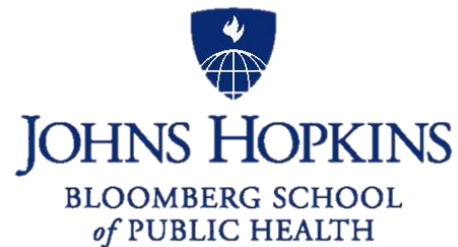


New Jersey Strategic Plan Preschool Development Grant Birth through 5 (PDG B-5)

*New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development
in Collaboration with Johns Hopkins University*

December 2024



Funding Acknowledgement: This publication was made possible by the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Initiative (B-5), Grant Number 90TP0123 from the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Administration for Children and Families or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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New Jersey Strategic Plan Preschool Development Grant Birth through 5 (PDG B-5): Executive Summary

New Jersey's vision is for PDG to promote a comprehensive, coordinated early childhood system of care in addressing the physical, social-emotional, behavioral and cognitive aspects of child wellbeing and school readiness from prenatal through age five. Informed by a robust needs assessment and in keeping with ACF guidance, New Jersey developed a Strategic Plan "to plan for changes to the system that maximize the availability of high-quality Early Childhood Care and Education (ECE) options across providers and partners for children and families, improve the quality of care, streamline administrative infrastructure, and improve state/territory-level ECE funding efficiencies."

This strategic plan was created under the auspices of the Interdepartmental Planning Group (IPG). The IPG is comprised of representatives of six core partners: Department of Education (DOE), Department of Human Services (DHS), Department of Health (DOH), Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DOL), Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJEDA). As such, the IPG represents a wide array of early care and education agencies/services. Participants include senior staff and assistant commissioners with decision-making responsibility from each department. Regular meetings provide a structured agenda for planning/implementation or early childhood activities and assuring alignment of programs and policies.

Strategic Planning Process

Development of the strategic plan began in 2024 as early childhood partners were analyzing the PDG needs assessment data reports and identifying service needs/gaps. The strategic plan also aligned with concurrent work being led by the NJ DHS-DFD and DOL on the PDG-funded Registered Apprenticeship program pilot focused on Early Childhood Care and Education workers, the review and redesign of NJ's ECCE career lattice, and building out NJ-EASEL, New Jersey's Early Childhood Integrated Data System. The strategic plan was also informed by review of ten prior and two concurrent strategic plans focused on priorities within the B-5 system of care and conducted by New Jersey state agencies, committees, and organizations. These complementary strategic plans share a focus on vulnerable underserved young children and their families.

Vision and Mission

Vision: The state's vision is to promote a comprehensive, coordinated, and equitable early childhood system of care that addresses the physical, social-emotional, behavioral and cognitive aspects of child wellbeing and school readiness for expectant families and families with young children from birth through age five.

Mission: To achieve this vision, New Jersey engages with parents to promote a competent workforce, provide equitable access to affordable services for all children and families, ensure adequate and sustainable financing, provide varied high-quality service delivery options, and create a system for ongoing accountability including evaluation and continuous quality improvement.

Stakeholder Engagement and Involvement

Stakeholder engagement included ongoing dialogue with the **IPG** including attendance at regular meetings, conference calls focused on reviewing draft documents, as well as email and phone correspondence with members to incorporate perspectives and expertise of each agency. Discussions about strategic priorities, in relationship to the needs assessment also took place as part of standing meetings of the **Infant Child Health Committee (ICHC)**, which operates as a standing committee of the New Jersey Council for Young Children (NJCYC) and focuses on three priority areas—infant/child wellness, infant and early childhood mental health, and children with special needs. In addition, our work was informed by engagement with the **NJ Child Care Advisory Council (NJCCAC)**, which operates out of DHS and focuses on issues surrounding subsidized child care and helps inform and make recommendations for the Child Care Subsidy Program. Robust discussions about the strategic plan thus took place within and across state agencies as part of ongoing meetings as well as development of the successful PDG B-5 Renewal application. The meetings and conversations provided input/guidance on critical elements, ensuring alignment with related initiatives, next steps (action steps), realistic timelines, progress measures and funding requirements/sustainability planning.

Parent voices contributed to the strategic plan through their ongoing input to existing state workgroups and through their participation as parent leaders. The shared leadership philosophy includes parents as active partners with service providers and community leaders helping to identify the needs, concerns, aspirations and successes of the state's collective efforts to positively impact the health, education and well-being of children from pregnancy/birth to age 8. In addition, both the ICHC and the NJCCAC include representation from parent organizations. The Statewide Parent Advocacy Network serves on the ICHC, and Advocates for Children of New Jersey participates in both ICHC and NJCCAC.

