2023–2027 STRATEGIC PLAN

NOEEN | NEW ORLEANS EARLY EDUCATION NETWORK

STRATEGIC PLAN OUTLINE

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The NOEEN Steering Committee adopted this strategic plan on March 8, 2023.

NOEEN | NEW ORLEANS EARLY EDUCATION NETWORK

NOEEN BACKGROUND

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NOEEN HISTORY

- The New Orleans Early Education Network (NOEEN) was founded following the passage of Act 3 of the 2012 Louisiana Legislative Session, which sought to create a **comprehensive** and **integrated** delivery system for early care and education (ECE) and improve kindergarten readiness.

- The Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) took a parish-based approach to Act 3 implementation, identifying **lead agencies** in each parish to build local early care and education **networks** that:
    - **coordinate quality observations** of early learning classrooms using the CLASS tool;
    - **unify enrollment** across all publicly funded early care and education programs, including Early Head Start, Head Start, school-based Pre-K programs, and family child care providers with academic approval;
    - **streamline funding** through an annual unified funding recommendation to LDOE; and
    - **communicate** with early learning providers about state policies and initiatives, serving as a local connector between the state and a multitude of early care and education providers.

NOEEN HISTORY

- Initially, Agenda for Children served as the **lead agency** for NOEEN. Currently, this responsibility is shared between **Agenda for Children** and **NOLA Public Schools**.
- In 2019, **NOEEN** became one of the first LDOE **Ready Start Networks**, which were designed to increase access to high-quality early care and education at the local level.
- Today, NOEEN is comprised of all **publicly-funded** early childhood care and education providers in Orleans Parish—more than 150 public schools, non-public schools, Type III early learning centers, Early Head Start centers, Head Start centers, and family child care providers with academic approval—that serve more than 5,500 publicly funded birth to five-year-old children. It also boasts the most comprehensive network with some of the most diverse funding of any local community network in Louisiana.

NOEEN'S ROLE

Role	Entity	Function + Responsibilities
Early Childhood Community Network (Orleans Parish)	New Orleans Early Education Network (NOEEN)	• unifies early learning programs • includes every publicly-funded pre-k, child care, and Head Start program • improves family access to high-quality early learning experiences for children and increases support for programs
Lead Agency (Orleans Parish)	Agenda for Children NOLA-PS *(co-lead agencies on behalf of NOEEN)*	The Lead Agency is the administrator of the compliance or "government" functions and contracts and facilitates coordinated leadership functions for the community network. • coordinated observations (CLASS) • coordinated enrollment • coordinated funding request • coordinated information, convenings, and child count • fiscal management, stipend payments, seat payments
Ready Start Network (Orleans Parish)	Agenda for Children *(on behalf of NOEEN)*	The Ready Start Network is the strategic arm of the lead agency and community network and focuses on capacity building, increasing access and quality, and innovation. • assesses local demand for early care and education and creates a blueprint to address gaps • recruits stakeholders to expand early childhood coalition • establishes local governance structures to make collaborative decisions • implements fundraising strategies to satisfy local demand

MISSION AND VISION

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NOEEN'S MISSION

To ensure an excellent start for every child in New Orleans by strengthening early childhood education and providing families access to high-quality early learning programs that help them realize their dreams for their children.

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NOEEN'S VISION FOR THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM

The NOEEN Steering Committee envisions making New Orleans the premiere city for early education with a system that ensures:

- **School-Ready Children and Child-Ready Schools:** All children enter school ready to succeed and kindergarten classrooms across the city are prepared to best support children through the transition into "big school."
- **A Quality Early Learning Seat for Every Child:** Every family that wants one can continuously and easily access a high-quality early learning seat for their child throughout their early years from birth to kindergarten with an easy enrollment process.
- **A Professional, Well-Compensated, and Sustainable Educator Workforce:** Early learning teachers are respected, able to build savings, access career ladders, and stay in the field of early education.
- **Families with Decision-Making Power:** Families are engaged and have decision-making power in the development and design of New Orleans' early education system.

NOEEN'S VISION FOR THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM

The NOEEN Steering Committee envisions making New Orleans the premiere city for early education with a system that ensures:

- **Diverse High-Quality and Sustainable Early Learning Providers:** There are an abundance of early learning providers across settings that deliver high-quality programs and meet the needs of children and families.
- **A Comprehensive Quality Rating & Improvement System:** New Orleans' early learning system operates with a more nuanced understanding of – and means of assessing and improving – quality that goes beyond the CLASS assessment of teacher-child interactions.
- **Longitudinal Data:** The system easily allows stakeholders to track data for children over time from their early education into their K-12 careers to track and monitor impacts across settings and programs.
- **All Children Served Well:** The specific needs of children with disabilities, English Language Learners, and other diverse learners are consistently met in environments that work for them.

