NEVADA EARLY CHILDHOOD ADVISORY COUNCIL

2026-2028 STRATEGIC PLAN

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BY PUBLIC WORKS LLC

Nevada Early Childhood Advisory Council
2026-2028 Strategic Plan

Outline

I. Overview/Executive Summary

1. Purpose, Scope and Methodology of the Strategic Plan
2. Vision, Purpose, Current Goals of ECAC

II. Assessing the Current State

1. External Factors Impacting NV ECE
2. Impact of HR 1 on Early Childhood Systems
3. Socio-Demographic Trends
4. Accomplishments of Current Strategic Plan
5. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Challenges SWOC Analysis

III. What We Learned from Community Engagement

Overview of three prong process: Interviews, Surveys and Retreat

1. Insights from Key Informant Interviews
2. Insights from Community Member Survey Respondents
3. Insights from Early Childhood Sector Survey Respondents
4. Insights from ECAC Strategic Planning Retreat Participants

IV. Strategic Plan Goals, Objectives and Implementation Strategies

1. The Framing and Process of Five Priority Focus Areas
2. Goals, Objectives and Implementation Strategies for each Focus Area.

V. Appendix

1. **SWOC Analysis Chart**
2. **Community Engagement Findings Deck**
3. **Strategic Plan Snapshot Infographic**

I. Overview of Strategic Planning Project: Scope and Process

1. Purpose and Scope of Strategic Plan

The goal of the ECAC Strategic Plan process is "to produce an evidence-based and actionable strategic plan through the use of a comprehensive development process aligned with the ECAC commitments" of:

- Responsiveness to Nevada's Population
- Family Engagement and Leadership
- Community Partner Collaboration
- Transparency and Responsive Two-way Communication
- Continuity and Pathways from Prenatal into School Entry and Beyond
- Access to Early Childhood Programs and Supports

The "comprehensive development process" in developing the strategic plan involved ECAC commissioning the public policy firm Public Works LLC to inform, guide and facilitate the extensive research on identifying external forces impacting Nevada's early childhood systems, a review of the current state of ECAC's work in fulfilling its vision and purpose, a Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Challenges analysis impacting ECAC and early childhood system sectors in Nevada and an extensive Community Engagement process that involved Key Informant Interviews, Community Member Survey, Early Childhood Sector Survey and an ECAC Strategic Planning Retreat – all of which yielded over 2,000 individuals providing authentic voice and insights that informed this report and strategic plan.

2. Vision, Purpose and Current Goals of the Council

Aligning the Early Childhood Advisory Council's vision, purpose, commitments and legislative mandate was foundational to developing the strategic plan and are presented here to highlight how they've been considered throughout the development process of the 2026-2028 ECAC Strategic Plan.

VISION

Nevada's children will be safe, healthy, & thriving during the first eight years of life and the system will support children & families in achieving their full potential.

PURPOSE

The Nevada ECAC shall work to strengthen state-level coordination and collaboration among the various sectors and settings of early childhood education programs in Nevada.

GOALS

The goals cited in the current strategic plan and the work of the Council over the past three years are:

- Create a Coordinated Early Childhood Leadership Infrastructure
- Increase Coordination and Alignment Between Systems of Care for Young Children and Families
- Increase Capacity to Equitably Connect Families with the Early Childhood System Continuum of Care and Community at Large
- Identify Budget and Finance Strategies to Drive Policy Goals and Objectives
- Execute Data Collection and Integrated Systems to increase Equity and Accountability

References to an Early Childhood System throughout this report is broadly defined as "the interconnected network of programs, services, and supports for children birth through eight and their families."

II. Assessing the Current State

External Factors Impacting Nevada Early Childhood Systems

Introduction

An analysis of the current state within which Nevada's Early Childhood Advisory Council operates begins with an overview describing the shifting social, economic, demographic, health care and workforce conditions impacting how services are funded, delivered, and experienced by Nevada's children and families. Four major domains below outline key external forces shaping the landscape for children ages 0–8, followed by a snap-shot as to how federal funding through the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act" will affect early childhood systems and services.