Objectives and Activities

The strategic plan is organized in eight broad domains: 1) Quality of Services, 2) Equitable Access to Affordable Services, 3) Collaboration/Partnership, 4) Communication & Awareness, 5) Parent Involvement and Leadership, 6) Workforce Development, 7) Sustainable Financing, and 8) Continuous Quality Improvement. The plan articulates 24 objectives across the eight domains as well as measures and a timeline to assess their achievement. The number of objectives per domain ranges from one (Collaboration/Partnership; Parent Involvement and Leadership; Continuous Quality Improvement) to seven (Equitable Access to Affordable Services). For each objective, the plan also specifies key action steps and the agency responsible for making progress on the objectives. And finally, the plan identifies how the objectives respond to and align with findings from the PDG B-5 needs assessment.

Conclusion

Development of the NJ Strategic Plan has supported and been informed by rich dialogue among key stakeholders. Stakeholders are committed to achieving the state's vision and recognize that the strategic plan provides a starting point and will evolve over time. The plan builds on the PDG B-5 needs assessment to prioritize eight domains, 24 objectives, and specific

actions steps to achieve those objectives. The plan also identifies a broad set of indicators to allow the responsible agencies to monitor progress. Implementation of the Strategic Plan will continue under the auspices of the **Interdepartmental Planning Group (IPG)**. With representation of senior staff across six core partners, the IPG is uniquely qualified to assess federal, state, and local statutory requirements and identify any potential barriers or roadblocks that these requirements put on future coordination. Input from parent leaders will continue to inform how implementation is progressing across the state. Responding to COVID-19 has underscored the critical importance of addressing the physical, social-emotional, behavioral, and cognitive aspects of child wellbeing and school readiness for expectant families and families with young children. New Jersey is eager to continue the work.

Introduction

This strategic plan (NJ Plan) has been accomplished as part of New Jersey's Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) sponsored by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Office of Child Care. The strategic plan has been conducted by Johns Hopkins University and the Department of Labor and Workforce Development under the auspices of the NJ Interdepartmental Planning Group (IPG). The plan is organized into eight sections to delineate: the strategic planning process (Section I), vision (Section II), mission (Section III), stakeholder engagement and involvement (Section IV), goals and objectives (Section V), specific activities (Section VI), alignment of the objectives with the recently completed PDG B-5 Needs Assessment (Section VII), and conclusion (Section VIII). An Appendix reviews commonly used abbreviations.

I. Description of strategic planning process

The purpose of the strategic plan, per the ACF guidance, is “to plan for changes to the system that maximize the availability of high-quality ECE options across providers and partners for children and families, improve the quality of care, streamline administrative infrastructure, and improve state/territory-level ECE funding efficiencies.” As such, nine steps articulated in the ACF guidance were followed and are reflected in our plan:

- Identify the full range of stakeholders meaningfully impacted by the work (see Section IV).
- Lay out a plan with goals and action steps that establish a comprehensive ECE system (see Sections V and VI).
- Identify the partnerships, collaborations, coordination, and quality improvement activities that will be used to leverage policy alignments and program quality and service delivery across ECE settings in the birth through five (B-5) system (see Section VI)
- Identify activities to improve transitions of children from ECE programs into elementary schools (see Section VI)
- Delineate how the plan builds on and supports improved coordination and collaboration among ECE programs (see Section VI)
- Provide a strong framework for laying out how the state/territory will increase the overall participation of children in high-quality ECE programs, services, and settings within and across a mixed delivery system (see Section VI)
- Assess current federal, state, and local statutory requirements and identify any potential barriers or roadblocks that these requirements put on future coordination (Section VIII)
- Identify how the state/territory will use indicator data to assess progress, assess key desired outcomes, inform cost and resource efficiency, and support continuous quality improvement (see Section V)
- Describe how the state/territory will continue to involve the State Advisory Council in the implementation of the strategic plan (Section VIII)

Development of the strategic plan began mid 2024 as early childhood partners were analyzing the PDG needs assessment data reports and identifying service needs/gaps. The strategic plan also aligns with the PDG-funded Registered Apprenticeship program pilot. This work is a collaborative effort between DOL, DHS, the NJ Workforce Registry, and the Early Childhood Leadership Institute (ECLI) at Rowan University. The apprenticeship model is

designed to support and address the needs of apprentices, mentors, and employers in the Early Childhood Care and Education workforce. The Registered Apprenticeship Program is part of a ``broader strategy to strengthen and expand the ECCE workforce to be capable of addressing the identified needs of young children, working parents, and the economy at large. The strategic plan also aligned with concurrent work being led by Advocates for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ) in partnership with the IPG and the New Jersey Council for Young Children (NJCYC) and performed as part of the Pritzker Prenatal to Three planning grant. Current Pritzker work focused on two key areas—Infant and Toddler Child Care and Infant Mental Health. The strategic plan also was informed by review of ten prior and 2 concurrent strategic plans focused on priorities within the B-5 system of care and conducted by New Jersey state agencies, committees, and organizations (Table 1). These complementary strategic plans share a focus on vulnerable underserved young children and their families.