THE CURRENT STATE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN NEW ORLEANS

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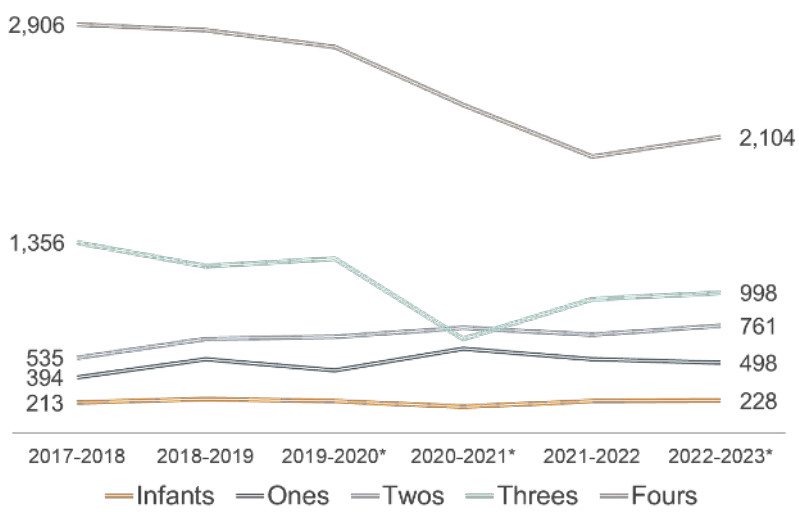
EARLY CHILDHOOD ENROLLMENT IN NEW ORLEANS

Publicly Funded Early Care and Education Enrollment by Age Group and Year, 2017 - 2023



***Source**: LDOE data kit based on audited Oct. 1 child count data for 2017-2021; 2022-2023 reflects unaudited Child Count data and is therefore preliminary.*

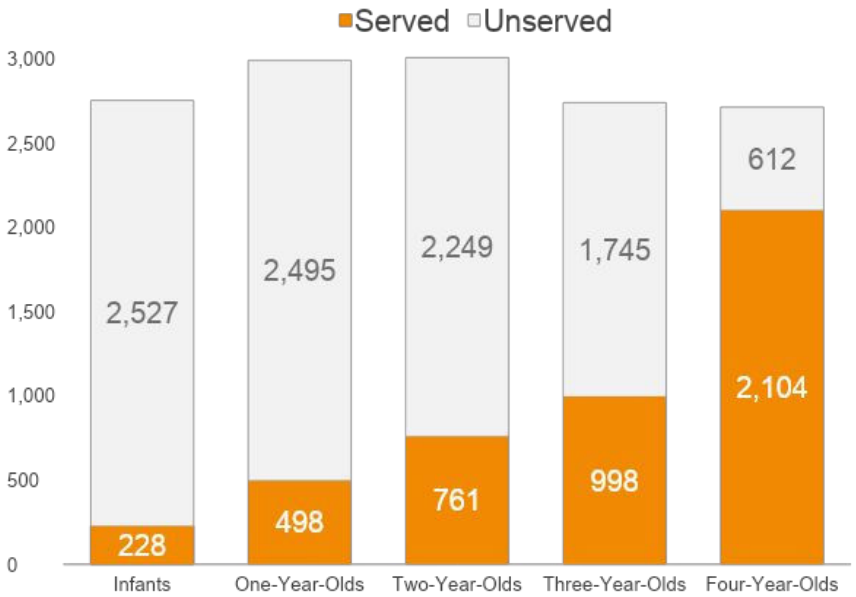
While publicly-funded enrollment remains highest among four year olds, there were 802 fewer **four year olds** enrolled in Oct. 2022 than in Oct. 2017, the equivalent of 40+ fewer classrooms.

While far fewer seats are available for children **birth through age two**, there were 345 more children enrolled in 2022 than in 2017 – a 30% increase.

The network served 815 **fewer children overall** in 2022 than in 2017.

