

Common Agenda

Early Care and Education in Alexandria, VA



October 2015

I. OUR STORY

The **Early Care and Education Work Group** (“ECEW”) was born from the same **collaborative DNA** that has propelled the **City of Alexandria** for many years.

In 2010, the Alexandria City Council created the **Children, Youth and Families Collaborative Commission** (“the Commission”) with the support of the Alexandria City Public Schools. Establishing the Commission was a groundbreaking step toward addressing the needs of Alexandria’s children in a more holistic manner, moving away from an age-based structure that addressed needs in siloes. One of the key remits of the Commission was to create a **Children and Youth Master Plan** focused on guiding the provision of services for the city’s children and youth, birth through age 21. The Plan was developed over a two-year period involving hundreds of hours of discussion, debate and problem-solving with extensive input from community residents, parents, students, service providers, faith-based leaders, funders, and elected officials.

As the Commission established a design team to guide the development of the Master Plan, simultaneous interest surfaced from **Alexandria’s philanthropic community** to build a **stronger system of early care and education**. Members of the Commission engaged these stakeholders with the result of forming an Early Care and Education Work Group that would work on a parallel track, identifying bright spot research to inform how Alexandria could create a more robust early care and education system. Between 2012 and 2015, the ECEW, supported by private funding and working in a highly collaborative manner across philanthropic, public and private sectors, contributed significantly to both knowledge on and momentum for early care and education in our city. For example, in 2013 the ECEW published a study entitled “**Risk & Reach**” which was instrumental in helping to shape collective understanding about the population and risk profile of children under five in Alexandria. Early care and education was also the focus of the summer 2013 **ACT For Alexandria** (“ACT”) **IMPACT Forum**. In 2014, the ECEW was selected to attend a P-3 conference in Seattle. In 2015, the ECEW enabled the creation of a “**No Wrong Door**” **brochure** that provides information in multiple languages about pre-K options in our city.

The work of the ECEW and the adoption and implementation of the Master Plan have gone hand in hand. Regular reports about the progress of the ECEW were communicated to the Commission and elected bodies (e.g., City Council and School Board) in an effort to ensure that insights generated through the ECEW were used to inform and shape the strategies and action steps ultimately included in the Master Plan. In May 2014 and June 2014 the School Board and City Council, respectively, adopted the Children and Youth Master Plan and charged an existing body of city and school senior staff with owning implementation while plans were made to secure funds for an eventual backbone entity to support the Master Plan implementation. The Council also officially engaged ACT to serve as the convener of the ECEW and charged this group with assuming responsibility for implementing the Master Plan strategy 2.1. The Commission maintains an active role in monitoring the progress of implementation.

The common agenda described in this document, and its component parts, are connected to strategies and actions steps included in the Master Plan and designed to help us move in the direction of all children succeeding today and tomorrow. While the ECEW is dedicated specifically to strategy 2.1 (“*Support the development and alignment of, and access to, an early care and education system that prepares young children to enter kindergarten*”), due to the cross-cutting nature of the Master Plan, the ECEW’s work touches upon strategies related to health (Goal 1); socio-emotional development (Goal 3); family empowerment (Goal 4); and overall coordination (Goal 5).

II. OUR VISION, MISSION, & GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Our **VISION** mirrors that of Alexandria's Children & Youth Master Plan:

All of Alexandria's children and youth succeed today and tomorrow

The specific ECEW **MISSION** is to ensure that:

Every child in Alexandria has a strong start in life and in school

In order to realize this mission, we are building an early care and education system that is:

- **Aligned:** We celebrate Alexandria's mixed delivery system which is intentionally organized to provide a variety of services based on the diverse needs of children and families; ensuring there is both variety *and* alignment entails programs, agencies and individuals sharing information and processes to enable transparency, a unified voice, smooth transitions and ease of access.
- **Accessible:** Access for all, especially for the most vulnerable, must be centered around what is optimal for children and families, and encompass many different dimensions of access (e.g., geographic, cultural, linguistic, and financial).
- **High-quality:** Alexandria's children are entitled to a high-quality, culturally competent learning experience that is in line with local, state and national guidelines, research, and evidence-based, data-driven practices.
- **Comprehensive:** We embrace an early care and education system which spans pre-natal through 3rd grade, including educational, health, socio-emotional, family, and community support.
- **Equitable:** Every child and family deserves high-quality services that eliminate disparities in life opportunities and allow all of Alexandria's children to succeed today and tomorrow.