1. External Factors

Federal Safety Net at Risk: Funds & policy changes cited in the *One Big Beautiful Bill Act* are authorized to: cut Medicaid spending by reducing health care coverage provided by Affordable Care Act subsidies, cutting SNAP food benefits, and making steep cuts to Head Start and CCDBG programs. The Act is intended to shift costs formerly funded by the U.S. Department of Education and Health & Human Services to the states. The impact of these impending funding deficits will bear a heavy toll as Nevada is already among the lowest states investing in early childhood systems and services. Thus, ECAC's mission to advise and recommend enhancements to early childhood care, development and learning will face even less financial support as it continues to rely upon a precarious patchwork of federal grants.

Cost of Early Childhood Care, Development & Learning: With lack of Medicaid services, families will face greater out-of-pocket cost burden for early childhood development, physical and mental health services. The current long waiting list for diagnostic testing and subsequent services will continue to grow causing children to go without treatment. The lack of Head Start funds will likely lead to more centers closing since families won't be able to afford the out-of-pocket expense, providers won't be able to remain open if they are relying on reduced Head Start reimbursements to sustain their centers.

Workforce Shortage Rises: Nevada's wages trail state averages especially in early childhood field. Tighter public dollars lead to hiring freezes and wage stagnation among workers already being paid below living wages. Inflation and high housing, food, and transportation costs continue to strain family budgets and early childhood provider's sustainability to provide care and services. Persistent workforce shortages and low wages threaten service quality and

availability, especially for infant–toddler care and in rural areas. Efforts to strengthen the early childhood workforce such as through wage supplements, apprenticeship/credential pathways, and career lattices are expanding but are uneven across states.

Learning, Mental & Physical Health Needs: Expect Maternal Child Health access in rural areas to become scarcer which is already flagged as "Maternal-care deserts." (Source) About 42% of Nevada's children eight years and under are living in households at 200% of federal poverty levels leaving them vulnerable to reduced access to services and greater exposure to mental and physical health needs**.** The state's limited early childhood systems funding and infrastructure portends that cuts will likely produce service gaps rather than being covered by state funding or providers.

Note: There will be a side-bar of facts with sourced links making points cited above.

2. The Impact of P.L. 119-21 "One Big Beautiful Bill Act"

One of the most profound external factors affecting early childhood systems, both nationally and in Nevada, is the recent passage of the federal "One Big Beautiful Bill Act."

The following table provides an overview as to how six policy changes in the Act will have a direct impact on early childhood systems.

Table 1
Impact of P.L. 119-21 "One Big Beautiful Bill Act, 119th Congress on Early Childhood System and Services

Provision / Policy Change	Potential Impact on Early Childhood / Family Supports	Notes & Caveats
Cuts to Medicaid / health spending	Loss of health coverage or greater cost burden for families and children; fewer resources for health-related services in early childhood settings	The bill is projected to reduce federal health spending by over $1 trillion. (KFF)
New Medicaid work requirements / eligibility changes	Some families might lose eligibility; administrative burden could disrupt continuity of care	For adults 19–64, monthly 80-hour work/community activity requirements, though some exemptions for caregivers of children under age 7. (Wikipedia)
Cuts / restructuring in nutrition / food supports (SNAP)	Increased food insecurity, which stresses families and may reduce ability to pay for child care or related services	The bill imposes new work requirements for certain non-disabled adults in SNAP. Up to 3.3 million families could face losses. (Afterschool Alliance)
Cuts to federal safety-net spending / shifting cost burden to states	States may face pressure to backfill cuts, potentially pulling from education or early childhood budgets	Analyses flag that states will bear much of the financial "backstop" burden. (Center For Children and Families)
Head Start / HHS / discretionary funding proposals	Risk of elimination or steep cuts to Head Start, early care, or related supports under the administration's budget proposals	The administration's draft FY 2026 budget reportedly includes elimination of Head Start. (AP News)
Child Tax Credit, dependent care / employer-provided child care tax credit enhancements	Some provisions are more favorable to families with children (e.g., increased dependent care FSA limits, expanded employer child care credits).	The bill increases the dependent care FSA limit, expands qualifying childcare expenses, and enhances employer child care credits. (Tax Policy Center)

3. Socio-Demographic Trends

Overall, there are several trends that will continue to exacerbate the needs of young children and their families over the course of the next three years. They range from the unaffordability of child care and learning, the high poverty rates among children and families, decreasing numbers of the licensed early childhood workforce, a lack of licensed early care centers to meet the demand of working parents, and finally, the need to address the unique needs among Nevada's growing numbers of children of color.

The following facts reveal the external factors ECAC must consider over the next three years as they set goals and strategies to inform state policymakers and the public on advancing Nevada's early childhood systems.