CURRENT STATISTICS: ECE ACCESS

Economically Disadvantaged Children's Access to Publicly Funded Early Care and Education Seats



***Source**: Oct 1, 2022 (unaudited) child count and LDOE estimates of eligible children from 2021-22*

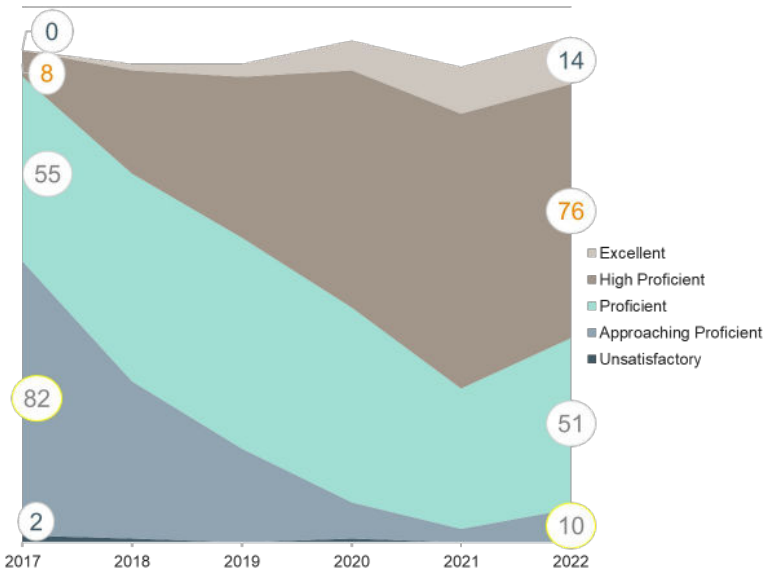
Thirty two (32) percent of economically-disadvantaged children in New Orleans have a free or subsidized early childhood seat.

Access varies widely by age, from a low of 8% among infants to 77% among four year olds.

There are an estimated 9,600 eligible **children who are not served**, including 9,000 children ages 0-3.

PERFORMANCE PROFILE RATINGS OVER TIME

ECE Program Ratings over Time: ALL NOEEN Providers (Schools, Head Start and Type III Centers)



Source: *Agenda for Children's Analysis of Performance Profile data. Year represents the year the ratings were release (e.g. 2022 reflects 2021-2022 school year CLASS scores).*

The percentage of New Orleans early learning programs rated as **"Proficient" or better** rose from 43% in 2017 to 93% in 2022.

The percentage of programs rated as **"High Proficient" or better** rose from just 5% in 2017 to 60% in 2022.*

**Note that the high proficient rating was not officially used in 2017, so it was calculated based on performance scores. Additionally, the LDOE instituted a "hold harmless" policy in 2020 and 2021, wherein programs' ratings changed only if they improved. Regular rating policies resumed in 2022.*

PERCEPTIONS OF THE OVERALL STATE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION*

1. **New Orleans is "ahead"** of many places because of Act 3 and the millage.
2. Despite great progress, there is room for improvement, especially in **consistent quality and access** to seats that work for families (geography, hours, etc.).
3. **Fragmentation** is a significant challenge for stakeholders across the system including parents, center directors, community agencies, and system leaders.
4. Increasing, maintaining, and streamlining **funding mechanisms** is essential to ensuring access to high-quality early childhood education that works for every family.
5. Many **families do not know** what options and supports are available.
6. There is **no shared understanding** of the early childhood system and roles within it.
7. **Gaps in the system remain** related to workforce sustainability, parent voice, children with disabilities, enrollment, diverse models of care, and coordination across systems.
8. Lack of **coordinated, system-level data** means system leaders may not have an accurate picture of where and how all children are cared for currently.

**Perceptions are based on interviews with a diverse group of early learning stakeholders in New Orleans*

SWOT ANALYSIS OF NOEEN

Strengths (internal)

- Strong **alignment and unified political will** across sectors
- **Dedicated millage funding** to increase access and improve quality
- New Orleans is **seen as a leader in early childhood** in the state and region
- Significant **talent and commitment** among NOEEN partners
- **Passionate early childhood providers** and educators
- The **network NOEEN brings together**, including access to professional development, information, and resources
- **Commitment to measuring and improving quality** across stakeholders
- Increasing diversity of **options available** to families re: curriculum and settings, particularly for 3 and 4 year olds
- **NOEEN Steering Committee meetings** are seen as well run and useful

Weaknesses (internal)

- **Staffing challenges** constrain quality and access
- **Lack of clear understanding of NOEEN** and the local early childhood system structure, function, and roles among stakeholders
- Limited **public communications** about NOEEN and early childhood education
- The **enrollment and verification process** remains difficult for families
- **Family child care providers** are not included in many programs
- Lack of access and quality in **non-traditional hour care**
- Lack of **support for children with disabilities**
- Lack of **consistent data** makes planning and measuring impact difficult
- **Staff turnover in lead agencies** reduces institutional knowledge
- **Parent voice** in the early childhood system is largely absent; the system is designed more around the needs of system partners than parents