Table 1. Review of New Jersey Strategic Plans and Initiatives

Source	Strategic Plan Title
Advocates for Children of New Jersey	ACNJ. Unlocking Potential: A Roadmap to Making New Jersey the Safest, Healthiest and Most Supportive Place to Give Birth and Raise a Family, 2020. Babies Have Health Needs Too! Supporting Infant Mental Health in NJ. 2023.
New Jersey Department of Human Services (DHS), Division of Family Development (DFD)	Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Plan for New Jersey FFY 2022-2024 (2022) Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Plan for New Jersey FFY 2025-2027 (2024)
New Jersey Department of Education (DOE)	Every Student Succeeds Act: New Jersey State Plan with limited amendments, 2017; Updated 2023
Infant-Child Health Committee (IHC) of the NJ Council for Young Children (NJCYC)	ICHC/ECCS P-3 Strategic Plan 2014; Updated 2023
New Jersey Department of Children and Families (DCF)	DCF Strategic Plan 2019-2023 and 2024-2025.
New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DOL)	New Jersey Combined State Plan for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, 2020. New Jersey Combined State Plan for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, 2022-2023
State of New Jersey	Nurture NJ 2021 Strategic Plan
New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJEDA)	In progress
New Jersey Department of Health (DOH)	In progress

Initial discussions regarding the strategic plan were reflected in the PDG B-5 renewal application, which emphasized New Jersey's emphasis on aligning PDG planning priorities across related early childhood strategic plans to ensure a systematic approach in optimizing coordination, collaboration and integration.

Engagement of stakeholders was a critical part of the strategic planning process (Section IV).

II. Vision

The state's vision is to promote a comprehensive, coordinated, and equitable early childhood system of care that addresses the physical, social-emotional, behavioral and cognitive aspects of child wellbeing and school readiness for expectant families and families with young children from birth through age five.

III. Mission

To achieve this vision, New Jersey engages with parents to promote a competent workforce, provide equitable access to affordable services for all children and families, ensure adequate and sustainable financing, provide varied high-quality service delivery options, and create a system for ongoing accountability including evaluation and continuous quality improvement.

IV. Stakeholder engagement and involvement

This strategic plan was created under the auspices of the Interdepartmental Planning Group (IPG). The IPG is comprised of representatives of six core partners: Department of Education (DOE), Department of Human Services (DHS), Department of Health (DOH), Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DOL), Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJEDA). As such, the IPG represents a wide array of early care and education agencies/services. Participants include senior staff and assistant commissioners with decision-making responsibility from each department. Regular meetings provide a structured agenda for planning/implementation of early childhood activities and assuring alignment of programs and policies.

Stakeholder engagement included ongoing dialogue with the **IPG** including attendance at regular meetings, conference calls focused on reviewing draft documents, as well as email and phone correspondence with members to incorporate perspectives and expertise of each agency. Conversations also took place with the **Infant Child Health Committee (IHC)**, which operates as a standing committee of the NJCYC and focuses on three priority areas—infant/child wellness, infant and early childhood mental health, and children with special needs. In addition, our work was informed by engagement with the **NJ Child Care Advisory Council (NJCCAC)** which operates out of DHS and focuses on issues surrounding subsidized child care and helps inform and make recommendations for the Child Care Subsidy Program. Robust discussions about the strategic plan thus took place within and across state agencies as part of ongoing meetings. The meetings and conversations provided input/guidance on critical elements, ensuring alignment with related initiatives, next steps (action steps), realistic timelines, progress measures and funding requirements/sustainability planning.

Parent voices contributed to the strategic plan through their ongoing input to existing state workgroups and as a convened group of parent leaders. The shared leadership philosophy includes parents as active partners with service providers and community leaders helping to identify the needs, concerns, aspirations and successes of the state's collective efforts to positively impact the health, education and well-being of children from pregnancy/birth to age 8. In addition, both the New Jersey Council for Young Children and the NJ Child Care Advisory Group include representation from parent organizations. The Statewide Parent Advocacy Network serves on the NJCYC and Advocates for Children of New Jersey participates in both groups.

NJ recognizes a wide array of stakeholders who are impacted by the strategic plan. Stakeholders include children and families, birth through five, with a special focus on those who are vulnerable, underserved and high needs; the NJ Needs Assessment operationalized vulnerability on the basis of poverty and economic stressors, special educational needs, special medical/health needs, child welfare and safety needs, and other special circumstances. Additional stakeholders include policy makers, payers (including private and public as well as tax payers), state agencies, the wide array of service providers in the mixed delivery system.

