

Local Early Childhood Councils
A Structure for Improving Outcomes & Systems
for Young Children Birth to Age Eight

A Voice from the Ground

The Discovery Initiative Communities and the
William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund

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This paper is the result of the efforts of multiple individuals from the Discovery communities, the Memorial Fund staff, liaisons and consultants. It reflects their collective experiences, and builds on a decade of work to ensure that Connecticut's children of all races and income levels are ready for school by age five and are successful learners by age nine.

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We all wish to recognize and thank all the parents, the community providers, and local leaders who voluntarily, every day contribute their time and talent to their Local Early Childhood Councils and to improving outcomes for Connecticut's youngest citizens. Without them the work would not be possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. OVERVIEW.....	1
Purpose of paper.....	1
Why Local Early Childhood Councils	1
II. THE EVOLUTION OF LOCAL EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCILS	3
III. ROLE AND FUNCTION OF LOCAL EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCILS.....	4
IV. LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE.....	4
V. HOW ARE WE DOING?	5
1. Early Childhood Council Successes to Date.....	5
2. What Local Early Childhood Councils Need to Continue Progress	7
VI. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS	8
APPENDIX A. KEY SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS	10
APPENDIX B: COMMON BLUEPRINT STRATEGIES.....	11

I. OVERVIEW

Purpose of paper

In Spring 2012, Governor Dannel Malloy appointed Dr. Myra Jones-Taylor to the new position of Connecticut's Early Childhood Planning Director. Her task is to generate a proposal for a statewide early childhood system. Dr. Jones-Taylor and her team have been reaching out to local communities to learn more about their perspectives on early childhood system needs and resources.

After well over a decade of supporting Connecticut communities in their collaborative efforts to improve outcomes for children birth-to-age-eight, the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund (Memorial Fund) and its grantee communities have collected a trove of lessons learned, successes and challenges. This white paper is intended to share with Dr. Jones-Taylor and her team the wisdom of community voice and experience in Connecticut as the team tackles the daunting challenge of developing a comprehensive plan for Connecticut's young children and their families.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a community perspective on local infrastructure, one of the critical elements of a statewide early childhood system; what has been accomplished; and what is still needed to build and sustain Local Early Childhood Councils (LECC).

Why Local Early Childhood Councils

Connecticut students' academic outcomes reflect the greatest achievement gap in the nation. These results mirror the state's income gaps. If all children in Connecticut are going to thrive and overcome these disparities, families need their specific circumstances and cultural and linguistic needs heard and understood, and their voices amplified, through collective advocacy. These are some of the many critical roles of a Local Early Childhood Council.

Local Early Childhood Councils understand that services to children and families in Connecticut, as in many states, are fragmented or siloed. Accessing the support a family needs to raise healthy, successful children is challenging, particularly for the most vulnerable families. Not only do families have to deal with many organizations, but the services themselves may be riddled with inconsistencies or rife with redundancies. Institutional barriers often impede providers from sharing information or resources. As a result, we fail to maximize the first 1,000 days of life, when every child experiences the most robust brain development.