SWOT ANALYSIS OF NOEEN

Opportunities (external)

- **Celebrate** the millage and other successes more regularly
- Tell and set the **narrative about NOEEN**, its impacts, and defining key terms
- Engage high schools and higher ed to create **ECE workforce pipelines**
- Better **align** child-focused state agencies (DCFS, LDH, LDOE) and programs (WIC, SNAP, Medicaid, ECE, etc.) to support families
- Leverage momentum and alignment to create **universal ECE**
- Expand inclusion of **Family Child Care and Type I and II** providers
- Use **data** on the "good" and "bad" within the system more effectively for planning
- Measure and communicate **long-term impact**
- Improve **system-wide supports for early childhood educators**, including prioritization in the enrollment algorithm
- **Increase per child funding levels** to meet the true cost of care
- Centrally subscribe to a language line for **translation services**
- Engage **business leaders** to increase access to facilities, capital, and early care and education for employees
- Create guidance for centers to **navigate the Dept of Safety & Permits**
- Proactively **expand access to capital for ECE providers**

Threats (external)

- Lack of **funding** overall
- **Low wages for teachers** leads to difficulty with recruitment, turnover, and maintaining quality, which threatens ability to expand access
- **Fragmentation** in funding streams and eligibility requirements
- **Funding levels for Pre-K** are not sustainable for schools
- **Lack of special education infrastructure,** including different definitions/eligibility among educators and medical providers
- Barriers to accessing seats for **undocumented families**
- Lack of a **clear public charge** for ECE like in K-12
- Difficulty navigating **safety and permits and accessing capital** means quality centers who want to expand may not be able to do so.
- Persistent **negative stigma** around publicly-funded ECE as inferior
- A **shifting political environment** at state and federal levels

NOEEN BUILDS ON EXISTING LEADERSHIP

As part of its Strategic Planning process, NOEEN conducted a crosswalk of 21 existing plans across partners focused on young children that focused goals and strategies in eight major areas:

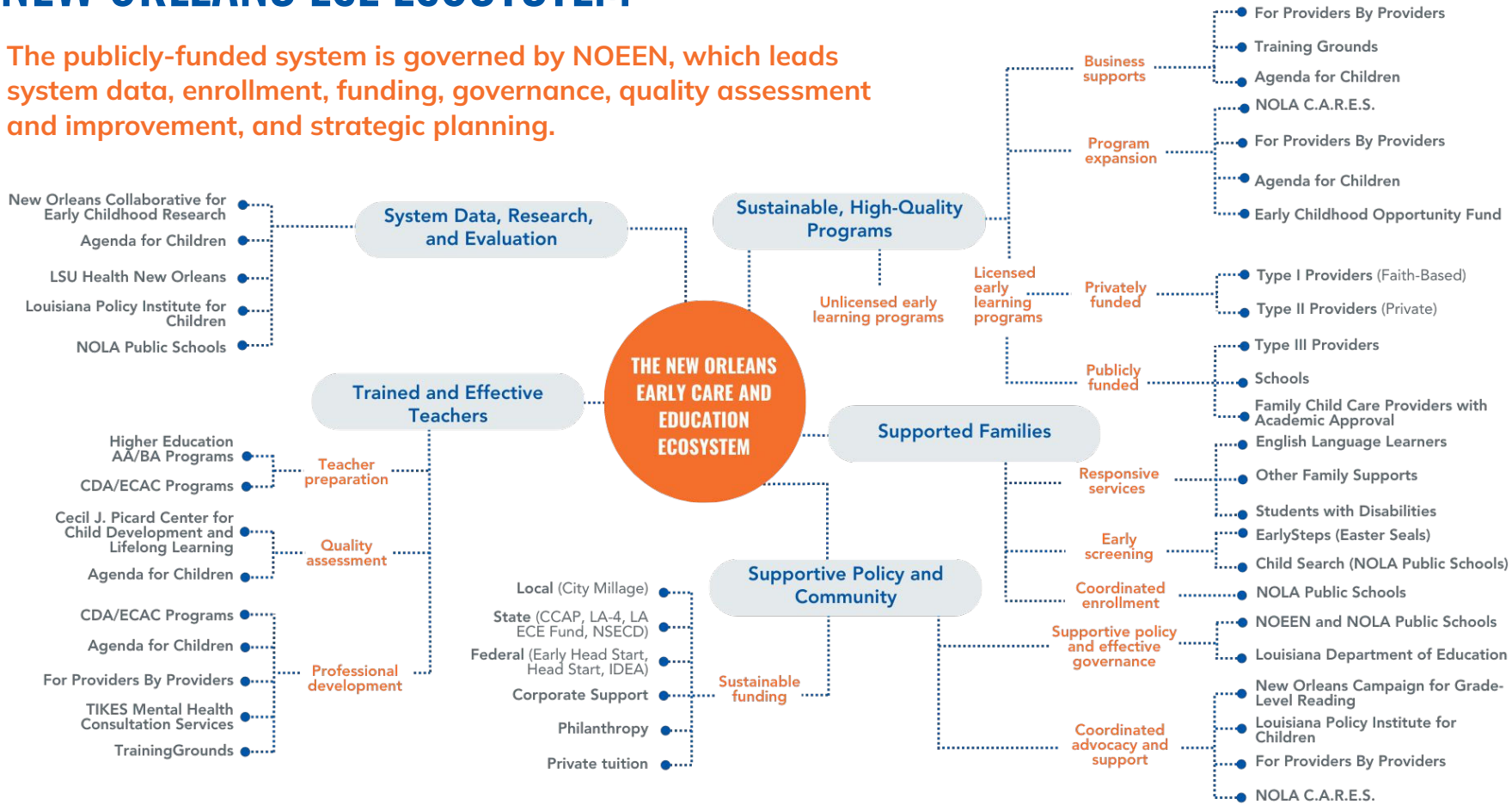
Goal	NOEEN	NOLA-PS	NOLA-GLR / NOLA CARES	NOLA YMP	LDOE	LDH	Geaux Far LA
Increase **funding** to expand ECE access & quality (public, corporate, philanthropic)	✔		✔	✔	✔		✔
Retain, attract, and support a highly-qualified, consistent, and adequately compensated **workforce**	✔	✔	✔		✔		✔
Build the **capacity of providers** through business supports, facilities, and shared learning	✔	✔	✔		✔		
Increase the system's coordination, **responsiveness, and supports for all families** through coordinated enrollment and services	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Develop and support **parents & families** as first teachers, advocates, and leaders	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Use **data** for continuous learning, quality improvement, advocacy, and addressing evolving needs	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔	✔
Influence **public policy** to improve access, quality, sustainability, and responsiveness to families	✔		✔		✔	✔	✔
Raise **community awareness** about the importance of the early childhood years for future health, learning, and development	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔

Key

- **NOEEN** = New Orleans Early Education Network
- **NOLA-PS** = New Orleans Public Schools
- **NOLA-GLR** = New Orleans Campaign for Grade-Level Reading
- **NOLA CARES** = New Orleans CARES collaborative
- **NOLA YMP** = New Orleans Youth Master Plan
- **LDOE** = Louisiana Department of Education
- **LDH** = Louisiana Department of Health
- **Geaux Far LA** = Geaux Far Louisiana

NEW ORLEANS ECE ECOSYSTEM

The publicly-funded system is governed by NOEEN, which leads system data, enrollment, funding, governance, quality assessment and improvement, and strategic planning.



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES & KEY STRATEGIES

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CLARIFYING NOEEN'S STRATEGIC FOCUS

1. **B-5:** While NOEEN was originally envisioned as focusing on early education from birth through age eight, given its responsibilities for the early learning system, NOEEN will focus on children from birth to age five, including the transition to kindergarten.

2. **Publicly-Funded:** NOEEN is charged with expanding access to high-quality early learning for all children with a priority focus on the publicly-funded aspects of the early learning system in Orleans Parish that will expand over time to address and support a comprehensive system that includes all children and all programs, including those that are privately-funded.

3. **Networks & Partnerships:** Over the past five years, interest and engagement in early care and education has increased. With numerous other organizations and collaboratives engaged in various aspects of New Orleans' early learning system, NOEEN seeks to accomplish its goals through collaboration and coordinated partnerships.

4. **Quality Improvement:** While much of NOEEN's focus has been on expanding access to early care and education over the past several years, NOEEN will focus its efforts on expanding quality and ensuring sustainability while maintaining recent gains in access.

