant with their first baby who enroll before 28 weeks. Mothers are connected to a registered nurse who will provide the support, advice and information needed to have a healthy pregnancy, a healthy baby and be a great mom. The nurse works with the mother on goal setting and mothers can earn points to spend on baby-related items. The in-home service is provided until the child is 24 months old. The program currently serves 91 mothers with the capacity to serve 175 mothers. There is one Spanish-speaking nurse.

Estimated number of families and children served: 200

Measure of Success impacted: Decrease infant mortality, decrease low birth weight, increase the number of children improving with early intervention services

Implementation Partners: Erlanger Hospital

Implementation Stage: Stage 2

Funding: Currently funded through federal grants

#### 4. INTENTIONAL LATINO FAMILY OUTREACH

(INCREASING CAPACITY)

Datapoint: 37% of Latino families reported in the Hamilton County early childhood survey that they were unaware of development milestones

Strategy Description: La Paz Chattanooga will invite community partners who offer resources and parental tools for families to their community center to speak to Latino families. Through the La Paz cafecitas program, Latina mothers have expressed a lack of awareness around developmental milestones in early childhood. We are including this strategy because it would increase access to information and tools for these families, including for other programs such as the Chattanooga Basics, Pyramid model, etc. Funding would pay for a meal and child care for families during the sessions.

Estimated number of families and children served:

Measure of Success impacted: Knowledgeable parents; Families supported

Implementation Partners: La Paz Chattanooga

Implementation Stage: Stage 1

Funding: This has not been funded

#### PARENT RESOURCE HUB

(INCREASING CAPACITY)

Datapoint: An expressed need by families in the countywide early childhood survey was a central location for resource navigation and connection.

Strategy Description: Imagine if all families knew to visit ChattaFamily.org as the place to turn with local answers to questions about their child's health, education, or family needs. The first iteration of the Parent Resource Hub will be an online platform that links to a myriad of helpful resources for families, all in one place. The website will feature practical messaging in how to better understand the early childhood system as well as resource connection. It would link out to resources such as: the Child Care Finder; the Chattanooga Basics; Peer learning groups; Developmental assessments; crisis resources (such as United Way's 211); informal education resources in the community; events; programs, etc.

Estimated number of families and children served:

Measure of Success impacted: Supported parents

Implementation Partners: In talks with two potential partners

Implementation Stage: Stage 2

Funding: This has not been funded

## SCALE DOLLY PARTON IMAGINATION LIBRARY

### (INCREASING ACCESS)

Datapoint: Roughly 45% of children under 5 in the highest poverty areas in Chattanooga city limits are enrolled in the free Dolly Parton Imagination library.

Strategy Description: Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is a monthly book-gifting program that mails free, high-quality books to children from birth to age five, no matter their family's income. By intentionally recruiting sign-ups in communities with economically disadvantaged children, children can begin to grow a home library.

Estimated number of families and children served:

Measure of Success impacted: Amount of time families read to children each week.

Implementation Partners: Signal Centers, Various Community Partners

Implementation Stage: Stage 3





# COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGNS FOR ALL THREE DOMAINS

Clear and consistent countrywide communication will be imperative for some strategies to be effective. Below are the communications campaigns that we recommend to best equip families with the skills and resources to build their child's solid foundation in life.

## CHATTANOOGA BASICS pt. 4

(INCREASING CAPACITY)

Datapoint: 80% of brain growth happens within the first three years of life.

Strategy Description: Our community needs one, accessible campaign for early childhood development. If we have the Chattanooga Basics tools being shared with families through child care, pediatricians office, and through targeted neighborhood outreach, the final way to ensure the Basics are common household knowledge is by making the information available where people are in the community.

## KINDERGARTEN READINESS

(INCREASING CAPACITY)

Datapoint: At least a quarter of families surveyed in Hamilton County reported that they were unsure if their 4-year-old is ready for Kindergarten.

Strategy Description: Once Early Matters convenes a multi-stakeholder working group to inventory PreK experiences and come to consensus on the profile of what it means to be Kindergarten ready, the community will need easy access to this information. Methods will be social media campaigns, local media, and distribution through child care networks, and other family-serving providers.