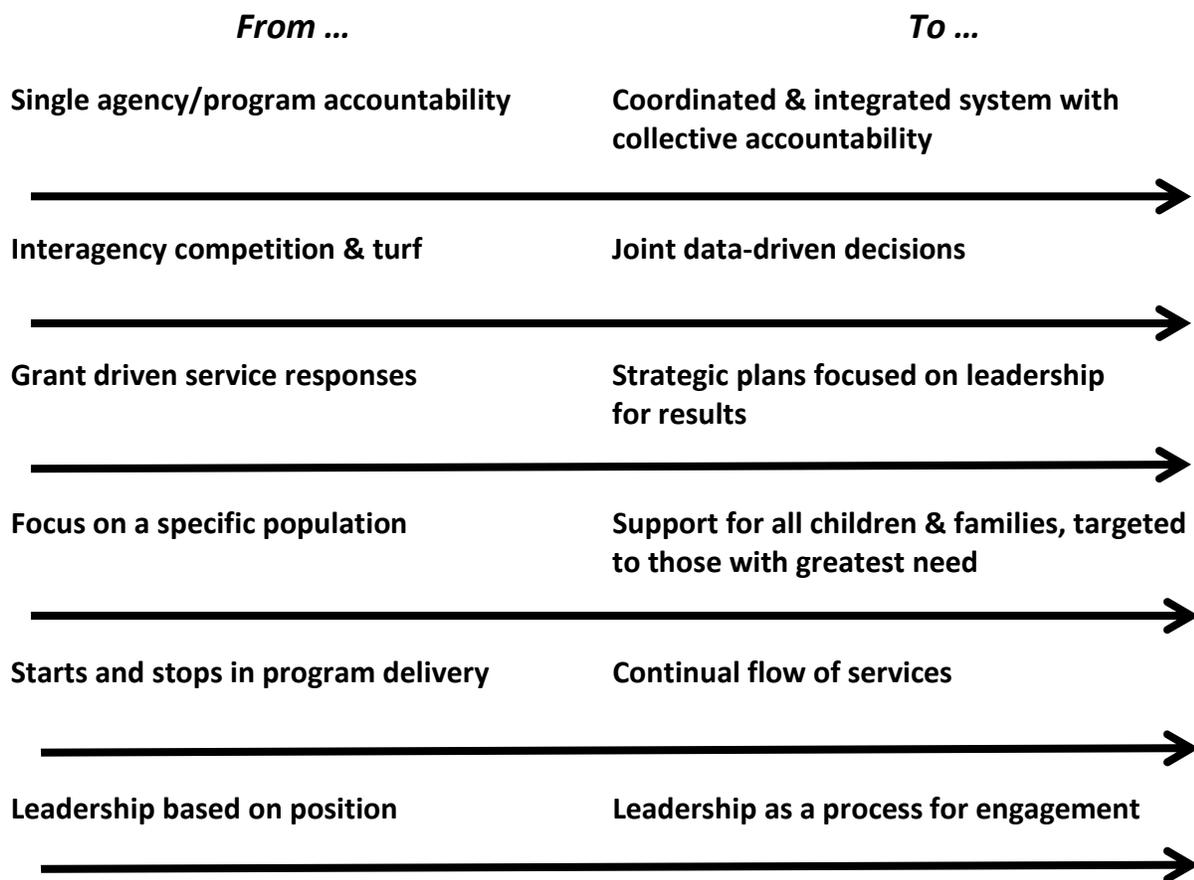
Community experience indicates that solutions that are categorical, have a narrow program focus, or are based in a single organization cannot achieve large-scale change with respect to complex social problems such as early care and education. The focus needs to be on child outcomes.

To overcome these barriers and effectively support young children, local councils have brought together residents, parents, and a broad range of service providers for a common purpose: to develop birth-to-age-eight community blueprints, using Results Based Accountability (RBA) that lays out the community's vision to improve outcomes for its youngest citizens. The blueprints reflect the unique needs and characteristics of the children and families in each community and create a local framework for collaboration and accountability in response to family needs across the domains of early care, early education, social, emotional and physical health, and family support. An analysis of community blueprints indicates that the communities have identified common indicators, performance measures, and a range of common strategies. Local Early Childhood Councils support and sustain effective and efficient policies and programs that address the needs of children and families who reside in the community.

From the state perspective, the birth-to-age-eight blueprints can be a map for aligning state agencies' resources, and the Local Early Childhood Councils can be the means for policy consultation among state and local leadership. In fact, the *Ready by 5 & Fine by 9, Early Childhood Investment Plan* (2006) delineated these roles and responsibilities.

The long term sustainability of Local Early Childhood Councils depends on local political will coupled with state resources and a formal, accountable, state-local system that aligns state policies, systems (including school districts), programs, and funding to support the Local Early Childhood Councils and the implementation of community blueprints.