NOEEN'S STRATEGIC PRIORITIES, 2023-2027

1. **High-Quality Workforce:** A high-quality, highly-compensated workforce with continuous career advancement opportunities
2. **Sustainable and Equitable Funding:** Increased and more sustainable and equitable funding that addresses immediate needs and long-term system needs
3. **Comprehensive and Coordinated Services:** Comprehensive and coordinated services and supports for families with young children
4. **Informed and Engaged Community:** An informed and engaged community with a strong and diverse coalition for policy advocacy
5. **Quality and Inclusive Programs:** Supports to improve and sustain quality and inclusive programs that meet all children's developmental needs

1. HIGH-QUALITY WORKFORCE

Goal: Cultivate a **high-quality, highly-compensated workforce** with continuous career advancement opportunities through strategies focused on:

A. **Preparation and Pathways**
   - i. Reduce barriers and increase access to **early educator preparation** programs
   - ii. Increase the number of **non-traditional preparation opportunities** (ex. apprenticeship, mentorship, high school)
   - iii. Clearly define the various roles in the early care and education sector and the **career pathways** between them

B. **Retention and Recruitment**
   - i. Reduce sector attrition and **retain early childhood educators and leaders** currently in the sector
   - ii. **Recruit qualified educators** into the sector
   - iii. **Increase pathways and reduce barriers** into the sector

C. **Compensation (Pay and Benefits)**
   - i. Offer a **competitive salary** to early educators and leaders
   - ii. Advocate for policies that provide **sustainable and increased funding** to increase educator salaries
   - iii. Identify the most attractive **benefits** to the early care and education sector and explore shared services (ex. centralized benefits, business supports, recruiting) to reduce program overhead and improve access to benefits

See the Orleans Parish Early Care & Education Workforce Task Force Playbook for additional details.

2. SUSTAINABLE AND EQUITABLE FUNDING

Goal: Increase the **availability, sustainability, and equity of funding** to address both immediate and long-term system needs through:

A. **Sustainable Funding for the True Cost of Care**
   i. Conduct research and release a **localized cost model** that shows the actual cost of high-quality care for different age groups, settings, and neighborhoods across New Orleans
   ii. Use the cost model to **inform recommended funding levels** for sustainable funding that reflects the true cost of high-quality care across all city, state, and federal funding programs
   iii. Support **policy advocacy efforts to establish sustainable funding** that reflects the true cost of high-quality care across all city, state, and federal funding programs

B. **Maximize and Leverage All Available Funding**
   i. Work with Louisiana Department of Education to **access the maximum available state matching funds** for local investments each year and leverage these funds to expand high-quality early care and education in New Orleans
   ii. Support **policy advocacy efforts to ensure the state matching fund has enough funding** to match every dollar of local investment in New Orleans and is sustainable and predictable from year to year
   iii. Advance policy that supports **more effective braiding of different funding streams at the system level**

C. **Leverage System Partnerships**
   i. Conduct an **assessment of existing and potential funding sources for the ECE system**, including specialized funding sources for workforce development, screening and early intervention, additional services for children with disabilities, etc.
   ii. Use this assessment to **guide efforts to increase the utilization of under-used funding sources** for ECE
   iii. Increase **technical assistance to help early learning programs most effectively braid funds**, using the Coordinated Funding Request process to help them think through how best to braid funding to maximize access, quality, and sustainability.

3. COMPREHENSIVE AND COORDINATED SERVICES

Goal: Foster strong partnerships to help **ensure comprehensive and coordinated services, supports, resources, and information** for families with young children by:

A. **Increasing Awareness of Available Services**
   i. Support the creation and/or dissemination of specialized resource guides for families and providers focused on supporting **young children with behavioral challenges, developmental delays, or disabilities**
   ii. Support the creation and/or dissemination of a comprehensive resource guide for all NOEEN partners to share and identify available **resources and "wraparound services" for families** in employment training, financial assistance, health, housing, and a variety of social services
   iii. Coordinate **trainings among NOEEN stakeholders** about available services, supports, and resources

B. **Addressing Gaps in Services, Access, Consistency, and Quality**
   i. **Assess gaps and prioritize needs** among families and providers for comprehensive services for families that impact early learning and child success
   ii. Leverage the resource guides and gap analysis to identify and implement opportunities to **develop new and/or expand existing partnerships** to address gaps, scale promising partnerships, and improve coordination
   iii. Identify and implement **opportunities for improved coordination and responsiveness** of services that can lead to better results and experiences for partners and families

4. INFORMED AND ENGAGED COMMUNITY

Goal: Cultivate an **informed and engaged community** with a strong, diverse, and effective coalition that works together with a shared understanding of the needs and priorities for policy advocacy through:

A. Education and Information Sharing

- **i.** Develop **NOEEN's communications capacity** to serve as a source of information on the early care and education system in New Orleans
- **ii.** Release an **annual state of the sector report** to highlight current gaps, opportunities, and progress updates related to early education in New Orleans

