**Mission, Vision & Values**

The Early Childhood Alliance (ECA) facilitates cross-sector engagement and collaboration aimed at building a comprehensive and effective early childhood system that utilizes data driven solutions informed by community priorities to support young children and their families in order to advance optimal child development in Onondaga County.

**Our Mission**

**Our Vision**

All young children in Onondaga County are healthy, thriving and successful in school and life; and all families of young children are supported in their parenting and have the knowledge, skills, confidence, and resources they need to raise their children in healthy and nurturing environments.

**Our Values**

- Equity, Diversity & Inclusion
- Family-Centered
- Collaboration
- Shared Decision-Making & Governance
- Systems Building
- Data Driven

**Our Goal**

Improve 3rd grade reading levels in Onondaga County.
Director & Chair Messages

The ECA works to provide families with young children comprehensive support by engaging in cross-systems work at the local level. To achieve better outcomes for families, we need to take the fragmented early childhood system and strengthen it by weaving it together through a cross-sector coalition. Stakeholders from each part of the fragmented system must be at the table – working together and aligning efforts. We are so grateful to the hundreds of stakeholders who join us at the ECA tables to plan for a more equitable system of supports for children and families.

This cross systems collaboration, along with powerful leadership, is what gives their work momentum and keeps stakeholders motivated and engaged in the work. In this document you will see the results of our collective efforts. The success of our youngest children require us to build a better system of supports. We are so grateful to Onondaga County, our philanthropic partners, the business community and all the individuals and families who dedicate themselves every day to improve the early childhood system. It will take all of us working together to build a smarter and more effective early childhood system.

In Onondaga County, all children should have the opportunity to enter kindergarten ready to learn. As a nation, we are finally beginning to understand that the first five years of life are the foundation for later success. Countless studies and research have irrefutably shown that a child’s brain develops faster from birth to five than any later period in life. When we support them in their earliest years, infants grow into healthy kids who are competent, empathetic, and ready for school and life and our communities, workforce and economy become stronger and more productive.

We can and have to do better for our children. For the past five years, the Early Childhood Alliance and the ECA Business Council have been advancing a vision for a strengthened early childhood system in Onondaga County. We have come a long way since we first launched the ECA in 2015 and yet there is much more work to be done to put children on the right path for educational and life-long success.

The Early Childhood Alliance is committed to working together to strengthen the array of services and supports available to children and families.

Laurie Black
Director, Early Childhood Alliance

Meg O’Connell
Executive Director, Allyn Family Foundation
Chair, ECA Community Advisory Committee
The scientific evidence could not be clearer, children who enter school unprepared are more likely to underachieve, drop out of school and need public assistance, and it’s hard for school systems to make up that deficit when children get in school. It really is this simple: We can focus on early learning now, or we can address the consequences later.

At the ECA Business Council, we recognize the tremendous return on the investment of the first few years of life. In order to have a strong economy and a vibrant community that supports all families, we need to start at the beginning to strengthen the early childhood system. We support the work of the ECA because it is recognizing gaps in the system, identifying best practices and then is data driven to measure the impact of the new initiatives.

As representatives of the business community, we are committed to helping drive deeper understanding among other business leaders, elected officials and the community at-large about the importance of a strong early childhood system to the long-term health of our community.

Steve Gorczynski
Administrative Vice President, Commercial Banking, M&T Bank
Chair, ECA Business Council

**Articles of Interest**

*Case Study: Early Childhood Alliance Brings Wide Range of Stakeholders on Board for Infants and Toddlers* - National Collaborative for Infants & Toddlers

[bit.ly/ECA_NCIT](bit.ly/ECA_NCIT)

*Community Solutions to Supporting the Well-Being of Expectant Parents, Babies, and Toddlers: Creating a New Source of Dedicated Early Childhood Funding: Onondaga County, NY* - Center for the Study of Social Policy


*Early Childhood Alliance Onondaga: A Master Class in Cross-Sector Coalition Building* - Early Learning Nation

The Why...

The brain develops rapidly during the first five years, laying the foundation for lifelong health, well-being, and achievement. During this time, it’s vitally important that families have the resources they need to provide a strong foundation for their children.

In Onondaga County, third grade reading scores for all children are well below the state average. The latest data for 2019 shows 22% of students in Syracuse and 40% in Onondaga County reading on grade level in 3rd grade. To promote a community “where all children are healthy, thriving and ready to succeed in school,” the community in 2015 galvanized around a multi-pronged approach to support healthy child development - particularly among infants and toddlers.

The scientific evidence could not be clearer; children who enter school ready to learn are more likely to achieve, stay in school, and graduate on time. The opposite is true for children who come underprepared. It really is this simple: We can focus on early learning now, or we can address the consequences later.

With the deeper awareness of the importance of the first five years, there’s a race all over this country to strengthen the web of supports available to families to ensure more children arrive ready to school.

Strengthening the early childhood system requires bringing together multiple systems – health, early learning and family strengthening supports. To achieve better outcomes for families, we must take this fragmented system and strengthen it by weaving it together through early childhood sector-building work. Stakeholders from each part of the fragmented system and families must be at the table – working together and aligning efforts. Cross systems collaboration, along with powerful leadership and family voice, is what will lead to better outcomes for all children.
Community Context...