- Nevada is ranked the 4th least affordable state for infant care in licensed family child care; for a family of three at 100% poverty it represents 61 % of income. (Children's Cabinet Fact Sheet).

- Forty-three percent of Nevada's children ages 0-12 live under 200% of poverty exposing them to increased risk of developmental delays, toxic stress, chronic illness, and nutritional deficits." (Source: Healthy People 2030, Health.gov).

- Nevada's licensed child care workforce has decreased by 9.43% since 2018. (Source: Children's Cabinet Fact Sheet)

- Nevada's licensed capacity meets just 33.1% of the need for children ages 0-5 with all parents in the workforce. (Source: Ibid).

- Nevada serves just 8 % of 4-year-olds in state-funded pre-K indicating a major access gap and predictor of K-5 readiness challenges. (Source: Nevada Ready).

- Hispanic children account for 42% of Nevada's child population state-wide. (Source: National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families).

4. The Current State: ECAC's Accomplishments

The Nevada Early Childhood Advisory Council's 2025 Progress Highlights chart showcases a range of impactful achievements designed to enhance the state's early childhood systems. In the area of Systems Alignment, one notable accomplishment is the establishment of a Centralized Outreach Tracking System. This system allows for the effective tracking of

outreach efforts across agencies, facilitating better coordination and ensuring that families receive consistent information about available services. Additionally, the council conducted a comprehensive Network Analysis, which helped identify gaps in service delivery and coordination among providers, ultimately informing strategies for improved inter-agency collaboration.

In the domain of Communication and Engagement, the council implemented Spanish translation at meetings to foster inclusivity among non-English speaking communities. This initiative has significantly enhanced participation from Spanish speaking community members. Moreover, the council successfully delivered over 50 million messages through various channels including digital platforms, community events, and partnerships with local organizations. This widespread communication campaign aimed to raise awareness about early childhood resources and programs, effectively increasing family engagement and access to vital services.

On the policy and finance front, the development of a Children's Fiscal Map stands out as a crucial tool in understanding the funding landscape for early childhood services in Nevada. This map provides detailed insights into the allocation of resources and identifies potential areas for investment. The council has also been instrumental in advocating for increased state funding to expand access to quality early childhood education programs. Coupled with ongoing data evaluation initiatives through the Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS), these efforts enable the council to measure program outcomes and ensure that policies are informed by solid evidence, laying a strong foundation for a sustainable and effective early childhood system in Nevada.

The Council closed their strategic plan's three-year cycle by launching a community member survey to identify priority areas for the next three years – it yielded a record-breaking response of nearly 2,000 completed surveys, the majority of whom are raising young children from zero to eight years of age. For a complete listing of accomplishments, see the *ECAC 2025 Progress Highlights Chart* in the Appendix.

5. SWOC Analysis of ECAC's Organization and Early Childhood System

An integral part of the Strategic Planning process is to assess an organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges (SWOC) within the environment it functions, in this case, early childhood systems. The following highlights each of these areas:

Strengths

• **Strong Commitment and Expertise**. Members, partners and staff demonstrate deep field experience and commitment despite structural and funding limitations.

• **Federal Grant Alignment and Coordination Capacity.** ECAC effectively leverages federal funding (e.g. HRSA, PDG, ARPA) and aligns goals with federal initiatives.

• **Infrastructure Achievements**. Built vital systems e.g. Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS), Parent Leadership Councils, & professional pathways (e.g., First 5 Leadership Project).

• **Progress in Family Engagement.** Expansion of Parent Leadership Councils, evening meetings, translation services, and compensation for family participation.

• **Improved Collaboration and Cross-Sector Awareness.** Increasing inclusion of health professionals, coordination between data and evaluation teams, communication between state and local partners.

Weaknesses

• **Lack of Sustainable Funding and Administrative Capacity**. ECAC operates with zero state funding, relying on expiring grants and volunteer labor; administrative support ending in 2025/26 poses a serious threat.

• **Structural and Governance Fragmentation**. 82+ annual meetings, overlapping subcommittees, unclear decision-making authority, and without an organizational home.

• **Limited Visibility and Public Recognition.** Modest recognition by the public as to what ECAC does and its impact on the Early Childhood System, family engagement without decision-making influence.

• **Strategic Plan Over-reach.** Goals exceed ECAC's statutory authority and capacity, staff consumed with clerical and logistical work to hold meetings limiting their focus on systemic change.

