



Creating and Supporting a Thriving Local Early Care and Education System

The saying “it takes a village to raise a child” is the perfect motto for thinking about developing a robust and sustainable system to educate and care for young children from birth to school age. Individuals and organizations across the “village” need to understand the importance of early care and education (ECE) and determine how they can play a role in preparing young children for lifelong success. In choosing to read this tool, you likely already are committed to ECE in your community and are looking for ways to do more. Advocacy & Communication Solutions can help! This tool outlines six key components of a thriving system and offers questions to get you and other ECE local champions thinking about how to create and support a thriving ECE system. The six components are the following:

1. **Involvement of an Early Care and Education Committee:**

Have a diverse group of stakeholders who create and help implement a comprehensive approach to developing and improving the community’s ECE system.

2. **Engagement among Community Stakeholders:**

Ensure involvement from people who will benefit directly or indirectly from the success of the community’s ECE system, such as educators, local businesses, and elected officials.

3. **Involvement among Families and Caregivers:**

Consistently inform, engage, and invite parents and family members of young children to participate in events, programs, and activities related to ECE.

4. **Coordination among ECE Programs:**

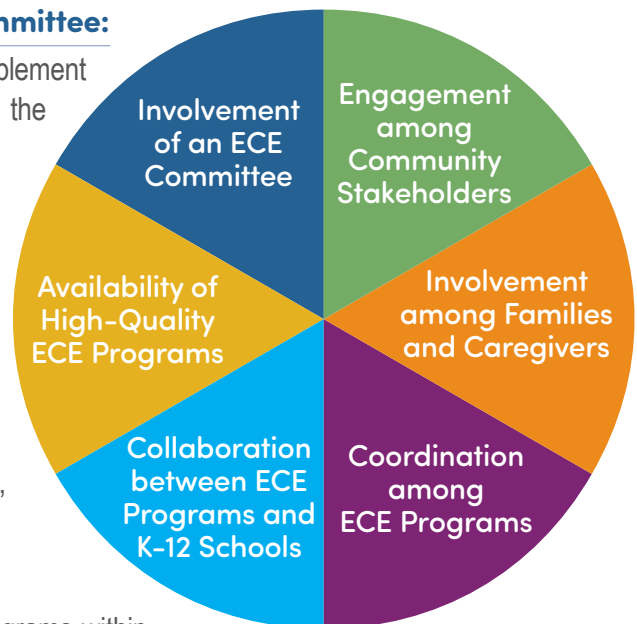
Bring all types of non-parental child care and education programs within the community to the conversation to support the needs of young children, regardless of where they receive care.

5. **Collaboration between ECE Programs and K-12 Schools:**

Support strong connections between ECE programs and the K–12 system (e.g., public, non-public, charter schools), so they work together to support school readiness, kindergarten transitions, and the overall success of young children.

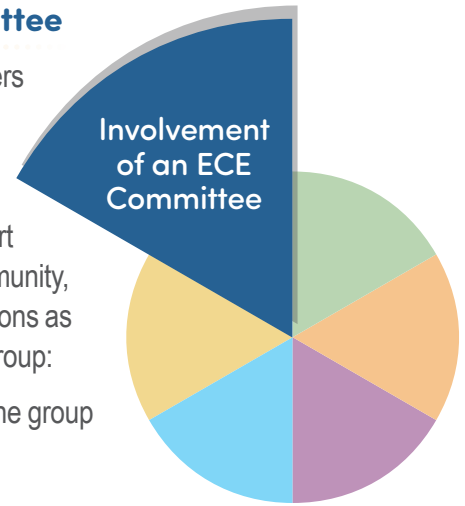
6. **Availability of High-Quality Early Care and Education Programs:**

Give families access to a wide range of options that meet their needs, are affordable, and are recognized as high quality by trusted experts.



1: Involvement of an Early Care and Education Committee

An Early Care and Education Committee is a diverse group of stakeholders who are responsible for ensuring the community has a comprehensive approach to developing and improving the community's early care and education system. Sometimes this group is called an advisory council or advisory group. Whatever the name, this group helps elevate and support the full early learning system by engaging people from all parts of the community, not just those in education or early childhood. Consider the following questions as you think about the best way to structure the work of an ECE committee/group:



1. **Who will lead the effort?** Who will be primarily responsible for ensuring the group comes together regularly and works well as a collective?

2. **What structure will be used?**

Tip: Many communities convene a leadership body or advisory committee comprising 10–15 people to drive the community-wide work. This approach can extend the reach of funding and marketing opportunities by including more people—including those outside of the early education field—in the decision-making process.