V. Goals and objectives

The following table identifies the goals within eight broad domains and their corresponding objectives, measures, and timeline. The number of objectives per domain ranges from one (Collaboration/Partnership; Parent Involvement and Leadership; Continuous Quality Improvement) to seven (Equitable Access to Affordable Services).

Table 2: Strategic Plan Goals, Objectives, Measures and Timeline

DOMAIN and GOALS	OUTCOME OBJECTIVES	MEASURES & TIMELINE
1: Quality of Services		
Enhance the quality of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) services	1.1 Mental health (MH) clinicians available to provide IECMH	By 2027: 25% increase in clinicians with IECMH credentials
Enhance the quality of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) services	1.2 Increased GNJK enrollment	By 2027: 25% increase in overall enrollment in GNJK, 30% of those enrolled rated (3 or more stars)
Enhance ECE facility development	1.3 Increase quality of early childhood learning environments	By December 2026: Complete all projects for center-based providers funded by the Child Care Facilities Improvement Program
Enhance the quality of transition services	1.4 Provide support to early childhood providers and local education agencies with plans for supporting transitions	By 2027: Trainings to support providers and agencies are available through the existing Learning Management System (LMS)
	1.5 Develop communication strategies to ensure parents feel informed, empowered and involved throughout their child's transitions	By 2027: Develop materials in alignment with standards and disseminate to families
2: Equitable Access to Affordable Services		
Provide culturally responsive services/ English language learners	2.1 ECCE info—multiple languages	By 2027: 50% increase in training & TA participation for culturally responsive services
Improve access to high-quality services	2.2 ECCE staff participate in training & TA opportunities	By 2027: Comprehensive communication and marketing plan in place Improved ECE collaborations with families and providers

DOMAIN and GOALS	OUTCOME OBJECTIVES	MEASURES & TIMELINE
	2.3 Improved high-quality access for vulnerable populations	By 2027: 25% increase in #s of vulnerable children/ families through Connecting NJ Hubs By 2025, plan developed for template for cross-agency policy reviews Review 1 policy per year identified by IPG
Enhance supports for inclusion	2.4 Built capacity in high-leverage practices to support an increase of preschoolers in the general education setting	By 2026: 2% increase in percentage of preschoolers in their Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)
	2.5 Enhanced educator awareness and understanding of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), its components, how it impacts daily practices in the school community, and practices that improve programming to increase positive student outcomes	By June 2026: produce a list of completed professional learning events focused on improving family and student outcomes
Expand PreK	2.6 Development of a plan to support increased number of eligible school districts that apply for and receive preschool expansion funds	Through Fiscal Year 2026: 20 additional school districts receive preschool expansion funds and demonstrate increased knowledge and implementation in highly inclusive practices
Expand universal developmental health promotion across Connecting NJ system to all 21 counties	2.7 Continued outreach to families along with community partners and hubs to promote developmental health awareness, screening, and access to resources	15% increase in outreach per year By 2026: implementation of ASQ-3 online platform
3: Collaboration/Partnership		
Continue IPG learning & agency coordination	3.1 Strengthen IPG partners	By 2025: Start policy reviews
4: Communication & Awareness – Vision, Mission, & Key Definitions		
Promote shared understanding of NJ's vision, mission & key definitions	4.1 NJ parents/providers have a shared vision of EC success and easy access to resource information and referral	By 2025: IPG and CYC have facilitated conversations about shared vision and seek input from respective stakeholders.

DOMAIN and GOALS	OUTCOME OBJECTIVES	MEASURES & TIMELINE
	4.2 Data (New Jersey Enterprise Analysis System for Early Learning - NJ-EASEL) are used to communicate need & success	By 2026: NJ-EASEL to continue to advance Phase 2
5: Parent Involvement & Leadership		
Support and increase parent voice	5.1 Enhance parent/child interactions	Ongoing: Each Child Care Resource & Referral agency holds four Family Engagement events per year with accompanying coaching and training
6: Workforce Development		
Identify PD needs	6.1 Explore opportunities to enhance existing WR to track professional development and training for CHWs, doulas, and other ECCE paraprofessionals	By 2027: Assess the fit of the existing WR for CHWs, doulas, and other ECE paraprofessionals
Convey respect and provide support for ECE workforce and parents	6.2 OOL regulatory standards support high quality training	By 2025: IPG provides input into anticipated updated OOL regulations for 2025
Reflective practice	6.3 Increased reflective practice in ECCE field	By 2026: Analyze the extent to which reflective practice is used in the EC field
Create pipelines for the early care and education workforce, increase compensation	6.4. Explore opportunities to fund and expand the apprenticeship model	In 2025: DHS and NJDOL have a funding and expansion plan in place
7: Sustainable Financing		
Assure Connecting NJ Investment	7.1 Identify & realign ECCE funding streams for long-term support	By 2026: IPG to develop strategic plans for Connecting NJ and NJ-EASEL sustainable funding
Assure NJ-EASEL Investment		
Support New Jersey's Mixed Delivery Plan	7.2 Create new ECCE slots for infants and toddlers in areas with limited supply	Ongoing: Provide support to community based child care programs in strategies to increase capacity to serve infants and toddlers