## SLEEP MESSAGING

(INCREASING CAPACITY)

Datapoint: 47% of children under 5 in Hamilton County are receiving less than 9 hours of sleep per day when the recommended amount by the American Academy of Pediatrics is 10-13 hours.

Strategy Description: After completion of a needs assessment by the Early Matters early childhood health equity working group, this strategy is to use our collective network of service providers and media partners to distribute community messaging about proper sleep and its impacts in all places where families go for trusted information..

## DENTAL HYGIENE AWARENESS

(INCREASING CAPACITY)

Datapoint: Trauma from severe dental work can impact a student's academic performance. Education on proper oral hygiene is key for prevention. Implementation Partners: TN Child Care Resource and Referral Network; Hamilton County Schools; La Paz Chattanooga.

# CONTINUED LEARNING

Early Matters members are continually conducting needs assessments, gaps analysis and asset mapping to understand the true needs of children in our community. The below two strategies for continued learning will allow us to make informed decisions on future evidence-based initiatives.

## FUNDING STREAM ANALYSIS

### (INCREASING CAPACITY)

Datapoint: With the cost of care so high, early childhood teachers and providers on average would need to spend 39 percent of their monthly income to send their children to the same programs in which they teach.

Strategy Description: In order to calculate the additional funding needed to realize a child care sector in which teachers are adequately paid, children thrive in a high-quality learning environment, and parents can afford tuition, we must first understand what investments go into the child care sector. Once this difference is calculated, our community can come together in innovative ways to create a child care system that works for all.

Estimated number of families and children served: n/a

Measure of Success impacted: All

Implementation Partners: Children's Funding Project; Early Matters Access to Quality Child Care working group members

Implementation Stage: Stage 2

Funding: Seeking Funding

## NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

### (INCREASING CAPACITY)

Datapoint: In the early childhood survey, as household income increases, so do the number of families reporting that all of their children's meals are complete.

Strategy Description: Sleep; Nutrition; Behavioral and Mental Health (including service provider capacity) More research and community conversation is needed to understand the reasons behind the lack of sleep and what can be done to give children the rest they need for healthy development. Early Matters, in partnership with community stakeholders, will

Estimated number of families and children served: N/A

Measure of Success impacted: Health birthweight, physical health, social-emotional health

Implementation Partners: Community partners in the Early Matters Early Childhood Health Equity working group

Implementation Stage: Stage 2

Funding: Seeking Funding

# STRATEGY MATRIX

		HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT						HIGH-QUALITY LEARNING					SUPPORTED FAMILIES AND				
		BEGINNING AT BIRTH						ENVIRONMENTS BIRTH - 8					SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY				
STRATEGIES		Healthy Birth Weight	Physical Health	Social & Emotional Health	Oral Health	Early Intervention Screening and Services	Additional Indicators	High-Quality Early Care and Ed 0-5	Positive Early Care and Education Climate	Regular School Attendance	Grade-Level Proficiency PreK-2nd	Summer Learning	Safe at Home	Positive Parent/Child Interactions	Reading with Children	Supports for Families	Skilled and Knowledgeable Parents
INCREASING ACCESS	Child Care Finder							●								●	
	Colgate Dental Trucks				●												●
	Dolly Parton Imagination Library											●			●		
	Pathway to Licensure																
	High-Dosage, Low-Ratio Tutoring										●	●					
	Micro-Center Networks							●									
	Parent Resource Hub			●		●		●								●	●
	Planning		●	●					●	●	●	●					
School-Based Health Clinics		●							●								
INCREASING CAPACITY	Chattanooga Basics			●				●	●					●	●		●
	Early Childhood Service Corps							●									
	Funding Stream Analysis																
	Latino Family Outreach		●		●	●								●		●	●
	Learning Oventions + A2i Literacy										●	●					
	LENA Research Project								●	●							
	Nurse Family Partnership	●											●	●		●	●
	Out-of-School Time Talent Development											●					
	Pyramid Model			●					●					●			●
	Quality Matters Fund						●	●	●								
Reach Out and Read			●		●								●	●		●	
Substitute Pool						●	●										
Trauma-Informed Practices															●		
COMMUNICATION	Early Matters Early Childhood Health Equity Needs Assessments	●	●	●	●	●											
	Sleep Messaging		●														
	Kindergarten Transition and Alignment			●				●	●		●						

# MEASUREMENT & EVALUATION

## EVALUATION

To implement each of the strategies proposed in this plan with fidelity, the Early Matters-Bright Start Steering Committee will enlist the assistance of a group of research and evaluation experts, including current partners at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. Graduate assistants, under the guidance of professors, will conduct a variety of evaluation measures on each of the strategies in the plan, including, but not limited to: pre and post-surveys, satisfaction surveys, and pre-post assessment calculations.