3. **Based on the chosen structure, who needs to be at the table?** The box at right offers a few suggestions from successful ECE committee efforts around the country.

4. **In addition to the project lead, what other roles will need to be filled? How will they be filled (e.g., facilitator, notetaker, outreach/marketing coordinator)?**

5. **How will decisions be made within the council or committee (consensus, majority vote, other)?**

6. **Where and how often will meetings be held?**

Tip: Start with monthly meetings at a central location to build momentum.

7. **How will you explain the importance of this committee and member expectations when recruiting others?**

Tip: Consider using a member agreement that lays out clear expectations and have all members sign it.

TIP: ACS' [Network Mapping](#) tool can help you think through and organize relevant connections in your community. Find it online [here](#).

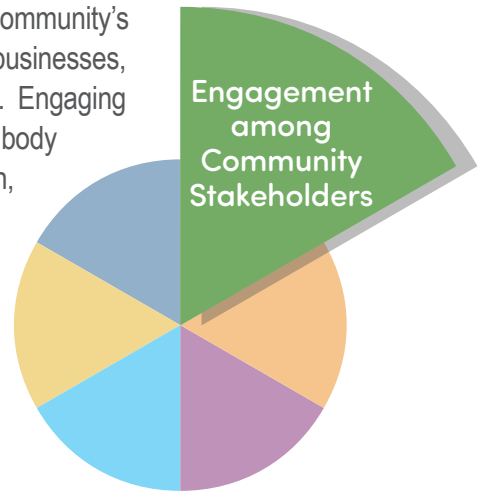
Consider the following organizations when thinking about committee members:

- Child care/preschool programs
- Head Start/Early Head Start programs
- Schools (public and private)
- Library
- Local government and elected officials (e.g., mayor's office)
- Community foundations and other philanthropic organizations
- Local businesses and the Chamber of Commerce
- Tribal organizations
- Faith-based organizations
- Child welfare agency/organizations
- Civic organizations, (e.g., Volunteers of America, Big Brothers Big Sisters)
- Community action centers
- Health care organizations and hospitals
- Mental health providers/organizations
- Early intervention organizations
- Criminal justice organizations
- Economic development organizations
- Colleges and universities
- Parents and families
- Professional associations (educators, doctors, nurses, law enforcement, etc.)



2: Engagement among Community Stakeholders

People who will benefit directly or indirectly from the success of the community's early care and education system—including parents, educators, local businesses, and elected officials—need to have a voice in decisions about ECE. Engaging these audiences can be formal (such as membership on the governing body discussed in #1 above), or informal (such as through communication, marketing, and events). Below are some questions to get you started in thinking about broad engagement in your community.

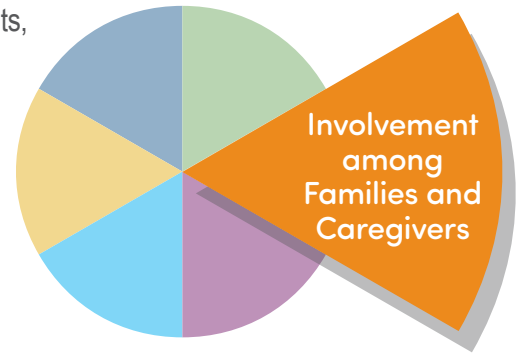


1. Who is *directly* impacted by decisions about when and how early care and education is delivered and accessed in your community? Are representatives from those audiences on the committee you created when considering who to involve in your effort? If not, how can they be engaged?
2. Who is *indirectly* impacted by the ECE system in your community? Often this includes health and human service agencies, health care providers/hospitals, local nonprofit organizations that support families, and government agencies. Are representatives from those audiences on the committee you created when considering who to involve in your effort? If not, how can they be engaged?
3. How will you explain to people from non-education backgrounds why their involvement in strengthening the ECE system is important?
Tip: When speaking with employers and other business-focused individuals, emphasize the short- and long-term economic impact of quality ECE, including workforce reliability and stability.
4. In addition to a formal role on the governing body, which of the following engagement methods might work to reach other stakeholders in your community?
 - ▶ Individual emails
 - ▶ Group emails
 - ▶ E-newsletters or e-blasts
 - ▶ Phone calls
 - ▶ One-on-one meetings (in-person or virtual)
 - ▶ Traditional media such as newspapers, TV, and radio
 - ▶ Printed materials like flyers, posters, brochures, and handouts
 - ▶ Digital media like Facebook, Instagram, website ads, and streaming service ads
 - ▶ In-person or virtual group events (including meetings)



3: Involvement among Families and Caregivers

Direct caregivers, including parents, nannies, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and even siblings, should be regularly informed, engaged, and invited to participate in events, programs, and/or activities related to early care and education. The questions below will help you consider what role parents and families will have in your local ECE system.