• **Workforce Development Crisis.** Staffing shortages, suspended TEACH scholarships, and unclear career pathways destabilize the entire Early Childhood Education and Care workforce.

• **Weak Legislative & Fellow-Agency Relationships.** Reports go unread by policymakers, recommendations unacknowledged, and representation on the Council lacks decision-makers.

Challenges

- **Funding Cliff: December 2025–July 2026**. Simultaneous end of multiple grants (ARPA, PDG, HRSA) threatens council continuity, staff retention, and operational capacity.

- **Workforce Collapse.** Ongoing staff shortages leading to program closures statewide; without workforce stability, all system improvements stall.

• **Public Perception and Professional Recognition Crisis**. Early childhood sector viewed as 'non-professional,' weakening advocacy power and workforce appeal.

• **Systemic Fragmentation**. Inter-agency competition and lack of authority perpetuate silos; agencies debate over who's responsible for ECAC.

• **Geographic and Language Barriers**. Rural families face long travel distances; over 20 languages needed beyond Spanish for meaningful inclusion.

• **Meeting Fatigue and Volunteer Burnout.** Current compliance and open meeting law requirements unsustainable under volunteer model.

• **Data Integrity Concerns.** Conflicting population counts and limited ECIDS adoption reduce ability to measure true outcomes and progress.

Opportunity

- **Establish Sustainable State Funding and Administrative Infrastructure.** Advocate for a dedicated ECAC budget line, professional staff, and long-term sustainability beyond federal grants.

- **Legislative Education and Advocacy.** Leverage family and educator voices to build legislative understanding and secure policy action ('policy influenced by parents on the front lines' in legislative districts).

• **System Integration and Streamlining**. Align health, education, and social services under a potential Department of Early Childhood to address fragmentation.

• **Workforce Innovation.** Develop alternative credentialing pathways, stackable credentials, and career ladders strengthen workforce retention and recognition.

• **Visibility and Marketing. Rebrand** ECAC through improved communications, public-facing website redesign, dashboards to access services and storytelling to increase recognition.

• **Data-Driven Decision-Making**. Expand ECIDS utilization, develop progress scorecards, and incorporate biannual public progress reviews.

• **Authentic Family Leadership.** Transition from participation to co-leadership roles, ensuring families co-create policy and hold advisory power.

Overall, the Nevada Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) exhibits significant strengths, including a strong commitment and expertise among its Advisory Council members, staff who successfully leverage federal grants and build crucial infrastructure, evidenced by the Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS) and Parent Leadership Councils. Family engagement has improved through the expansion of councils and translation services, while collaboration across sectors has increased awareness among health professionals and local partners.

Weaknesses, however, persist that include: a lack of sustainable funding leading to operational challenges, fragmented governance, and limited public visibility. Additionally, a workforce development crisis is exacerbated by staffing shortages and unclear career pathways. Notable challenges include: the impending funding cliff due to expiring grants, public and policymakers lack of respect for those who work in the field of early childhood, and geographic barriers causing a lack of early childhood services affecting rural families. Opportunities for improvement include advocating for sustainable state funding, enhancing visibility and communications, advocating for streamlined, easy-access to early childhood services and transitioning families from participation to co-leadership roles in policy-making processes.

III. What We Learned from Community Engagement

This segment of the strategic planning process engaged a three-prong process of reaching out to Early Childhood Thought Leaders through 28 Key Informant Interviews including members of the Early Childhood Advisory Council, a survey sent to community members and families yielding 1,777 completed responses and a survey sent to Early Childhood providers culminating in 212 respondents. All told, these three means of engagement brought forth 2,017 individual insights to inform ECAC's strategic planning. In addition, these findings were shared with 37 participants of the ECAC Strategic Planning Retreat. Overall, respondents represent every county throughout Nevada and represent multiple segments of the early childhood field grounded and enlightened by the majority bringing lived-experience perspectives as parents, family, and members of the early childhood workforce.

The following section presents the key highlights learned from each segment of our community engagement endeavor to seek out "authentic voice" and tell their story.

1. Key Informant Interviews

Overall, among the 28 Thought Leaders individually interviewed, many of whom are members of the Early Childhood Advisory Council, we found that they want to see a transformative approach to early childhood services, emphasizing the need for substantial improvements rather than incremental changes. Participants envision a collaborative framework that unites various stakeholders, engages families and workforce as leaders and experts, fosters partnerships and coordinated data efforts to enhance service delivery and system effectiveness.