Local Early Childhood Councils help the system to move



II. THE EVOLUTION OF LOCAL EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCILS

The development of Local Early Childhood Councils has nearly a twenty-year history:

1995: Children First Initiative was launched by the Graustein Memorial Fund to support local planning and engagement to improve early childhood outcomes in seven communities over seven years.

1997: Enactment of the School Readiness Program (C.G.S. 10-16p – 10-16u). Sixty-three of the state’s 169 communities, including 19 Priority School Districts and 44 Competitive Districts, established School Readiness Councils to guide implementation of local School Readiness Programs.

2001: Memorial Fund launched the Discovery Initiative and provided multi-year support for Local Early Childhood Council work in 46 communities (growing to 54 by 2008). Initially there was little cohesion between the School Readiness Councils and the Discovery Community Councils.

2005: Connecticut Early Childhood Education Cabinet established.

2006: Policy and Research Council released the *Ready by 5 & Fine by 9, Connecticut’s Early Childhood Investment Plan (Part I)*, calling for the establishment of birth-to-age-eight Local Early Childhood Councils to plan and monitor early childhood services. The Memorial Fund offered to match state funds to build the capacity of Local Early Childhood Councils to develop comprehensive birth-to-age-eight community blueprints.

2007-09: The Cabinet committed \$1.2m over two years to match the Memorial Fund’s \$600,000 for local capacity building and the development of comprehensive early childhood plans. As a result of the Cabinet’s allocation, the public-private partnership to support community planning and system building was established through a jointly-developed Request for Proposal. Twenty-three of the Discovery communities received public-private partnership grants for fiscal years 2007-2009 to develop comprehensive birth-to-age-eight community plans for a total partnership investment of \$1.65m. In 2008, the Children’s Fund of Connecticut (CFC) joined the public-private partnership to add a health addendum, increasing the total investment to \$1.8m.

2010-12: The Memorial Fund in partnership with SDE and CFC again jointly-developed a Request for Proposal and invited all the Discovery communities to develop a community plan and establish a single Local Early Childhood Council by aligning Discovery and School Readiness Councils. The number of public-private partnership grants awarded increased to 38 for fiscal years 2010-2012 and focused on supporting the Local Council infrastructure for a total partnership investment of \$4.3m.

Total Investments: Since 2007, the total public-private partnership investment for local infrastructure community grants is approximately \$6.1m (Memorial Fund \$2.8m, SDE \$2.5m, CFC \$800,000). The grants per community range from \$25,000 to 50,000. These totals do not include the Memorial Fund’s additional investments of over \$5m in capacity building and other grants to support LECCs, making the total for LECCs \$11.1m. In addition the Memorial Fund invested \$990,000 in parent leadership development, and \$975,000 in early literacy support, funding that was also matched with state dollars.

Note: Twenty-five communities with completed community plans are among the 30 districts designated as SDE “alliance” districts.

III. ROLE AND FUNCTION OF LOCAL EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCILS

The *Ready by 5 & Fine by 9, Connecticut's Early Childhood Investment Plan (Part 1)* delineated a set of functions for local councils which many of the Local Early Childhood Councils (LECC) have incorporated into their local work and which remain their aspiration:

1. **Cross-Sector Engagement:** Ensure that parents, early care, social service and health providers, city government and school districts, philanthropy, business, and citizens are members of the LECC and engaged in decision-making.
2. **Policy and Program Planning:** Develop a comprehensive birth-to-age-eight community blueprint and financing strategy that is informed by parents, child outcome data, local needs assessment, and state and local data.
3. **System Development:** Oversee the development of an effective, accessible system of services that responds to family needs for early care and education, social, emotional, behavioral health and physical health, and family supports; serve as the primary point of interface with state agencies and work closely with the school district to connect community services with K-12.
4. **Leadership:** Provide leadership in advocating for early childhood programs at the community and state level.
5. **Public Accountability:** Track and report child and family outcomes and hold public and private programs and systems accountable for results through systematic data collection and analysis.
6. **Resource Allocation:** Align local, state, federal, and private resources in support of the community blueprint.