- 1. How can parents and caregivers engage in ECE work in your community?** Examples include:
 - ▶ Attending events to learn about child development/early education strategies
 - ▶ Serving on the governing body (advisory committee)
 - ▶ Attending and speaking at school board meetings about the importance of ECE
 - ▶ Calling local and state elected officials to advocate for public funding and/or policy changes to support ECE
 - ▶ Writing a letter to the editor or an opinion editorial in the local newspaper
 - ▶ Sharing messages about ECE and family engagement opportunities with their own social networks
- 2. Which parents do you want to engage? Do you want to reach out to those who will be served by a specific program? All parents in the community? Are there existing parent groups you can engage?**
- 3. How will you engage parents?** This should be based on what role they will play, and which parents are to be engaged. Some options include:
 - ▶ Email
 - ▶ Flyers
 - ▶ Social media (like parenting and neighborhood or school-specific Facebook groups)
 - ▶ Texting
 - ▶ Using lists already created/used by partners (e.g., school district)
 - ▶ Group meeting(s)
 - ▶ Peer to Peer
- 4. When will you engage parents? Are there certain times of year that you will need and want to do more extensive outreach and engagement (e.g., during joint enrollment periods or in the lead-up to a new school year)?**
- 5. What messages about early learning are most effective with parents and families in your community?**
For ideas and examples, visit www.thinkbabies.org/take-action-congress/messaging-guides/messaging-guide-child-care/.



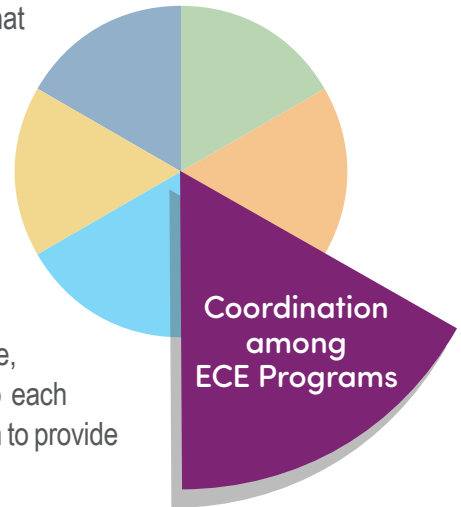
4: Coordination among Early Care and Education Programs

Families rely on a wide variety of child care arrangements based on what works best for their lives and priorities, so all types of non-parental child care and education programs within the community should be connected and working together when possible to support the needs of young children. This includes private child care centers and preschools, home-based child care providers, programs run by the local school district, and all others. Here are some questions to get you started:

1. **What are all the ECE programs in your community?** Making a list of names and contact information is a great task for the advisory committee, if the list does not exist already. Once you have that list, reach out to each program to explain your mission, understand their needs, and invite them to provide input.
2. **How are the ECE programs working together now? How else could they collaborate to maximize both their own financial stability and the quality of the care they provide?** Here are some strategies to consider:

- ▶ Coordinate placement/joint enrollment events and efforts.
- ▶ Enter into shared services agreements that allow a group of independent organizations or businesses to negotiate better deals on services like food, curriculum, assessment, and transportation.
- ▶ Collaborate to fund and attend professional development (this also helps align providers in learning the same information).
- ▶ Provide peer support and mentoring to one another.
- ▶ Promote one another's programs and services, especially if one program is stronger in serving certain populations of children than another or is in a community that will better meet the needs of a specific family.

Tip: Keep in mind that most ECE providers face a constant uphill battle to make financial ends meet and may be reluctant to take time away from running their businesses (especially to work closely with their competitors). Make clear up front how their involvement and collaboration can help them thrive.