There is a strong call for action-oriented goals that prioritize tangible results that can be realistically pursued given the Councils' resources and advisory role. Community leaders expressed a clear expectation for the strategic plan to be to lead to direct improvements.

Highlighted Insights from Key Informant Interviews:

- ECAC members, staff & partners bring decades of experience in Early Childhood Systems, staff expertise in managing grants.
- New improvements to engaging families (e.g. evening meetings, Parent Leadership Council, incentives) for participation have been very effective.

- Building cross-sector relationships has improved e.g. with health, education and non-profit partners. We need a greater public presence.
- Opportunities for growth: Reduce the number of sub-committees and meetings (currently 82 annually), re-think the five goals to align with current needs assessment and strategic planning.
- The challenges ECAC faces are: lack of state funding, uncertainty and cuts in federal ECS funding, and reliance on patchwork of temporary grants.
- Challenges impacting entire Early Childhood System: workforce shortage, centers closing, needs of children increasing, bureaucracy and waiting lists prevent access to services, federal cuts loom in health care and SNAP.

In Their Words Block:

"ECAC's value lies in breaking down silos and enhancing cooperation among early childhood agencies."

“Other states have dedicated budgets for their ECACs …we rely on temporary grants and volunteer labor.”

2. Community Members Survey Respondents

A twelve-question survey was sent by an email invitation by ECAC to community groups and early childhood providers who, in turn, sent it to their staff and families yielding 1,777 completed responses. Among those taking the survey, 62% were parents and family members while 24 percent were ECS providers and staff at early care or learning centers. A complete report of findings on the survey is available in Appendix B. The following presents an overview of key highlights among the thousands of responses and open-ended comments shared by respondents.

Highlighted Insights from Community Members:

- **Lack of affordable** early childhood care, development and learning services. Working families find the cost of child care/learning as much as paying their rent or mortgage. Cost of living is on the rise and many parents aren’t making a living wage to pay for care.
- **Access & Availability:** Lack of services/care especially in rural areas, long wait lists, transportation barriers, ECS “care deserts” throughout Nevada.

- **Quality of Care & Workforce Shortage:** Low pay, high-turnover rates, talented early care workers leave for better paying jobs, inconsistent care impacts children's socio-emotional learning.
- **Fragmented Early Care System:** Parents are forced to navigate confusing, multi-agency, eligibility applications. High desire for a seamless, "one-stop-shop" model for the ECS system.
- **Gaps in Disability & Developmental Delay:** Deep concerns over barriers to receive services, often unavailable, limited bilingual supports, long delays in evaluation, and inconsistent eligibility processing across districts.
- **Investing in ECS Needed**: Frequent sentiment that Nevada lacks a *unified* vision and commitment to benefits of early learning and the costs incurred without it.
- **Family Well-Being & Mental Health:** Parents describe feeling overwhelmed, isolated in finding help for children facing learning gaps while they also struggle daily with very limited incomes.

3. Early Childhood System Sector Survey Respondents

A fourteen-question survey was sent by an email invitation by ECAC to early childhood providers. The survey yielded 212 completed surveys of which 56 percent identified as being part of the early childhood workforce of which 17 percent report specializing in Maternal Child Health. The majority have been the early childhood field for 4-plus years. A complete report of findings on the survey is available in Appendix B. The following presents an overview of key highlights among the hundreds of responses and open-ended comments shared by respondents.

Highlighted Insights from Early Childhood Sector:

- **Affordability:** High cost is a great barrier to ECS also impacting the middle class. Families cycle in and out of centers/care due to changing subsidy requirements and increase in care.
- **Access & Availability:** Lack of full-day and extended care is hard on working families; insufficient infant slots are widely reported. Parents report quitting jobs because they are without *affordable* child care.
- **Quality of Care & Workforce Shortage:** Cite need for living wage for teachers and care aides, and access to training and career pathways to advance in the field. Need to respect their expertise.