Funding for graduate assistants to conduct evaluation and data collection has been worked into the costs for each evidence-based strategy.

## MEASUREMENT

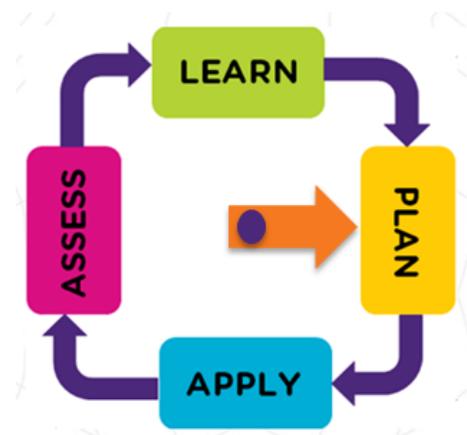
Tennesseans for Quality Early Education adapted the North Carolina Pathways to Grade-Level Reading Measures of Success Framework to help guide the work of Bright Start TN partnerships and measure progress toward Third-Grade Reading & Math Proficiency for all children. There are 15 research-based measures (5 per domain) that will be tracked at the state and community-level and updated at least annually on a statewide Data Dashboard. This dashboard will:

- Enable Policymakers to use the data to track trends at the local and state level in order to identify areas of need where policymakers could focus their efforts to improve the lives of their constituents.
- Support Bright Start Partnerships to use the data to think critically about how best to support children in their community, through direct services and policy change.
- Empower Practitioners to use the data to identify areas of needs and make informed decisions that support the financial, socioemotional, and physical health of their community.

## CONTINUOUS LEARNING & IMPLEMENTATION

Collective impact is not a straight line from strategy to results. We must be flexible and adaptable to the realities of working with dynamic people, policy, and environments.

Our Early Matters - Bright Start steering committee acknowledges the need to be open to new learnings, learn from the community as co-creators of what will WORK for our community and adapt (or abandon) strategies as necessary.



## **IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

Each strategy will have an implementation partner who signs a memorandum of understanding (MOU) agreeing to implement or scale the evidence-based strategy and provide continuous feedback on progress to the Early Matters action team, supported by the local Bright Start TN fellow. Chattanooga 2.0 serves as the backbone organization who will drive measurement, collaboration, and accountability of strategy implementation.

The Early Matters-Bright Start steering committee has committed to supporting the implementation of these strategies by championing the needs identified, using connections to remove barriers, and making connections to additional resources as necessary. They will meet once per quarter to assess and learn from the plans that have been implemented. In keeping with Chattanooga 2.0 coalition values, we will first identify any gaps in diversity and lived experience, so that our committee makeup is reflective of the community.

One lesson Chattanooga 2.0 partners have learned over the last five years is that new strategies need consistent champions who will support and reassess them regularly, helping to remove barriers. No implementation partner should feel as though they are on an island.

Twice per year, implementation leads will be invited to the Early Matters coalition meeting to report on progress and barriers. Coalition members will be able to offer thought partnership and expertise on how to overcome those hurdles for the benefit of our children. Progress will be tracked by the Chattanooga 2.0 backbone team and included in any annual reports.

## WHAT'S THE COST?

The interesting thing about the early childhood system is that there is not one funding body – neither at the state or the local level. First and foremost, the aim of the Bright Start TN network is to bring early childhood stakeholders together across different sectors to improve the efficiencies of the system. Communicating more clearly doesn't cost money. Changing a policy or a way of doing business so that it works better for families doesn't necessarily cost money. The second priority for us locally is to find out – what does quality really cost?

Some strategies already have funding. For others, Chattanooga 2.0 and implementation partners will be applying for grants and seeking private investors and philanthropy who are eager to improve the early childhood system to benefit our local economy. All partners investing in these strategies are doing so voluntarily, because they believe it's the right thing to do and it aligns with their company values.