DOMAIN and GOALS	OUTCOME OBJECTIVES	MEASURES & TIMELINE
		Ongoing: Conduct outreach to families with infants, toddlers, and pre-k aged children to educate them on early childhood care and education options
	7.3 Enhance coordination across ECCE public, private and HS programs	By 2027: Increase partnerships between Head Start and districts by 20%. By 2027: Increase partnerships between EHS and child care.
8: Continuous Quality Improvement – Connecting NJ System		
Maintain strong culture of CQI	8.1 Examine and strengthen the CQI function within Connecting NJ Hubs	By 2026: 25% increase in Connecting NJ screens/referrals By 2025: Review and align trainings for Connecting NJ Hub staff to align with CQI priorities.

VI. Specific activities

Table 3 identifies specific action steps to advance progress for each of the 24 objectives within 8 broad domains. In addition, the table specifies the agency responsible for ensuring the work is monitored and implemented.

Table 3: Strategic Plan Action Steps and Responsible Person/Agency by Objective

Objective	Specific Action Step	Agency Responsible
Domain 1: Quality of Services		
1.1 Mental health (MH) clinicians available to provide Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand professional development activities (Pyramid Model, Social and Emotional Health, Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health-IECMH) • Provide scholarships for IECMH training to incentivize providers to work in underserved communities • Provide on-site technical assistance and coaching in child care settings • Increase and expand training access and availability • Embed infant and toddler mental health specialists at child care programs, like integrated medical/behavioral health homes • Develop a system-level pyramid concept showing that the IECMH consultation should be universally available to pediatricians in the pediatric setting and to child care in the child care setting, as a primary prevention strategy as well as an early intervention strategy • Establish staffed FCC networks to provide QI supports for home-based FCC providers serving infants and toddlers • Explore opportunities to expedite credentialing for Mental Health Clinicians 	DCF/DFD
1.2 Increased GNJK enrollment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey Quality Improvement Specialists (QIS) and other CCR&R staff on recruitment efforts • Facilitate focus groups with providers who currently are not participating in GNJK to learn why they are not enrolled • Develop marketing materials to enhance outreach efforts • Review GNJK website materials and update as needed 	DFD

Objective	Specific Action Step	Agency Responsible
1.3 Increase quality of early childhood learning environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administer NJ Child Care Facilities Improvement Program • Complete facilities improvement projects 	NJEDA
1.4 Provide support to early childhood providers and local education agencies with plans for supporting transitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop trainings to support providers and agencies • Make trainings available through the existing Learning Management System (LMS) 	DFD
1.5 Develop communication strategies to ensure parents feel informed, empowered and involved throughout their child's transitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop materials in alignment with early learning standards • Engage parent leaders in the design of resource materials • Disseminate materials to parents and families 	DFD
Domain 2: Equitable Access to Affordable Services		
2.1 Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) info – multiple languages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide professional development/educational workshops on topics such as supporting multilingual Learners, cultural competence, cultural responsiveness • Collect information to inform languages spoken by families 	DFD
2.2 ECCE staff participate in training & TA opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training available online and face-to-face through DHS • Offer trainings for educators regarding transitions between programs 	DFD
2.3 Improved high-quality access for vulnerable populations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct cross-agency policy reviews focused on agreed upon priorities • Review state policies for consistency (training, workforce, service) • Develop template plan for cross-agency policy reviews • Evaluate existing data and assessments to identify where vulnerable populations exist, services needed, and barriers 	DCF/IPG
2.4 Built capacity to support an increase of preschoolers in the general education setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and disseminate an Educational Environment Dashboard • Increase the number of students in the preschool general education setting from 2023-2024 to 2025-2026 school year • Provide technical assistance and professional development to preschool educators in effective Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) decision-making processes 	DOE/DOH