The core drivers for the development of an effective early care system at the local level are a data-driven, birth-to-age-eight community blueprint with prioritized strategies and performance measures; a data management capacity to track and report progress; and sufficient funding to support the local infrastructure and locally defined strategies.

IV. LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The *Ready by 5 & Fine by 9, Connecticut's Early Childhood investment Plan* also indicated that local communities would need an infrastructure to carry out their roles and responsibilities and to sustain their work. However, the specific costs for this infrastructure were not specified. In 2008, the Graustein Memorial Fund commissioned Holt, Wexler & Farnam to prepare a report on the role and cost of effective Early Childhood Councils.

The report noted that a fiscal scan of Fiscal Year 2005-2006 spending identified **\$1.36 billion in federal, state and philanthropic funds invested in birth-to-age-eight services** in communities with school readiness programs, conveying the magnitude and complexity of the early childhood service system that local Early Childhood Councils are called on to navigate. The Holt, Wexler & Farnam report included infrastructure funding recommendations for Local Early Childhood Councils, including base grants and additional support based on community population.

This early study provides a framework for thinking about how to fund LECCs. At that time, the full functions of an LECC, such as developing local community plans, data management, and parent engagement, were still under construction. Based on recent years' experience and input from communities, more conversation is needed immediately to ground recommendations that work, for example, in smaller less-resourced rural communities or regions.

In order to effectively carry out the roles and functions of a Local Early Childhood Council (LECC), each community, needs a) full-time staff to coordinate and facilitate the development and implementation of the community blueprint and b) increased data management capacity. At a minimum, the infrastructure supports needed include:

- a. Council management staff
- b. Data management systems
- c. Outreach staff
- d. Flexible state and local resources
- e. Process and content technical assistance

To date, the primary funding for infrastructure including capacity building support has come from private philanthropy. The state (SDE) provides about one-quarter of the funding through the public-private partnership, with philanthropic investment making up the rest. In some communities, United Ways, community foundations, and private foundations have provided not only significant funding to support the infrastructure, but also funds to implement locally developed strategies and programs. In many communities these entities serve as the collaborative sponsor for the LECC and provide space, equipment, and leadership support. Dedicated local public funding is supporting the LECC infrastructure in a few pioneering communities.

V. HOW ARE WE DOING?

At this juncture, communities have had a wide variety of experiences, supports, successes, and challenges in creating a fully functioning LECC. While no community has fully implemented all the core functions of a Local Early Childhood Council, many have come close.

1. Early Childhood Council Successes to Date

- a. **By June 2013, birth-to-age-eight Community Blueprints will guide efforts in 40 communities that address the domains of early care (0-5), early education (K-grade 3), social, emotional, behavioral health and physical health, and family supports.**
 - Blueprints were created through an inclusive, cross-sector community engagement process and are living plans that provide an analysis of the causes of current conditions and child outcomes.
 - For some communities, using a Results Based Accountability (RBA) framework stimulated greater ownership for results from community leaders such as superintendents, municipal leaders, the business sector, and philanthropy.
 - Parents have closely consulted about their needs in crafting the local blueprint and have engaged in developing community solutions and often serve as leaders within the Council.
 - Data are used for decision making and system development. A wide range of community partners have analyzed and deliberated over data, developed success indicators and performance measures, and are committed to developing an accountability system. Common indicators and strategies have emerged across community blueprints (see Appendix B).
 - In 36 of the 53 Discovery communities, School Readiness Councils and the Discovery Collaborative are operating as combined birth-to-age-eight entity while integrating mandated School Readiness Council responsibilities.

b. Local Early Childhood Councils are increasingly seen as the community entity to coordinate and organize an early care and education system.

- LECCs are regularly producing community report cards on their results and indicators.
- Organizations are increasingly entering into Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) that delineate mutual responsibilities for implementing blueprint strategies.
- Philanthropic institutions such as United Ways, community foundations and private foundations actively partner with some LECCs for their grantmaking on early childhood and reducing the achievement gap.
- Some Mayors are reporting to Town Councils on blueprint results and strategies and have added a "community plan report" to the agenda for Department Head meetings.
- Superintendents in some communities are encouraging Board of Education policy changes so that LECC work is sustainable.

c. Local Early Childhood Councils are influencing public and private resource allocations.