An important thing to note is this is a [community-driven plan](#). Based on local data and community input, and with technical assistance from TQEE, we're taking strategies that have been proven to work in other communities and seeing if they'll make an impact locally. We're seeking proof points and evidence that the above strategies are effective and are what the community want and need. If they're not effective, we won't try to scale them.

### WE'VE INVESTED BEFORE, HOW IS THIS ANY DIFFERENT?

Hamilton County has seen strong early childhood advocates in the past, but now we have a concerted effort to create a coordinated and aligned early childhood system, built on family input. And we're not just focusing on one domain of early childhood development at a time.

Lastly, with this plan, we've identified both program-level strategies and policies to change that are serving as barriers for children and families. It will take both to see a lasting impact.

## A BETTER QUESTION BECOMES – WHAT IS THE COST IF WE DO NOTHING?

# ANTICIPATED COST AND FUNDING PLAN

Some strategies included in this plan already have funding secured. Others will require investment from the public or private sectors, or grants that will be applied for by the Implementation Partners.

## HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT

TOTAL INVESTMENT: \$156,000 over three years

Breakdown of Strategy Costs:

Strategy Name	Cost	Funding Secured?	Current Funder
School-based health clinics	\$765,000	Yes	Federal grant funding
Scale the Erlanger Nurse Family Partnership	-	Yes	State and federal grants applied for by Erlanger
Needs Assessments by Early Matters	\$6,000 (\$2k per)	No	
Chattanooga Basics for Medical Providers	\$60,000 (\$20,000 / yr)	No	
Scale trauma- informed practices	\$0	No	
Scale Reach Out and Read	\$90,000 (\$30k/year)	No	
Colgate Dental Trucks	\$0	Free	

## HIGH-QUALITY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS BIRTH TO AGE 8

TOTAL INVESTMENT: \$11,851,000 over three years

Breakdown of Strategy Costs:

Strategy Name	Cost	Funding Secured?	Current Funder
Micro-Center Networks	\$375,000 (over 3 years)	Tentative	Will announce when public
Child Care Finder	\$16,000 (\$7k + \$5k per year in maintenance)	Partial	City of Chattanooga; corporate sponsor needed for recurring maintenance costs
Quality Matters Fund	\$2 million for 1 year	Partial (\$500k)	City of Chattanooga ARP
Substitute Pool	\$8,000	Yes	City of Chattanooga
Early Childhood Service Corps	\$85,000/year	No	
Funding Stream Analysis	\$35,000	No	
Pyramid Model in Child Care	\$50,000 (\$329pp)	No	
Family Friend and Neighbor Care pathway to licensure	\$5,000 in stipends and \$15,000 in marketing	No	
Chattanooga Basics*	\$36,000 (\$12k/yr)	No	
Early childhood teacher peer groups	\$0	N/A	N/A
Kindergarten Transition and Alignment	Free	No	
Scale HCS student success planning	-	Yes	HCS & Smart City Venture Fund
LENA Research Project	\$20,000	Yes	Maclellan Foundation

Out-of-School Time Talent Development	\$36,000 (\$15k/yr)	No	
High-dosage, low ratio tutoring	\$9 million over 2 yr	Yes	TN Department of Education

\* The Early Matters - Bright Start steering committee identified the Chattanooga Basics as an integral piece of our early childhood system design. These principles and this brand will be the umbrella under which all other strategies can be tied and communicated to families.

## SUPPORTED AND SUPPORTIVE FAMILIES

Total Investment: \$236,000

Breakdown of Strategy Costs:

Strategy Name	Cost	Funding Secured?	Current Funder
Chattanooga Basics	\$176,000 over 3 years	No	
Pyramid Model	Product of above	No	
Parent Resource Hub	\$60,000 (\$20k/yr)	No	

## COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGNS TO SUPPORT ALL THREE DOMAINS

Total Investment: \$427,000

Breakdown of Strategy Costs:

Strategy Name	Cost	Funding Secured?	Current Funder
Chattanooga Basics	\$322,000 over 3 years	No	
Kindergarten Readiness	\$30,000 (\$10k/yr)	No	
Latino Family Outreach	\$45,000 (\$15k/yr)	No	
Sleep Messaging	\$30,000 (\$10k/yr)	No	