- **Fragmented Early Care System**: Agencies, programs & funding streams operate in silos leaving families to navigate complex & duplicative steps to get help.
- **Teacher Support:** Need to respect the expertise of teachers and aides via living wages, professional development, career ladders, scholarships, mentoring and supporting a lifelong career.
- **Gaps in Disability & Developmental Delay:** Deep concerns over shortage of specialists, regional inconsistencies, complex eligibility barriers leaving children without evaluations and services.
- **Investing in ECS Needed**: Early Learning programs seriously underfunded compared to national benchmarks. Early Care and education must be seen as a bedrock to Nevada's economic & social infrastructure.
- **Family Well-Being & Mental Health:** Providers seeing emotionally exhausted families navigating a fragmented system, while their children need care, high need for Spanish-language translation services to assist bi-lingual families.

In Their Words Quotes Block:
"Waitlists are so long, that families give up before a slot opens."
"We lose passionate teachers every year as they can't survive on what early childhood pays."
"Nevada invests less in early childhood than almost any other state."

4. ECAC Strategic Planning Retreat Insights

At the Nevada Early Childhood Advisory Council Leadership Strategic Planning Retreat held in Las Vegas on October 29th and 30th, 2025, participants engaged in intensive collaborative work to shape the future of early childhood education in Nevada. Following morning presentations that included stakeholder engagement findings, legislative priorities, and systems analysis, attendees broke into small groups for facilitated discussions. Each group was asked to identify three key takeaways from what they had heard and to develop up to five strategic goals for ECAC's 2026-2028 strategic plan.

The following are the key themes that emerged among all work groups citing their three takeaways.

Highlighted Insights from ECAC Strategic Planning Retreat

Workforce Crisis & Compensation: Several participants in the early childhood field reported that, "I couldn't stay in the profession because I just couldn't pay my bills." The public and

policy makers need to get beyond the misconception that early learning is simply acting as a “babysitter." There is an extremely high need for livable wages and benefits in the early childhood workforce. We need to explore alternative pathways to certification in early childhood field.

Systems Integration & Access

Families need "One-stop-Shop" method to find out about and access early childhood services. "If you go from one program to another there shouldn't be a gap." We need an early childhood system like Mayo Clinic’s model wherein all their services are seamless for the patient. The current siloed and fragmented early childhood system needs fixing.

Funding & Sustainability

ECAC needs to find permanent funding not only for itself, but to advocate for other needed early childhood services and policies that benefit children and families. We need to develop materials and reports that show "provable high return on investment" that investing in early learning, care and development services yield – and the costs to society when we don’t. WE need to find innovative ways to address the “Affordability paradox:” if we raise provider and care worker wages, then many families can’t cover the higher cost. We need to make early childhood system services a priority in new development/tax projects.

Communication & Advocacy

"We all need to be speaking the same language" with a collective voice and reduce the use of acronyms and jargon. Those with lived-experience provide insights, opinions and ideas that provide a valuable and authentic voice for ECAC to share with the public and policymakers. We need to explore ways to educate those currently **not** in our corner of promoting the need for and enhancement of early childhood care, development and learning services.

Family-Centered Approach

ECAC’s efforts in advocacy should center on addressing families' early childhood needs and priorities. A family focus should be front and center in the Council’s mission and work. We need to promote policies and practice that make it simplified to apply for services rather than "parents getting bogged down by their 10th application." The Council should be seen as a trusted source and collective voice for families and providers.

Representation & Inclusion

"The lack of representation the fact that they're not here in this room." Diversity in workforce systems is needed, along with those making policy and practice decision-making at the Council and agency levels. We need to reach agencies and potential partners not currently at

our early “childhood system table,” especially in physical and mental health care. "The more voices we collectively represent then policymakers will pay attention"

Quality & Child Development

"You get third graders who aren't ready to read at their level because they didn't have quality pre-k and primary grade school learning experiences. Understanding brain development 0-8 is crucial and is often not understood nor the deficits children suffer when their brain health is neglected. Investment in quality yields positive results and we need to find ways to get the message out to the public and policymakers.

IV. Framing the Strategic Plan's Focus Priority Areas, Goals, Objectives and Implementation Strategies

Background on Identifying Priority Focus Areas

Following a comprehensive review of the current state of Nevada's early childhood system broadly defined as the coordinated network of programs and supports serving children from birth through age eight and their families, the Early Childhood Advisory Council undertook several key analyses and community engagement activities. This process included conducting a SWOC (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges) analysis of the ECAC as an organization, as well as an in-depth review of the external forces that are currently influencing, and are expected to continue impacting, the Council's mission and work over course of the next three years.