- Communities have developed Council funding applications and secured new funding as a result of having community-wide partners "at the table" and co-owned strategies.
- LECCs have used SDE quality enhancement funds creatively to meet unmet needs.
- LECCs have redirected Title I funds to blueprint strategies with the support of the superintendent.
- LECCs have secured Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to support parent leadership.
- School districts and municipal government are funding LECC staff.
- Community Foundations, United Ways, private foundations, businesses, and banks, are making grants that specifically align with the community blueprint.
- Communities have accessed new services to support young children and families (e.g., Early Head Start, Child FIRST, Differential Response, mobile dental program, Circle of Security).

d. Program providers have changed their practices in support of improved child outcomes.

- Afterschool programs agreed to common measures and reorganized services to reduce duplication and expand service reach.
- Mental health agencies have placed staff in school buildings offering counseling services to families before and after school.
- Pre-k and kindergarten teachers are participating in joint professional development.
- Early childhood providers have access to a behavioral health continuum that includes early screening, identification, linkage to appropriate birth-to-3 resources and family support.
- The number of low income and minority children who have a preschool experience for two years has increased as a result of parents having broad-based program options that include Head Start, public school, community-based, free, parent fee and licensed family childcare.
- Through joint advocacy, communities have saved the WIC program in their cities.
- Even Start program support shifted from federal to state funding.
- School districts share data with LECC and are beginning to look at and collect data on chronic absence and summer learning loss.
- Head Start and Early Head Start classrooms are housed within schools and function as Family Resource Centers.

2. What Local Early Childhood Councils Need to Continue Progress

Local Early Childhood Councils have earned credibility through their broad-based efforts and have made steady progress at the local level. To move forward, most require increased state and local support.

a. The LECC needs explicit, legal authority to tackle public accountability, system development, and resource allocation.

- Those councils that enjoy institutional leadership by local superintendents and/or municipal officials are better positioned to implement change. For example, when superintendents see that they have a role in pre-K services, the community blueprints address K-3 school-based strategies and/or are directly linked to district improvement plans.
- State and local leaders tend to focus on isolated programs and budget line items. Shifting to a systems focus can be challenging.
- State funding for early care and education flows to multiple entities in a community. State and local policymakers need to work with LECCs to utilize various funding streams in more flexible, supportive ways and consult with the LECC on the allocation and alignment of public resources.
- Flexible, discretionary resources would allow the LECC to focus on outcomes and take existing services/programs to scale or replicate evidence-based strategies in support of the Blueprint.

b. The LECC needs a better data management system to collect data and measure progress.

- Platforms for local data collection are not readily available and few, if any, staff resources exist to coordinate community data collection. Local agencies are reluctant to share existing data or collect new data, often citing a lack of staff resources.
- Although the Connecticut Data Collaborative has made some progress, state agency data are not readily accessible to communities. For example, health data form information is not collated or shared by DPH. This represents a missed opportunity to enhance children's health.
- A clear data sharing policy among state agencies would help to support the LECCs' need for data. This can be done with full adherence to and respect for all confidentiality requirements.

c. The LECCs need stable, sufficient funding to staff and support community blueprint planning and implementation.

- Many LECCs are overly dependent on private grants, often from a single source, to support their infrastructure in a way that is sustainable over the long term.
- Those LECCs with full-time dedicated staff are making steady progress. About a quarter of the LECCs have full-time staff. The majority of LECC staff work 20 hours or less a week. This part-time status, due to limited funding, often hampers LECC staff ability to foster systems change at the local level and to continually recruit and support robust parent engagement.
- Many providers are undertaking Council work in addition to a full-time service delivery job. They need support to make the most of the limited time they can devote to Council efforts.
- Collaboration is most successful when there is some value attached to collective action, in particular, funding for strategy implementation.

d. LECCs need a mechanism to jointly plan with state agencies and systematically share results.