Objective	Specific Action Step	Agency Responsible
2.5 Enhanced educator awareness and understanding of IDEA, its components, how it impacts daily practices in the school community, and practices that improve programming to increase positive student outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase collaboration across organizations • Facilitate two Communities of Practice focusing on IDEA and LRE • Continue partnerships with local universities, MOUs, and collaborative projects addressing practices to increase highly inclusive practices and high-quality preschool programming 	DOE/DOH
2.6 Development of a plan to support increased number of eligible school districts that apply for and receive preschool expansion funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve staff capacity to support preschool expansion and increased number of school districts, quality studies and inclusion of students with individualized education plans (IEPs) 	DOE
2.7 Continued outreach to families along with community partners and hubs to promote developmental health awareness, screening, and access to resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand universal developmental health promotion, screening, referral and linking across childcare system partners through the CCR&R agencies using the Books Balls and Blocks model • Early Childhood Specialists, as part of Connecting NJ, support expansion of universal developmental health promotion screening and monitoring via use of the updated ASQ-3 Family Access Portal 	DCF/DOH
Domain 3: Collaboration/Partnership		
3.1 Strengthen partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance the Early Childhood Initiative (Child Protection and Permanency, Family and Community Partnerships and the Early Childhood Community)¹ 	IPG
Domain 4: Communication & Awareness – Vision, Mission, & Key Definitions		
4.1 NJ parents/providers have a shared vision of ECCE success and easy access to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess strategies to effectively communicate with parents and providers • Update resource links on state and local websites to increase consumer knowledge of ECE services 	IPG

Objective	Specific Action Step	Agency Responsible
resource information and referral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use storytelling and testimonials to illustrate how we all need infant mental health and how it has helped consumers • Find champions to promote these messages • IPG and CYC have facilitated conversations about shared vision and seek input from respective stakeholders 	
4.2 Data (NJ-EASEL) are used to communicate need & success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NJ-EASEL to continue to advance Phase 2 efforts 	DOE
Domain 5: Parent Involvement & Leadership		
5.1 Enhance parent/child interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each CCR&R agency holds four Family Engagement events per year with accompanying coaching and training • Child care staff and families participate in family engagement activities • Child care staff participate in Pyramid Model training and Books, Balls & Blocks 	DFD/DOE
Domain 6: Workforce Development		
6.1 Explore opportunities to enhance existing Workforce Registry (WR) to track CE and training for CHWs, doulas, and other ECCE paraprofessionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the fit of the existing WR for CHWs, doulas, and other ECCE paraprofessionals • Use Workforce Registry to identify PD needs • Expand supports for administrators of ECE programs (e.g., business practices, social-emotional, and reflective supervision) 	DFD/DOH/ DOL/NJEDA/ MIHIA
6.2 OOL regulatory standards support high-quality training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IPG provides input into anticipated updated OOL regulations 	DCF
6.3 Increased reflective practice in ECCE field	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social-emotional supports for workforce to support healthy workplace 	DCF/DFD/ DOH/DOE

Objective	Specific Action Step	Agency Responsible
6.4 Explore opportunities to fund and expand the apprenticeship model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DHS and NJDOL meet with ECEPTS and community colleges to discuss expansion and processes to inform the future plans for apprenticeships • DHS and NJDOL meet to discuss funding streams and sustainability, plan next steps for expansion • NJDOL will propose policy changes to tailor grant programs to better support early childhood apprenticeship 	DOL/DFD
Domain 7: Sustainable Financing		
7.1 Identify & realign ECCE funding streams for long-term support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore multiple funding streams for the various programs to which Connecting NJ refers families • IPG to develop strategic plans for Connecting NJ and NJ-EASEL sustainable funding (explore public/private partnerships; review current funding streams for potential leveraging) 	DCF/DOH/DOE
7.2 Create new ECE slots for infants and toddlers in areas with limited supply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support community based child care programs in their effort to increase infant and toddler capacity and continue to service pre-k children. • Build on apprenticeship model and other initiatives to sustainably recruit, train, and retain workers • Expand marketing and communication efforts around the NJ ECE Scholarship Program to increase the number of qualified infant and toddler teachers. • Conduct outreach to families to educate them on early childhood care and education options 	DFD/DOL/NJEDA
7.3 Enhance coordination across ECCE public, private and HS programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen communication to improve enrollment and referral process • Enhance partnerships between Early Head Start and child care 	DOE/DFD
Domain 8: Continuous Quality Improvement – Connecting NJ System		
8.1 Examine and strengthen the CQI function within Connecting NJ Hubs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect, analyze and act on both quantitative and qualitative data to enhance linking families to services • Review and align trainings for Connecting NJ Hub staff to align with CQI priorities • Implement statewide CQI training 	DCF/DOH

Improving transitions of children from ECCE programs into elementary schools is a focus for ACF. The NJ Needs assessment noted strong administrative codes and regulations surrounding transition supports for children in preschool through third grade albeit

with uneven implementation of best practices with regard to child care and teacher training, engaging parents, preschool to third grade transition plans in school districts, and connections across early care and education settings. This strategic plan will advance work related to transitions as part of Objectives 2.2 (ECCE staff participate in training and TA opportunities), 2.3 (Improved high-quality access for vulnerable populations), and 7.3 (Enhance coordination across ECCE public, private and HS programs).