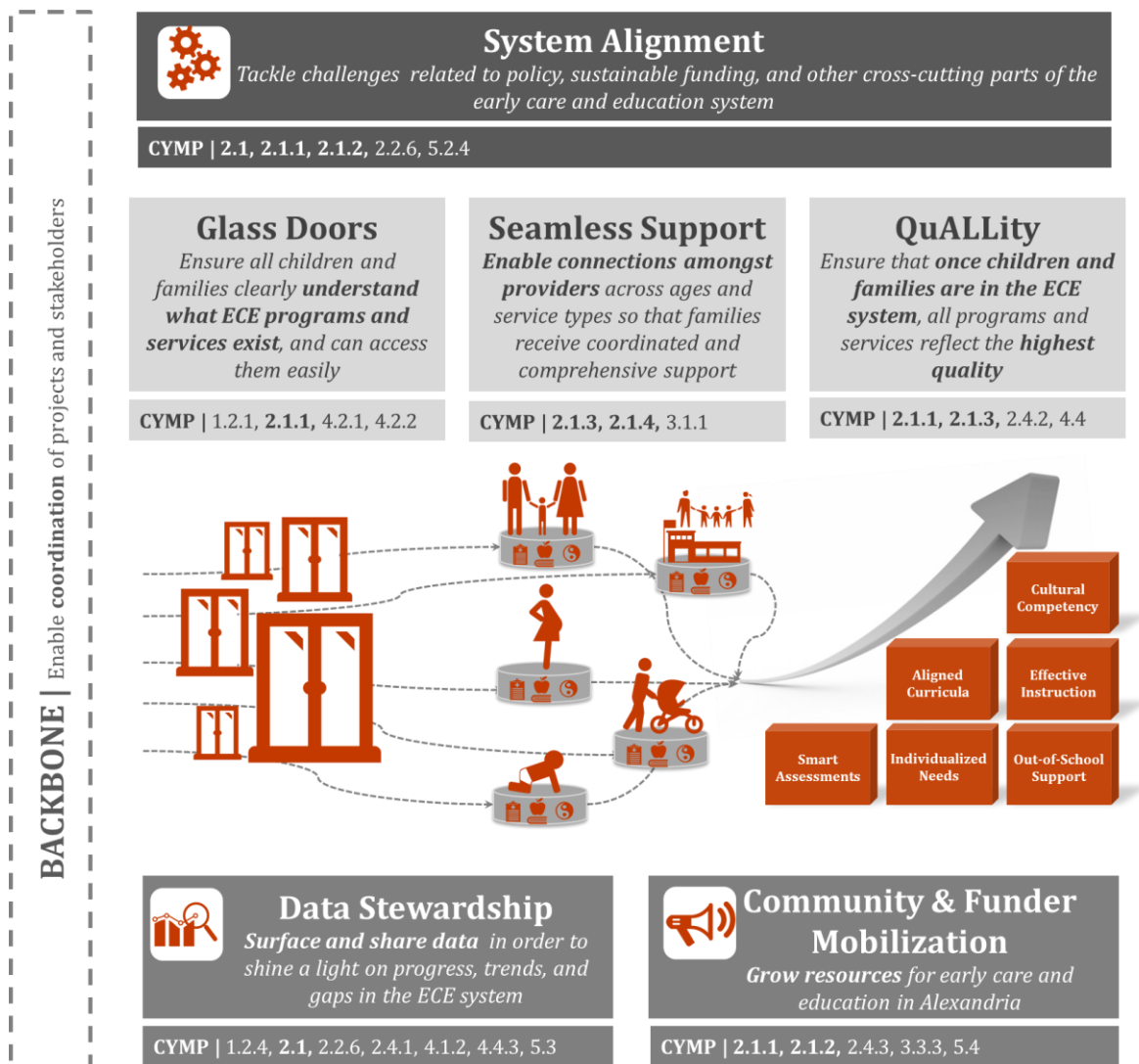
Our work is guided by a set of **PRINCIPLES** that underpin the way we work together collectively:

- **Children and families are at the heart of everything we do:** Together, we are building a system of care that is family and child-centric.
- **This is a community-wide effort:** We need to actively engage parents, community members, voters, funders, and other partners through a unified voice.
- **Everyone values and respects each other's contributions:** We embrace the fact that we are a mixed delivery system and actively seek to have different perspectives at the table.
- **Commitment to results is crucial:** If we arrange our puzzle pieces more effectively and share a commitment to accountability, we can create a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