## LIST OF EARLY MATTERS MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS:

- AIMHiTN
- TN Child Care Resource & Referral
- Chambliss Center for Children
- Chattanooga Public Library
- Chattanooga State Community College
- Children's Advocacy Center
- City of Chattanooga
- Community Forward School Coordinators
- Community Foundation of Greater Chattanooga
- Creative Discovery Museum
- Culture Books
- East Lake Montessori
- Family Forward
- First Things First
- Food Bank
- Hamilton Co. Health. Dept.
- Hamilton County schools
- HeadStart
- Helen Ross McNabb
- Highland Pediatrics
- MOMentum Network
- Nurse Family Partnership
- Nurture the Next
- Purpose Point
- Read 20
- Save the Children Action Network
- Signal Centers Inc.
- Siskin Children's Institute
- Speech and Hearing Center of Chattanooga
- TN Commission on Children and Youth
- Tech Goes Home - Child Care TN
- The Urban Child Institute
- United Way of Greater Chattanooga
- University of TN at Chattanooga
- YMCA of Chattanooga

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: Stakeholder Engagement

To create this early childhood action plan, Tennesseans for Quality Early Education provided technical assistance and Chattanooga 2.0 facilitated a steering committee and community engagement efforts.

Over the last six years, Chattanooga 2.0 and Early Matters have conducted dozens of community engagement listening sessions, forums, focus groups, surveys, and stakeholder interviews. This historic knowledge of the public opinions of public school and early education informed a targeted focus for additional community engagement over the last year.

Total number of *new* stakeholders engaged in the creation of this plan: ~625

### ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

- Spring 2021 - Access to Quality Child Care Needs Assessment.
  - Focus groups conducted by School Readiness consulting on the barriers to access quality child care in Hamilton County, TN. Focus groups included a diverse group of early education teachers,
- September 2021 - Early Matters-Bright Start steering committee established and meeting bi-monthly to examine data, strategize and create this ECE plan
- Fall 2021 - Early Matters action team meetings and breakouts for input
  - Advocacy working group
  - Access to Quality Child Care working group
  - Early Childhood Health Equity working group
- September 2021 - Bright Start TN Public Rollout
- Fall 2021 - Newsletter and Email Updates to Chattanooga 2.0 Network
  - Hamilton County Children's Cabinet
  - Out-of-School Time Alliance Chattanooga 2.0 action team
  - Early Grade Success (literacy) Chattanooga 2.0 action team
- February 2022 - Countywide early childhood survey (online and paper) garnering over 400 responses
- March 2022- Focus groups of teachers, leaders, and families at Woodmore Elementary School and Clifton Hills Elementary School
- Spring 2022 - Stakeholder interviews and other community group input meetings

## APPENDIX B: FOCUS AND WORKING GROUP PROJECT LEADERS

### FOCUS GROUPS

- Former Priority School Focus Groups
  - Staff: Lee Hope, *Chattanooga Public Library* + Mark Neal, *Project Inspire*;
  - Participants: Former priority school leaders, teachers, parents, students
- Access to Quality Child Care Needs Assessment - Spring 2021 - Conducted by School Readiness Consulting
  - Participants: Child care parents, teachers, directors
  - Early Matters Access Working Group (members listed below)

### WORKING GROUP PROJECT LEADERS

Access to Quality Child Care working group:

Jennifer Andrews, Chattanooga 2.0

Tracy Bryant, Signal Centers

Karitsa Jones, City of Chattanooga, Dept. of Early Learning

Jayne Griffin, Creative Discovery Museum

Katie Harbison, Chambliss Center for Children

Angela Hayes, Community Member

Tania Henson, Chattanooga State Community College

Lee Hope, Chattanooga Public Library

Charlotte Hubert, Southeast CCR&R

Joyce Jackson, Family Forward

Shawn Kurrelmeier-Lee, Read 20

Julie Mickel, Siskin Children's Institute

Elle Scarbrough, Tech Goes Home TN

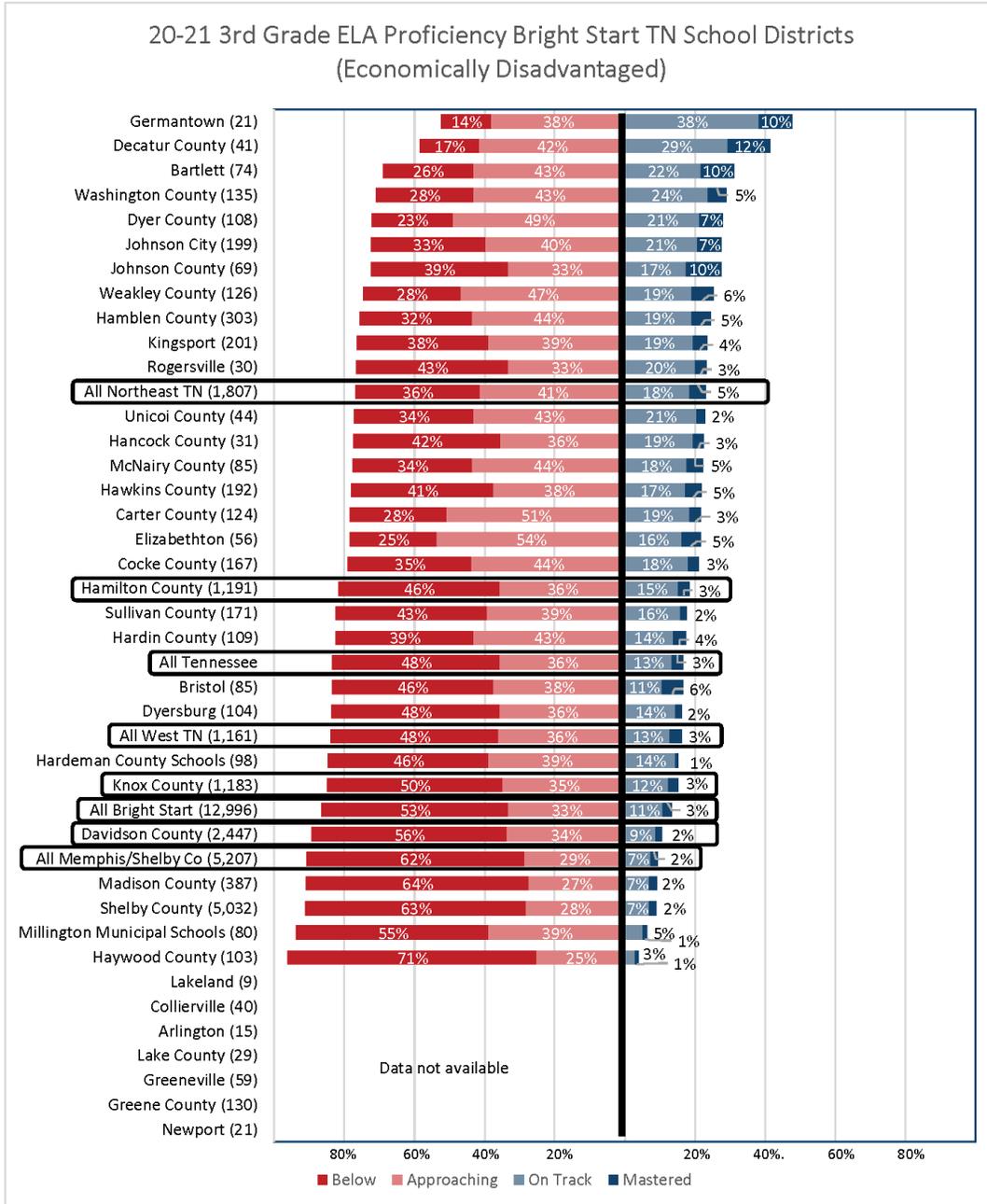
Monica Stone, Southeast CCR&R

Jessica Storey, James A. Henry YMCA

**APPENDIX C: Example data breakdown from TQEE**



Powered by **TQEE**



Note: The numbers beside each subgroup represent the total number of valid tests for 3rd grade students for each subgroup. On average, these data represent about 94% of all 3rd grade students enrolled in each subgroup. All data was sourced from the Tennessee Department of Education and can be found at <https://www.tn.gov/education/data/data-downloads.html>

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