VII. Alignment of objectives with PDG B-5 Needs Assessment

Table 4 links key findings from the previously completed needs assessment with the strategic plan objectives. The key findings are shown in relationships to the eight domains of the strategic plan.

Table 4: Alignment of Needs Assessment with Strategic Plan Domains and Objectives

Strategic Plan Domain 1: Quality of Services	
Needs Assessment Findings	Strategic Plan Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase capacity to provide Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) services to young children and their families • Address shortage of affordable and accessible high-quality early childhood care and education (ECCE) and preschool • Continue efforts to improve ECCE facilities 	1.1 Mental Health (MH) clinicians available to provide IECMH 1.2 Increased GNJK enrollment 1.3 Increase quality of early childhood learning environments 1.4 Provide support to early childhood providers and local education agencies with plans for supporting transitions 2.3 Improved high-quality access for vulnerable populations 2.4 Built capacity in high-leverage practices to support an increase of preschoolers in the general education setting 2.5 Enhanced educator awareness of IDEA, its components, how it impacts daily practices in the school community, and practices that improve programming to increase positive student outcomes 2.6 Development of a plan to support increased number of eligible school districts that apply for and receive preschool expansion funds 6.3 Increased reflective practice in EC field 7.1 Identify and realign ECCE funding streams for long-term support 7.2 Create new ECCE slots for infants and toddlers in areas with limited supply 7.3 Enhance coordination across ECCE public, private and HS programs
Strategic Plan Domain 2: Equitable Access to Affordable Services	
Needs Assessment Findings	Strategic Plan Objectives

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large % of foreign-born children • Persistent disparities • Low levels of inclusion • Low numbers of children in state funded PreK • Gaps in data for children with special circumstance • Need for continued efforts to improve ECE facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.3 Increase quality of early childhood learning environments 1.5 Develop communication strategies to ensure parents feel informed, empowered and involved throughout their child's transitions 2.1 ECCE info--multiple languages 2.2 ECCE staff participate in training & TA opportunities 2.3 Improved high-quality access for vulnerable populations 2.4 Built capacity in high-leverage practices to support an increase of preschoolers in the general education setting 2.5 Enhanced educator awareness of IDEA, its components, how it impacts daily practices in the school community, and practices that improve programming to increase positive student outcomes 2.6 Development of a plan to support increased number of eligible school districts that apply for and receive preschool expansion funds 2.7 NJ parents/providers have a shared vision of ECCE success and easy access to resource information and referral 4.2 Data (New Jersey Enterprise Analysis System for Early Learning - NJ-EASEL) are used to communicate need & success 6.3 Increased reflective practice in ECCE field 7.1 Identify and realign ECCE funding streams for long-term support 7.2 Create new ECCE slots for infants and toddlers in areas with limited supply 7.3 Enhance coordination across ECCE public, private and HS programs
Strategic Plan Domain 3: Collaboration/Partnership	
Needs Assessment Findings	Strategic Plan Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to support collaborations between and across programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4.1 NJ parents/providers have a shared vision of ECCE success and easy access to resource information and referral 4.2 Data (NJ-EASEL) are used to communicate need and success 5.1 Enhance parent/child interactions
Strategic Plan Domain 4: Communication & Awareness – vision, mission & key definitions	
Needs Assessment Findings	Strategic Plan Objectives

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen commitment and collaboration across state agencies and local programs to maintain New Jersey's shared vision and key terms (e.g., vulnerable, high quality) for its Early Childhood System Maintain commitment of New Jersey's 2-Gen approach to ECCE programs to serve and address the needs of children, pregnant women, parents and families Follow trends in consumer demand and access for ECCE across NJ 	<p>1.5 Develop communication strategies to ensure parents feel informed, empowered and involved throughout their child's transitions</p> <p>2.7 Continued outreach to families along with community partners and hubs to promote developmental health awareness, screening, and access to resources</p> <p>3.1 Strengthen IPG partners</p> <p>4.1 NJ parents/providers have a shared vision of ECCE success and easy access to resource information and referral</p> <p>4.2 Data (NJ-EASEL) are used to communicate need and success</p> <p>5.1 Enhance parent/child interactions</p>
Strategic Plan Domain 5: Parent Involvement & Leadership	
Needs Assessment Findings	Strategic Plan Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to create opportunities for parent feedback Spread awareness of available state ECCE services to diverse audiences 	<p>1.5 Develop communication strategies to ensure parents feel informed, empowered and involved throughout their child's transitions</p> <p>2.1 ECCE info—multiple languages</p> <p>2.5 Continued outreach to families along with community partners and hubs to promote developmental health, screening, and access to resources</p> <p>4.1 NJ parents/providers have a shared vision of ECCE success and easy access to resource information and referral</p> <p>5.1 Enhance parent/child interactions</p>
Strategic Plan Domain 6: Workforce Development	
Needs Assessment Findings	Strategic Plan Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workforce registry to track staff issues Multiple workforce development efforts (GNJK-Rutgers, MSU) Few professionals for parent/child IECMH clinical services Shortage of mental health supports for child care providers Launch of early childhood education Apprenticeship Pilot 	<p>1.1 Mental Health (MH) clinicians available to provide IECMH</p> <p>2.2 ECCE staff participate in training and TA opportunities</p> <p>2.5 Enhanced educator awareness and understanding of IDEA, its components, how it impacts daily practices in the school community, and practices that improve programming to increase positive student outcomes</p> <p>4.1 NJ parents/providers have a shared vision of ECCE success and easy access to resource information & referral</p> <p>5.1 Enhance parent/child interactions</p>