- With more information about LECCs and community blueprints, state agency managers and staff could use the data the LECC has developed when applying for new federal grants or designing new program initiatives. For example, the SDE Alliance district planning could have required the inclusion of the LECCs and their community blueprint work.

VI. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Long term sustainability of Local Early Childhood Councils is dependent on local political will, coupled with state-local partnerships that align state policies to local community blueprints and aspirations for their young children, birth-to- age-eight. To this end, the Discovery communities and the Memorial Fund make the following recommendations for strengthening public/private/community/state partnerships:

1. Provide state funding to sustain the infrastructure required for Local Early Childhood Councils to work effectively.

In-kind donations and volunteer time alone cannot sustain a LECC. Dedicated staff positions are needed to track and report results, provide facilitative leadership and continuously engage parents and the broader community. Without funding to support the work of collaborative decision-making, funds spent on programs will not achieve desired results. Although the recommendations in the 2008 Holt, Wexler & Farnam report needs refining, basic arithmetic shows that a state investment of \$4 to \$6 million annually could fund LECCs in communities that house most of Connecticut’s vulnerable children; this is a relatively small investment in contrast with the \$1.36 billion cost of services.

2. Expand access to state data at the community level.

The state needs to support local communities’ access to state data across agencies, disaggregated by community, in order to reduce the need for communities to individually collect the data that drives the implementation of community blueprints. The Data Collaborative is emerging as a support for LECCs but its efficacy depends on state agencies providing timely and useful data.

3. Authorize the roles and responsibilities of Local Early Childhood Councils in legislation.

Codifying the LECCs in law will provide the authority needed to execute fully and effectively their roles and functions, as well as require participation by school districts and municipalities. Legislation could reduce the duplication of a variety of state statutes that call for local coordination such as School Readiness Councils, Youth Service Bureaus, Local Mental Health Authorities, the birth-to-3 Interagency Coordinating Councils, DMHAS Regional Action Councils and the local Systems of Care.

4. Align categorical funding across state agencies and provide more flexible funding for locally-defined strategy implementation.

The LECCs are developing financing plans to support their blueprint strategies that align and maximize existing categorical public and private resources. Consolidating and aligning categorical funding streams across state agencies could go a long way in supporting blueprint implementation. The LECCs also need flexible, discretionary resources to take existing services/programs to scale or replicate research-based strategies to achieve the community defined results for young children. State funding is better if focused on outcomes than categories.