B. Coordinated Advocacy and Organizing

- **i.** Maintain **regular communication across advocacy partners** at the local, state, and national level to advance a shared policy agenda and regularly update the NOEEN Steering Committee on activities
- **ii.** Deepen **intentional engagement with key constituents**, including parents and families, providers and partners, civic and elected leaders, and the business community to understand and be empowered to advance policies to improve New Orleans' early education system

C. Policy Development and Improvement

- **i.** Work with the City of New Orleans, Louisiana Department of Education, and others to **reduce regulatory and policy barriers** to maximize access, quality, and coordination to support the realization of NOEEN's vision
- **ii.** Coordinate with partners to advance **legislative policies** that support NOEEN's vision, including braided funding at the local, state, and federal levels

5. QUALITY AND INCLUSIVE PROGRAMS

Goal: Strengthen supports to improve and sustain **quality and inclusive programs** that meet the development needs of all students through:

A. Improved Services for Children with Disabilities

i. Advocate for improved **services for children with disabilities** and providing centers and parents support in knowing their rights and accessing these services

ii. Better **support educators and providers** to meet the developmental needs of children with disabilities through professional development, curriculum, teacher mentors, classroom supports, and resource sharing

iii. **Differentiate funding** for children with disabilities based on the additional costs required to serve them effectively

B. Inclusion of Dual Language Learners

i. Establish a **centralized interpretation line** for providers and the families of English Language Learners to minimize language barriers

ii. Provide **targeted supports for multilingual educators and providers** to serve Dual Language Learners and immigrant families

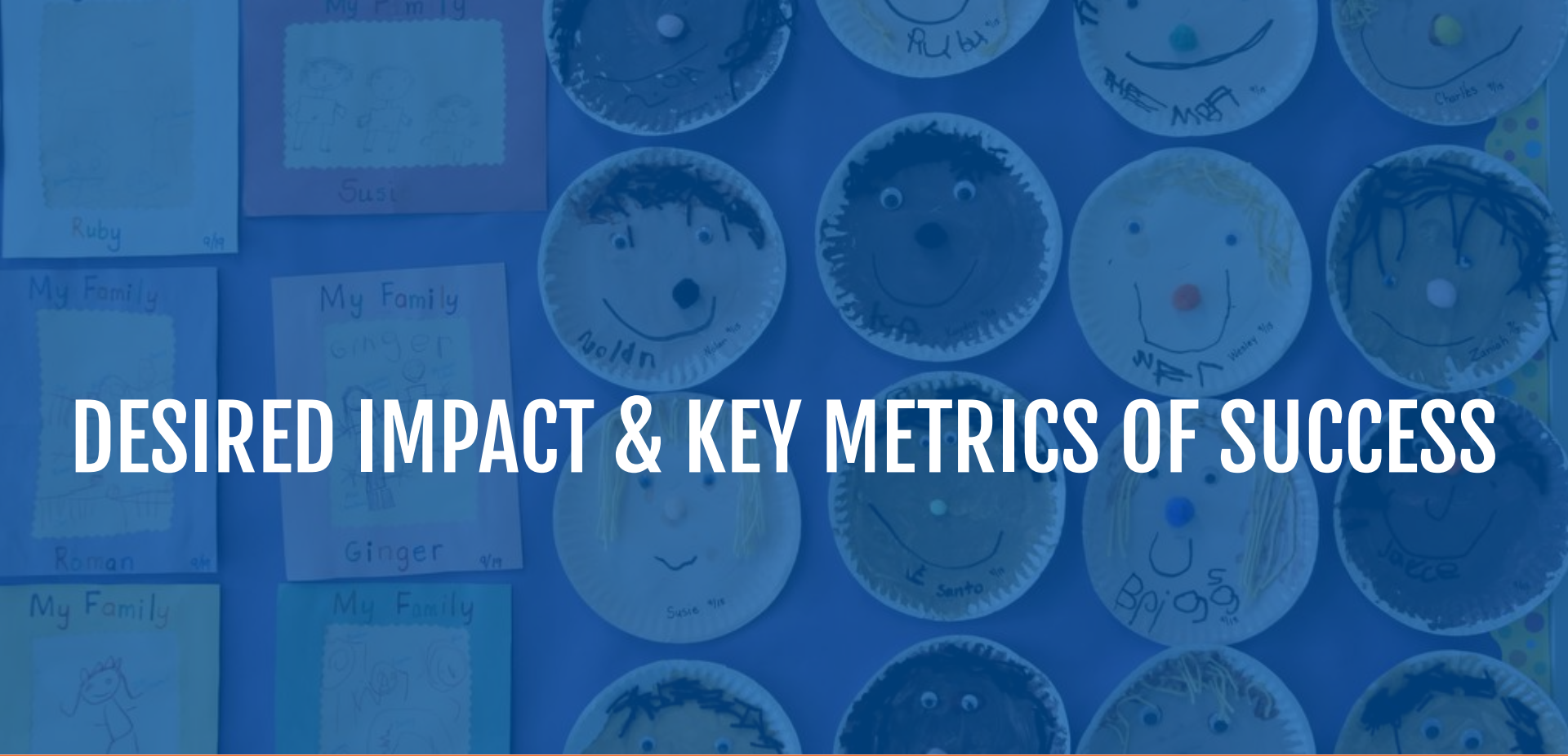
C. Comprehensive Measurement of Instructional Quality and Impact