	6.1 Explore opportunities to enhance existing Workforce Registry (WR) to track professional development and training for CHWs, doulas, and other ECCE paraprofessionals 6.2 OOL regulatory standards support high-quality training 6.3 Increased reflective practice in EC field 6.4 Explore opportunities to fund and expand the apprenticeship model
Strategic Plan Domain 7: Sustainable Financing	
Needs Assessment Findings	Strategic Plan Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding should be leveraged to sustain programs Affordability of Child Care & PreK remains a concern post-COVID 	4.1 Data (NJ-EASEL) are used to communicate need & success 6.4 Explore opportunities to fund and expand the apprenticeship model 7.1 Identify and realign ECCE funding streams for long-term support 7.2 Create new ECCE slots for infants and toddlers in areas with limited supply 7.3 Enhance coordination across ECCE public, private and HS programs
Strategic Plan Domain 8: Continuous Quality Improvement – CI System	
Needs Assessment Findings	Strategic Plan Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue investment in Connecting NJ infrastructure to support coordination 	8.1 Examine and strengthen the CQI function within Connecting NJ Hubs

VIII. Conclusions

Development of the NJ Strategic Plan has supported and been informed by rich dialogue among key stakeholders. Stakeholders are committed to achieving the state's vision and recognize that the strategic plan provides a starting point and will evolve over time. The plan builds on the needs assessment to prioritize eight domains, 24 objectives, and specific actions steps to achieve those objectives. The plan also identifies a broad set of indicators to allow the responsible agencies to monitor progress. Implementation of the Strategic Plan will continue under the auspices of the **Interdepartmental Planning Group (IPG)**. With representation of senior staff across six core partners, the IPG is uniquely qualified to assess federal, state, and local statutory requirements and identify any potential barriers or roadblocks that these requirements put on future coordination. Input from parent leaders will continue to inform how implementation is progressing across the state. Responding to COVID-19 underscored the critical importance of addressing the physical, social-emotional, behavioral, and cognitive aspects of child wellbeing and school readiness for expectant families and families with young children. New Jersey is eager to continue the work.

Appendix: Abbreviations

ACF	Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services
ACNJ	Advocates for Children of New Jersey
ASQ	Ages and Stages Questionnaire
CCDF	Child Care Development Fund
CCR&R	Child Care Resource & Referral agency
CE	Continuing Education
CHW	Community Health Worker
CNJ	Connecting New Jersey
CQI	Continuous Quality Improvement
DCF	Department of Children and Families, New Jersey
DHS	Department of Human Services, New Jersey
DHS-DFD	Department of Human Services, Division of Family Development, New Jersey
DOE	Department of Education, New Jersey
DOH	Department of Health, New Jersey
DOL	Department of Labor and Workforce Development, New Jersey
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECEPTS	Early Care and Education Pathways to Success
EI	Early Intervention
EHS/HS	Early Head Start/Head Start
FCC	Family Child Care
GNJK	Grow NJ Kids
ICHC	Infant/Child Health Committee, New Jersey Council for Young Children
IECMH	Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health
IEP	Individualized Education Program
IPG	Interdepartmental Planning Group, New Jersey (DOE, DHS, DCF, DOH, DOL, NJEDA)
MIHIA	Maternal and Infant Health Innovation Authority
MSU	Montclair State University
NJCCAC	New Jersey Child Care Advisory Council
NJCYC	New Jersey Council for Young Children
NJ-EASEL	New Jersey Enterprise Analysis System for Early Learning (state-level ECIDS)
NJEDA	New Jersey Economic Development Authority
OOL	Office of Licensing, Department of Children and Families
PDG	Preschool Development Grant
PDG B-5	Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five

QIS	Quality Improvement Specialists
WR	Workforce Registry