5. Establish a formal state-local structure to implement the early childhood system.

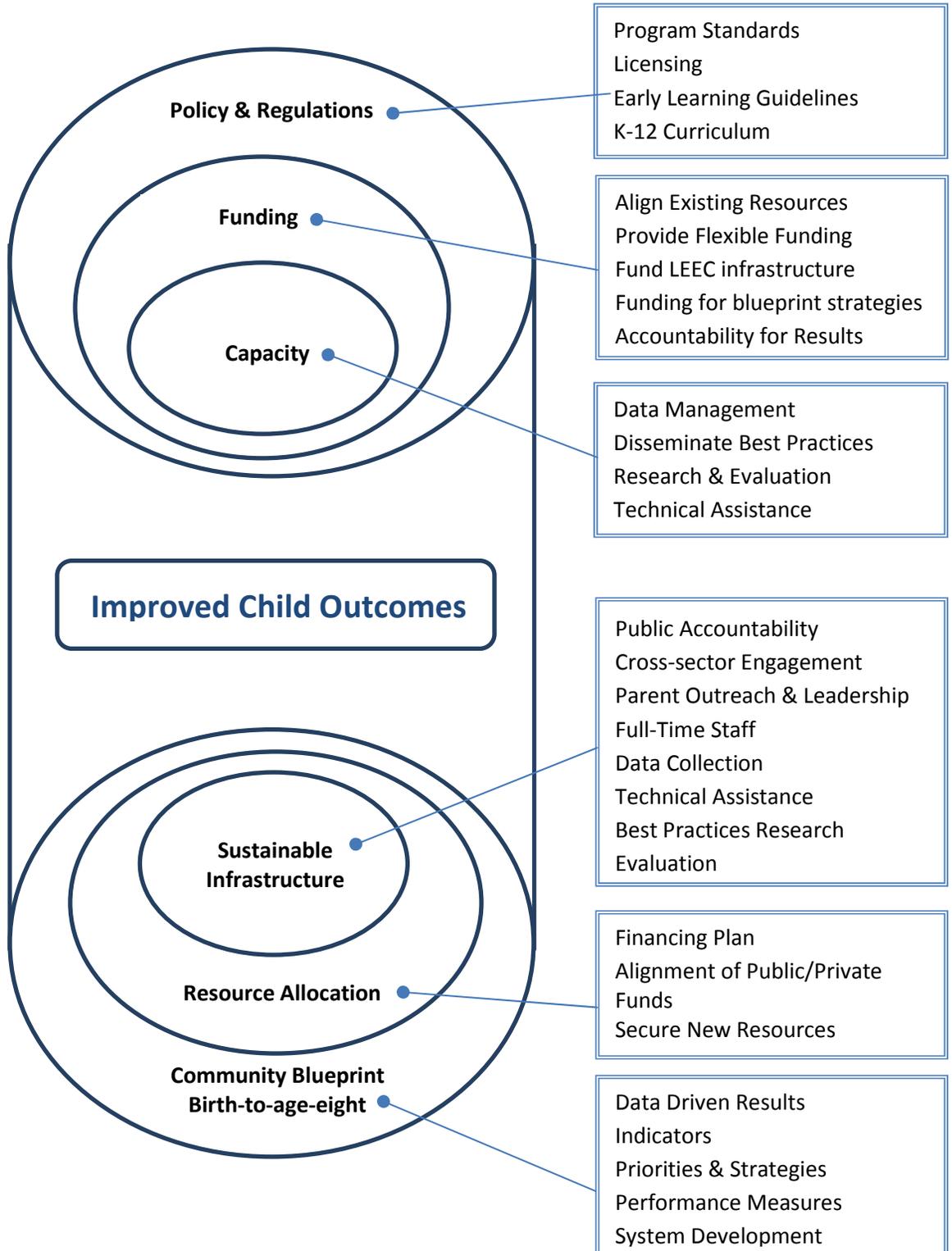
A formal, staffed structure is needed to explicitly link the multiple LECCs and state agencies that are responsible for early care and education. The charge for this structure would be to jointly plan, fund and build the capacity of LECCs to implement RBA framed blueprints and produce an annual report card on LECCs and blueprint outcomes for the Executive Branch and General Assembly. This structure could be the vehicle to implement the recommendations of both PA 11-181 and PA 11-109 (Select Committee on Children’s CT Kids Report Card)

The following diagram illustrates how a single early childhood system organized around improved child outcomes could operationalize the above recommendations.

SINGLE EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM ORGANIZED AROUND IMPROVED CHILD OUTCOMES

STATE LEVEL

- Legislature
- Governor
- State Agencies



APPENDIX A. KEY SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

The following are brief summaries and links to documents that provide key information about the role, function, value, and resource needs of local early childhood Councils.

Families and Community Raise Our Children: The Role and Cost of Effective Local Early Childhood Councils. Holt, Wexler & Farnam, LLP, September, 2009

<http://discovery.wcgmf.org/resources/families-and-communities-raise-our-children-role-and-cost-effective-local-early-childhood>

Holt, Wexler & Farnam worked with a Study Work Group composed of community-based and state-level early childhood leaders to determine the role, functions, and needs of early childhood councils in Connecticut. The report outlines a set of recommendations regarding funding, technical assistance, legislative and state-local partnership supports to further the development of local councils:

- ◆ The value and functions of early childhood councils in Connecticut;
- ◆ Patterns in how local councils are structured and supported in eight other States; and
- ◆ The infrastructure functions of early childhood councils: critical components for success, the costs and minimum funding needs, and the current resource structure.