i. Advocate for Louisiana to move toward a **more comprehensive system for quality rating and improvement**, using pilots as appropriate

ii. Develop capacity to **track longitudinal data on impacts** related to school readiness and child outcomes

iii. Increase supports for **providers that achieve proficient or higher rankings** on the CLASS to continue improving quality

iv. Expand supports for **family child care providers** to achieve academic approval and access quality supports



DESIRED IMPACT & KEY METRICS OF SUCCESS

OUR DESIRED IMPACT

The NOEEN Steering Committee intends for the effective implementation of this plan to create the following by 2028:

Outcome	Baseline (2022)	2028 Goal
1. Improved Quality of Publicly Funded Early Learning Programs	59% of publicly funded early learning programs are rated at least "High Proficient"	At least 90% of publicly-funded early learning programs are rated at least "High Proficient"
2. Improved School Readiness	44.8% of children enter kindergarten meeting school readiness benchmarks*	At least 70% of children enter kindergarten meeting school readiness benchmarks
3. Increased Access to Publicly Funded Early Learning Programs	32% of "at-risk" children under age 5 have access to a publicly-funded early learning program, including 77% of 4 year-olds and 22% of 0-3 year-olds	At least 50% of "at-risk" children under age 5 have access to a publicly-funded early learning program, including 100% of 4 year-olds and 38% of 0-3 year-olds

*Reflects only DRDP data; baseline may be revised to incorporate GOLD data when it becomes available

KEY INTERNAL MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Goal Area	Key Metric
1. High-Quality Workforce	1. ↑ workforce retention
	2. ↑ Average/median compensation
	3. ↑ Credential and degree attainment
2. Equitable Funding	4. ↑ Average per child funding amount
	5. ↑ amount of state match funding accessed
	6. ↑ in new/additional funding realized
3. Comprehensive & Coordinated Services	7. ↑ # of families referred to services from early learning programs
	8. ↑ in knowledge among families and providers re: available resources and services
4. Informed & Engaged Community	9. ↑ # of media & social media impressions
	10. Key policy changes achieved
5. Quality & Inclusive Programs	11. ↑ # of children with disabilities who are identified and connected to services
	12. ↑ # of Dual Language Learners enrolled in publicly-funded early learning programs
	13. ↑ % of children enrolled in a program that is ranked proficient or better

**Metrics to be fleshed out further and baselines established by NOEEN over the coming months.*

KEY POLICY PRIORITIES

NOEEN | NEW ORLEANS EARLY EDUCATION NETWORK

KEY POLICY PRIORITIES

1. Increased and more sustainable **workforce compensation**
2. Sustainable **funding for the true cost of care**
3. Sustainable, sufficient, and **predictable state matching funding** in the Louisiana Early Childhood Education Fund
4. Increased **ability to braid or combine funds** at the system and child levels across funding sources and programs
5. Opening up **more aligned funding through partners in other systems** (health, workforce, etc.)
6. **Expanding the quality rating and improvement system** to include measures beyond CLASS
7. Increased ability of Resource & Referral agency to **use state funds to support providers and teachers scoring proficient or higher**

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IMPLEMENTATION NOTES

- The NOEEN Steering Committee approved this strategic plan on March 8, 2023.
- This plan is meant to be a living document. It may adapt and change throughout implementation.
- NOEEN will continue to flesh out more detailed work plans and determine the most appropriate staffing and funding structure to execute the plan.
- NOEEN will review the progress on this plan throughout the implementation period through biannual updates to its Executive Subcommittee.

NOEEN | NEW ORLEANS EARLY EDUCATION NETWORK