31,293 children birth-5 in Onondaga County
12,658 children birth-5 in the city of Syracuse

1 in 5 children in Onondaga County live in poverty
50% of the children in Syracuse live in poverty

$14,560 Annual Cost of Center-Based Infant Care in Onondaga County
$28,288 Annual Cost of Center-Based Care for Infant & 4-year-old in Onondaga County

Onondaga County Child Poverty by Race & Ethnicity

Racial & Ethnic Disparities by 3rd Grade
Percentage of 3rd Graders Meeting NYS ELA Standard

Sources: HealtheCNY, New York State Education Department (NYSED), Child Care Solutions
Our History...

The ECA was launched in 2015 after it was recommended in the 2013-2014 Onondaga Citizens League (OCL) study entitled, *Early Childhood and School Readiness, Creating a Community Where All Children Thrive by Five*.

One of the biggest challenges revealed in the OCL study was that the community lacked a strategic, systemic approach to early childhood issues. The study found many helpful services operating in the area, but also revealed that a lack of coordination and collaborative goal-setting limited the potential impact on young children and families.

The primary reason for formalizing the ECA was to bring together community leaders with early childhood stakeholders and families to build a cohesive system of supports for children and families.

The ECA is comprised of stakeholders from all levels of the early childhood system and is representative of the key areas of early childhood development (health, early learning, and family supports).

The ECA is advancing a coordinated strategy to create an integrated local system of early childhood care and family support services. We have several committees that help shape the strategic planning process and implementation of the strategic plan. Membership of the committees includes ECA members as well as other interested stakeholders from the community. All are welcome to be part of the committees.
Less than half the children in Onondaga County are arriving ready for school success. The Early Childhood Alliance (ECA) was created to improve school outcomes for all children by advancing a comprehensive, coordinated, well-funded system of high-quality, prenatal-to-age-5 early childhood programs and supports.

### Key Focus Areas

**Support Early Childhood Development**
- Advance quality programs and supports in home, early learning and community settings
- Support reproductive wellness from preconception to birth
- Promote and reinforce research based, culturally relevant and linguistically appropriate messages about child development
- Offer parents and caregivers the tools to engage in nurturing, language-rich interactions
- Build awareness of and connect families to programs and services that meet their needs
- Provide access to quality child care and universal preschool to promote early learning

**Promote Healthy Families & Vibrant Communities**
- Center efforts around parent and community voice, with a focus on race and equity
- Ensure access to culturally relevant programs
- Eliminate barriers to services
- Reduce parental stressors
- Authentically engage parents in leadership activities

**Advance a Strong Early Childhood System**
- Build community commitment to the healthy development of young children
- Assess the landscape to identify programs, services, and supports families need to support their child(ren)’s healthy development
- Advance solutions that address gaps in the availability and quality of services and supports
- Promote equity throughout the early childhood system

### Sustain System Progress

- **Invest** directly for impact
- **Influence** policy & funding allocation
- **Leverage** other assets
- **Strengthen** capabilities
- **Connect** systems & stakeholders

### Achieve Long-Term Goals

- All children are:
  - Born healthy
  - Developing on-track from birth to age 3
  - Ready for kindergarten
  - Achieving success by 3rd grade

### Catalyze Lifetime Success

- All children in Onondaga County are healthy, thriving and ready to succeed in school and life.
- All families of young children are supported in their parenting and have the knowledge, skills and resources needed to raise their children in healthy and nurturing environments.

### About the Early Childhood Alliance

The Early Childhood Alliance (ECA) is a diverse cross-section of community stakeholders with a shared vision for a more coordinated and strategic early childhood system that better supports children and families in Onondaga County.

[ecaonondaga.org](http://ecaonondaga.org)  [facebook.com/ecaonondaga](http://facebook.com/ecaonondaga)
Our Initiatives...

The ECA is investing in young children and their families when it matters most. Through the initiative’s featured on the following pages, the ECA is supporting new parents so their children are healthy and ready for kindergarten; providing health and developmental screenings along with referrals and follow-up services; strengthening the quality of child care; and providing support for a better coordinated and effective early childhood system.
Talking is Teaching!

Talking is Teaching: Talk, Read, Sing is a public awareness and action campaign that helps parents recognize their power to boost their children’s early brain and vocabulary development through simple, everyday actions.

Launched in 2017, Talk, Read, Sing Onondaga was the ECA’s first initiative. Aimed at increasing early literacy opportunities for all children in Onondaga County, the initiative has three core components:

1. **Messaging Campaign** – Robust campaign includes branding, promotional materials, social media and community outreach.

2. **Home Visiting Tote Bags** – Tote bags filled with branded materials, books and age-appropriate toys are distributed through home visiting programs (goal of 1,000/year).

3. **Pediatric Practice Outreach** – Free books are distributed to children at well child visits through a partnership with the Reach Out and Read program; branded bibs and T-shirts are also distributed.

**Program Goal:** Increase the daily talking, reading and singing that parents and caregivers do with children birth to five so children enter school ready to learn.