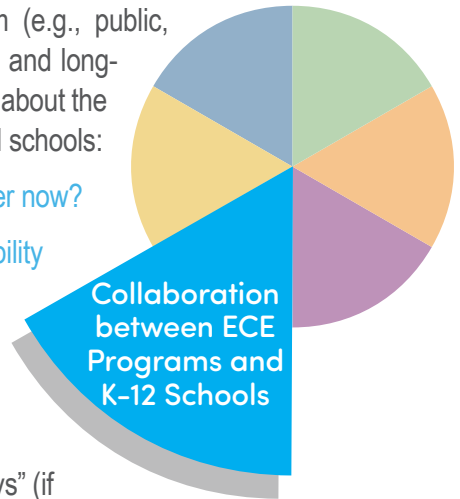


5: Alignment between Early Care and Education Programs and K-12 Schools

Collaboration between ECE programs and the traditional K–12 system (e.g., public, private, parochial schools) ensures alignment in the readiness, transition, and long-term success of young children. Here are some questions to help you think about the best ways to build and strengthen partnerships between ECE program and schools:

1. How are ECE programs and schools in your community working together now?
2. How else could they collaborate to maximize both their own financial stability and the quality of the care they provide? Here are some strategies to consider:

- ▶ Host preschoolers in kindergarten classrooms so they can become familiar with the setting and meet other students.
- ▶ Encourage kindergarten teachers to use earmarked “professional days” (if available) to visit preschools and child care centers to introduce themselves to rising kindergarteners in a setting familiar to the children.
- ▶ Help kindergarten and preschool teachers plan activities and outings together.
- ▶ Facilitate opportunities for ECE and kindergarten teachers to interact with each other via face-to-face or voice-to-voice conferences. Strong relationships among teachers will support better communication when there are challenges and facilitate opportunities to share and learn from each other’s successes.
- ▶ Have ECE teachers prepare a transition document for each child in their care to capture observations and milestones aligned with early learning standards to share with the child’s kindergarten teacher. If using a tool like this, make sure that parents understand its value and how it will be used, too.
- ▶ Standardize data-sharing processes to ensure kindergarten teachers get the information they need about each child coming into their classroom. Consider developing a transition document/packet that meets the needs of both ECE and K-12 teachers and supports parents/caregivers.
- ▶ Help schools create transition teams comprising teachers, administrators, and parents who can look at the strategies and tactics used to support successful transition from ECE to kindergarten.
- ▶ Offer joint professional development opportunities for early education and teachers in the early grades; this helps ensure they are on the same page when it comes to terminology and best practices.
- ▶ Implement data-sharing agreements so relevant information can be shared between ECE programs and schools. Explore ways to share information electronically to save time.
- ▶ Convene kindergarten discussion groups comprising preschool, kindergarten, and first-grade teachers who meet to discuss common issues.
- ▶ Align instructional components of ECE and kindergarten to create continuous learning and teaching experiences.
- ▶ Create ECE or kindergarten readiness coalitions comprising kindergarten principals and teachers as well as ECE teachers and providers, parents, libraries, and community service agencies.



6: Availability of High-Quality Early Care and Education Programs

All families should have access to early care and education programming that is affordable and recognized as high-quality. “High quality” is usually defined locally and includes elements such as licensing, professional development, curriculum, and more. While this may seem overwhelming if you aren’t an expert in ECE, rest assured that others in your community will be familiar with state standards and national best practices around high-quality early care and education. Here are some questions to get you started when it comes to quality:



1. Based on state standards, how many programs in your community are considered “high quality” now?

To find information about your state’s ECE standards, visit ccaoa.wenginepowered.com/resources/map/.

2. For programs that aren’t meeting those standards, what is standing in the way? Are there resources they need to strengthen their quality?
3. What resources are available to help programs obtain a higher quality rating (if applicable)? For example, is there professional development training offered to ECE providers? Are coaches available to support them?
Tip: A great resource for answering these types of questions is your local Child Care Resource and Referral agency or CCR&R. Find your local CCR&R online [here](#).
4. For programs that are not licensed and/or are not interested in pursuing a formal state quality rating/designation, what resources will help them ensure they are delivering high-quality care in their own setting? For example, are toolkits, books, and/or educational materials available? Could they use the same curriculum that other high-quality programs use? Think creatively about how to support all types of providers in your community in serving young children.

Looking Ahead

As you work through the six components and answer the questions posed, you likely will uncover existing progress by other local ECE champions. For example, there may be coordination efforts underway among K–12 schools and ECE programs, or perhaps there is an informal group of parents working to improve ECE offerings in your community. Part of the work ahead is aligning existing efforts, sharing widely any existing resources (trainings, materials, grants, community events, etc.), identifying gaps, and finding ways to fill those gaps to make a lasting difference.

Advocacy & Communication Solutions has decades of experience supporting communities in strengthening their ECE systems. If you’re ready to take the next step, reach out to info@advocacyandcommunication.org.