Collective Impact. John Kania & Mark Kramer. Stanford Social Innovation Review, Winter, 2011.

<http://discovery.wcgmf.org/resources/collective-impact>

The authors posit that “*Large-scale social change requires broad cross-sector coordination, yet the social sector remains focused on the isolated intervention of individual organizations.*” The approach they call *Collective Impact* builds relationships between organizations and focuses on the community’s progress toward shared goals. The Collective Impact framework includes five conditions of success:

- ◆ Common agenda shared by a broad cross-section of community organizations
- ◆ Shared measurement systems
- ◆ Mutually reinforcing activities
- ◆ Continuous communication
- ◆ Backbone support organizations

Constructing Council Success for Network Learning: The Story of the Discovery Community Self-Assessment Tool. Angela Frusciante, Ph.D., and Carmen Siberon, M.P.H. William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund. The Foundation Review, 2010. Vol 2:1.

This article describes the evaluation tool that Discovery communities have used annually since 2008 to track their progress on collaboration, and explains the engagement process the Graustein Memorial Fund used to develop the tool. The instrument contains five categories that contain multiple indicators of success; communities rate themselves on a 1 – 5 scale on each of the indicators:

- ◆ **Collaboration:** broad, inclusive, engaged Council; strategic use of data; governance structure;
- ◆ **Parent leadership and engagement:** leadership training opportunities; parents engaged in multiple ways and participating meaningfully in decision-making;
- ◆ **Local leadership:** strong chair in place; support of the superintendent, Mayor/CEO, community champions; engaged Council sponsor;
- ◆ **Staff support:** minimum of 20 hours per week; facilitating community dialogue and decision making; supporting collaboration and parent engagement;
- ◆ **Meaningful local match:** resources committed by municipality, school board or other local organization.

APPENDIX B: COMMON BLUEPRINT STRATEGIES

READY BY FIVE: Quality care in pre-school programs and home care providers with an emphasis on infants/toddlers were the most commonly identified strategies including:

- Joint professional development between early care providers and the school district
- Accreditation & quality workforce
- Quality, licensing & professional development family care with centers for infants and toddlers
- Supply of family care homes (outreach and recruitment)
- Access to Care4Kids
- Supply of school readiness slots
- Parent knowledge about quality programs & choices

EARLY HEALTH & DEVELOPMENT: Behavioral health and access to primary care were the most commonly identified strategies including:

- Developmental screening
- Mental health consultation in classrooms/Pediatricians
- HUSKY outreach/eligibility
- Medical home
- Home visiting
- Oral health (increase dentists taking HUSKY)
- Nutrition (Obesity prevention)

FINE BY NINE: Most commonly identified strategies focused on the successful transition from pre-k to kindergarten. Specific school-based strategies to sustain the gains through third grade were limited.

- District-wide kindergarten transition plans
- Kindergarten registration policies and practices
- Community-based out-of-school time programs (summer, after-school, extended day)
- Curriculum alignment & professional development between pre-K and K-3

FAMILY SUPPORT: Increasing community awareness of resources was the most commonly identified strategy. Others included:

- Educating parents about child development and their role as a child's first teacher
- Family Resource Centers
- Parent leadership training
- Outreach to families
- Increasing access to services through culturally appropriate venues and transportation

CROSS SYSTEM STRATEGIES: Cross domain strategies that connect programs and streamline access:

- **Quality** - Professional development to improve quality across and between early care programs and k-3 teachers and standardized assessment strategies.
- **Early Intervention** – Birth-to-age three strategies that link pediatricians, early care programs, behavioral health providers and the school system.
- **Early Literacy** – Community based early literacy efforts (out-of-school time, use of library) that are explicitly linked to the early grades of school.
- **English Language Learners** – Reaching out to non-English speaking families, to ensure there are culturally responsive services; that families have access to health care and translation services and a school based curriculum that acknowledges the diversity of the student population.