**Learn More:**
- @TalkReadSingOnondaga
- @talkreadsingoc
Every Parent Has Questions...

Launched in 2019, Help Me Grow Onondaga helps children birth through age 5 reach their full potential by:

- Providing families with information on child development and parenting, fun activities to help their children thrive, and personalized connections to local services.
- Helping families and caregivers track young children’s ongoing progress in building physical, social, behavioral, communications, and thinking skills.
- Improving the ability of families, caregivers, health and human service providers, and educators to work together in building a strong foundation for our children and a better future for New York’s communities.

Program Goal: To empower parents and caregivers with knowledge around child development and to increase developmental screening in Onondaga County.

Learn More:
- helpmegrowny.org
- @helpmegrowonondaga
- @helpmegrowoc
Parents as Leaders...

The Parents and Communities THRIVE Initiative engages parents to identify community barriers to their success and works with parents and local non-profits to strengthen community programming. THRIVE is charged with building a collaborative early learning system that centers the voice of parents in the decision making and planning.

Program Goal: Increase parent voice in the work of the Early Childhood Alliance and partner organizations.

Parent Advisory Committee:
Shaleca Allen    Darlene Medley
Tiara Frazer    Missie Ross
Annabell Hine - Otts

Learn More:  @THRIVEOnondaga
Launched in Onondaga County in 2018, Layla’s Got You is building a local movement to encourage and support young women and their partners to have complete information about all contraceptives and be able to choose the method that is right for them, without any cost or access barriers.

The Layla Campaign is strongly committed to reproductive justice, woman-centered care, dispelling myths, and changing social norms to empower young women with positive self-images and independent choice.

Strategies include:

- Social norms campaign on social media;
- Direct engagement of Black and Latina women ages 16-25;
- Creation of a chatbot named Layla, provides answers to questions about reproductive wellness;
- Helping young women of color be seen and heard through power building.

Program Goal: Reduce unintended pregnancies and increase reproductive wellness in Onondaga County.

Learn More:

+ laylasgotyou.com
@laylasgotyou
@laylasgotyou
Quality Child Care

The Child Care Quality Improvement (CCQI) pilot is an actionable plan for improving the quality of child care within our existing infrastructure of care. The pilot incorporates the following three priorities:

1. Improving quality across three types of child care programs – child care centers, family child care homes, and legally exempt providers;
2. Minimizing the negative impact of low pay and turnover for staff;
3. Ensuring children are developing on track and meeting developmental milestones; and when off-track, families are supported in connecting their child to appropriate services.

Program Goal: Increase the quality of infant and toddler child care available to families, resulting in optimal child development and school readiness.

Learn More:
- childcaresolutionscny.org
- @ChildCareSolutionsofCNY
Launched in Onondaga County in 2018, the ParentChild+ program provides two years of twice-weekly home visits to under-resourced families with children between the ages of 18 months and four years. All services begin when the child is between 18 months and 3 years old. Services, books and toys are provided to families at no cost.

ParentChild+ has been bridging the school achievement gap across the Country for 50 years by:

- Strengthening the parent-child relationship;
- Increasing language, literacy, communication and cognitive skills;
- Fostering healthy social-emotional development.

ParentChild+ empowers parents as their children’s first and most important teachers and helps parents create a learning-rich environment in their homes.

ParentChild+ graduates are 50% more likely to be prepared for kindergarten than their socio-economic peers.

ParentChild+ graduates scored 2.5x higher on social-emotional skills than their peers.

ParentChild+ graduates enter school performing 10 months above their chronological age.

ParentChild+ participants have 30% higher graduation rates than their peers.

Learn More: 
ccoc.us/parent-education-programs

Program Goal:
Increase the school readiness of participating children.
Community Advisory Council

Meg O’Connell – Chair
The Allyn Family Foundation*

Jaime Alicea
Syracuse City School District

Marnie Annese
Health Foundation for Western & Central New York*

Dr. Stephen Blatt
Upstate Medical University, UPAC

Dr. Cynthia Bright
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PEACE, Inc.*

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Syracuse City School District

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Onondaga County Health Department, Division of Healthy Families

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*Leadership Council Member
The ECA is grateful to all the funders that make these new initiatives and system work possible. County Executive Ryan McMahon prioritized early childhood investments as part of his anti-poverty strategy for Onondaga County, and our philanthropic and private sector partners have matched County support to strengthen the array of services for children and families.

- Allyn Family Foundation
- CNY Community Foundation
- Health Foundation for Western & Central New York
- Onondaga County
- Reisman Foundation
- Sisters of Saint Francis of the Neumann Communities
- UnitedHealthcare
- United Way of Central New York*
- Business Council Members Including: M&T Bank; SRC Inc.; Barton & Loguidice, D.P.C.; Bousquet Holstein PLLC; and Dannible & McKee, LLP

Special thanks to our national partners at the Center for the Study of Social Policy - EC-LINC program and the National Collaborative for Infants and Toddlers (NCIT) for the strong support they have provided us in our early childhood system building work.

*Provides in-kind support as the employer and fiscal agent to the ECA.