III. OUR STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK AND POTENTIAL PROJECTS

ECEW Strategic Framework

The image below depicts the strategic framework that will guide the ECEW as it selects, prioritizes, and implements specific action steps. In order to craft this strategic framework, the ECEW relied on several key inputs: the collective impact body of literature, national examples across other early care and education initiatives, a bottom-up cataloging and grouping of evidence-based best practice strategies, a top-down analysis of how the initiative's ultimate outcomes and indicators will be achieved, a crosswalk of proposed strategies and structures against the five adjectives highlighted within the ECEW's mission, a crosswalk against the CYMP, ACPS, and other existing strategic plans, and input from the ECEW based on its knowledge of bright spots and gaps in the ECE system. Note that although the primary focus of the ECEW is CYMP Goal 2.1, other CYMP goals are also relevant and connected (see boxes embedded below each strategy corresponding to CYMP goals).



While each strategy in this framework has a specific purpose and scope, they also complement and build on one another's work. Potential starting points and longer-term priorities within each strategy are outlined in the subsequent section.

Potential Projects

Potential Starting Points

Longer-Term Priorities

System Alignment



- Design and implement an **effective project coordination infrastructure** to help execute the ECEW's work and the Children & Youth Master Plan's work more broadly
- Better understand the **gaps and opportunities** related to existing funding streams, including how to better combine and optimize funding for a more equitable and family and child-centric system

Glass Doors



- Develop a **universal eligibility screening tool** that will enable families to have a more transparent understanding of their eligibility for various programs, and potentially also reduce the enrollment administrative burden
- Develop **stronger feedback mechanisms for families** to engage with providers in a culturally and geographically accessible way
- Create a **neighborhood-level interactive systems map** of providers and services in any particular geography

Seamless Support



- **Forge connections** among health and education providers, especially in the prenatal to 3-year-old space, in order to identify specific ways the ECEW can support **comprehensive pre-natal care, a comprehensive medical home approach, and more referral conduits** between health-focused and other programs
- Ensure **stronger transitions between pre-K and grades K-3**, with greater information-sharing across early learning pathways

QuALLity



- Continue to implement the new **CLASS professional development tools** through the Quality Collaborative grant, which will support **improved teaching practices in early childhood classrooms** across Alexandria
- Understand the **current professional development offerings** for providers and professionals
- **Align curricula and assessment practices** amongst pre-K providers
- Increase the number of child care centers, preschools, and family child care homes that are **accredited, maintaining accreditation status annually**, and/or participating in the **QRIS system**

Data Stewardship



- Develop a **learning and evaluation plan** that outlines the outcomes and indicators the ECEW will track to measure progress over time
- Lay the **groundwork for a data system** that captures how each child is being served by and benefitting from the early care and education system
- Implement a **longitudinal data tracking system** to track children as they move to and through the early care and education system

Community & Funder Mobilization



- **Make the case for early childhood investment** to the community through clear, consistent messaging about the ECEW's work externally
- Commission a study to **better understand the feasibility of options to grow public funding resources** dedicated to early care and education given Alexandria's political and policy context, and the feasibility of each

IV. MEASURING OUR PROGRESS

There are three main types of outcomes that the early care and education work group will track in order to measure progress and impact. First, one of the key ingredients will be **working together differently**, with better coordination among all actors across Alexandria's ECE system. This will then help to foster a **better early care and education system** for families, providers, and the community. In turn, these foundational steps will be in service of the ultimate outcomes the ECEW seeks: **better outcomes for children** in Alexandria across several dimensions of well-being (health, academic, and socio-emotional).

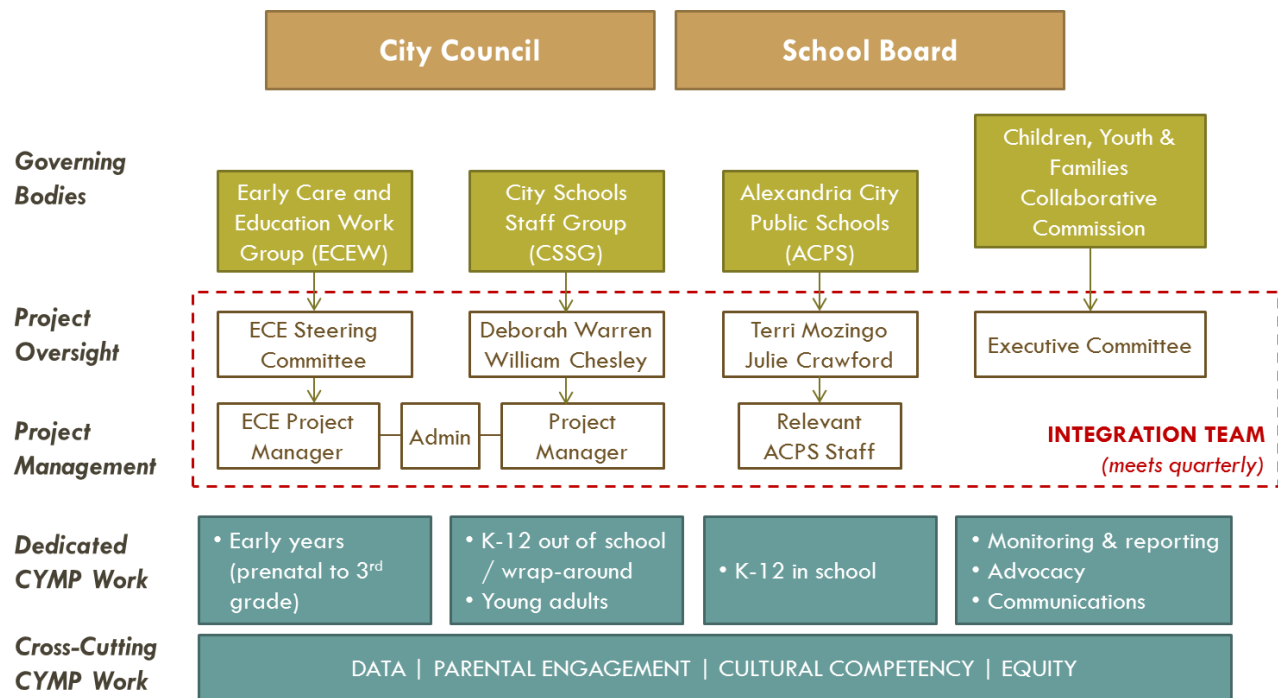
The visual below highlights some of the main outcomes that the ECEW will measure its progress against over time in each of these three areas.



The ECEW is also in process of finalizing a **detailed learning and evaluation plan** that will ensure effective processes and procedures are in place to measure progress on an ongoing basis.

V. OUR ORGANIZATIONAL SET-UP

Translating the ambitious agenda of the Children & Youth Master Plan into action will require dedicated resources going forward. Below is a visual depiction of the **initial organizational set-up** that will guide the implementation of the CYMP. There will be three main **governing bodies** that will provide oversight and project management to different components of the CYMP: the Early Care and Education Work Group, the City Schools Staff Group, and Alexandria City Public Schools. Each of these governing bodies will have oversight bodies and project management staff that will collectively form the **Integration Team**, alongside the Executive Committee for the Children, Youth & Families Collaborative Commission, which will focus on monitoring and reporting, advocacy, and communications functions.



ECEW Membership

- **Lisette Bishins**, CEO, Child & Family Network Centers
- **Debbie Bowers**, Public Health Nurse Manager, Alexandria Health Department
- **Debra Collins**, Deputy City Manager, City of Alexandria
- **Alvin Crawley**, Superintendent, Alexandria City Public Schools
- **Carol Farrell**, Chief of Early Childhood, City of Alexandria
- **Ellen Kennedy Folts**, Executive Director, Bruhn-Morris Family Foundation
- **Kate Garvey**, Director, Department of Community & Human Services, City of Alexandria
- **Lisa Guli**, Epidemiologist, Alexandria Health Department
- **Stephen Haering**, Director, Alexandria Health Department
- **Jane Richardson**, Early Childhood Special Education Coordinator, Alexandria City Public Schools
- **Tammy Mann**, CEO, Campagna Center, and Chair, Children, Youth, & Families Collaborative Commission
- **Sean McEneaney**, Past Chair, Children, Youth, & Families Collaborative Commission
- **Lori Morris**, President, Bruhn-Morris Family Foundation
- **Terri Mozingo**, Chief Academic Officer, Alexandria City Public Schools
- **Clint Page**, Chief Accountability Officer, Alexandria City Public Schools
- **Lisa Piehota**, Director of Elementary School Instruction, Alexandria City Public Schools
- **Deborah Warren**, Director, Center for Children & Families
- **Brandi Yee**, Chief Program Officer, ACT for Alexandria