In addition, the Council sought input and insights from a broad cross-section of the community, gathering insights from 2,000 community members, including families, early care and learning providers, teachers, support staff and policymakers. The knowledge gathered from the interviews and survey results were shared at a Strategic Planning Retreat. The participants included ECAC members, policymakers, NDE staff and early childhood experts and parents. From this retreat, thirteen goal/priority areas were identified for the 2026-2028 strategic plan. The synthesis of these findings and retreat proceedings led to the identification of five **Priority Focus Areas** aligned with ECAC's mission and current strategic plan.

These focus areas establish the groundwork for the Goals, Objectives, and Implementation Strategies outlined in the 2026-2028 ECAC Strategic Plan. For each focus area, the following section details its specific goals, objectives, and proposed strategies that will guide implementation during the next three years.

Goals, Objectives, and Implementation Strategies

ECAC embraces the principle that a strong early childhood workforce is foundational to Nevada's success in supporting children from birth through age eight. A qualified, stable, and fairly- compensated workforce ensures high-quality learning and provides consistent relationships vital for a child's development. ECAC will foster collaboration among the ECS that strengthens career pathways, compensation equity, and amplifies the voices of the early learning and care workforce to shape statewide decisions and policies addressing what many consider a workforce crisis.

GOAL

Promote the growth and sustainability of a qualified, stable, and diverse early childhood learning and care workforce that is fairly compensated and supported.

OBJECTIVES

Shed light, voice and attention on the following areas impacting Early Childhood System workforce stakeholders, children and families that leads to:

1. Expanding clear and flexible career pathways that allow early educators to enter and advance in the field including infant/toddler specialists, early interventionists, and Pre-K to Grade 3 teachers.
2. Promoting compensation equity by sharing pay and benefits data across program types and highlighting funding models that support fair, competitive wages. This includes coordinating with the Funding & Affordability Priority Focus Area to ensure compensation data informs fiscal recommendations.
3. Strengthening early learning educator and early care voices and leadership by embedding workforce listening sessions, surveys, and direct representation into ECAC's advisory process.
4. Improving recruitment and retention by identifying barriers, showcasing model practices, and recommending incentives such as stipends, scholarships, or tax credits.
5. Utilizing workforce data systems to monitor compensation equity including benefits, industry trends, turnover, and benefits, and share annual *Workforce Outcomes Updates* in ECAC's statewide reports.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

1. Convene a *Workforce Advisory Workgroup* to analyze career ladders, credentialing options, and training pathways across Early Childhood Systems.
2. Publish bi-annual 'Compensation Landscape Snapshots' summarizing early learning and care workers, pay, benefits, and workforce trends across Nevada informed by collaborating with ECIDS' data on workforce trends and outcomes.
3. Foster discussions and partnerships with vocational and higher education training providers to expand accessible certifications, degree and apprenticeship opportunities.
4. Host early care and early learning educator and provider listening sessions and synthesize findings in ECAC's annual report to inform policy recommendations.
5. Collaborate with state agencies to align workforce data sources (e.g., ECIDS, licensing, QRIS) and promote the development of a unified workforce dashboard for ECS stakeholders and local groups to access and enlighten their planning and decision-making.

Nevada families report navigating a fragmented landscape of early learning, health, and family support programs. Among a survey amassing 1,777 responses, of whom 60% were family members, a resounding 88% rate the need for *information on early childhood services with easy access to apply* for services as "Very High" or "High;" the majority rating the need as "Very High." In response, promoting an aligned, holistic, integrated, and family-centered early childhood system that connects services, strengthens data use, and enhances family members and guardians' ease of use to accessing services is vital.

GOAL

Promote an integrated, aligned, and family-centered early childhood system that strengthens coordination across agencies and data systems.

OBJECTIVES

Shed light, voice and attention on the provision of early learning and early care services within the Early Childhood System impacting children, families and the provider network that leads to:

1. Facilitating the development of coordinated service mapping that clarifies program roles, reduces duplication, and supports joint planning across early childhood agencies.
2. Promoting ECS shared data systems and dashboards that connect early learning, health, and K–3 data to guide statewide decisions and continuous improvement.
3. Improving family navigation by promoting one-stop access systems, shared eligibility tools across programs and local Community Resource Hubs offering access to ECS resources such as via libraries, schools, and non-profits.
4. Encouraging shared governance structures to bring together agencies, providers, and families to improve coordination among health, human services, family supportive services and early learning and care sectors.
5. Advocating for a type of ECS Passport of information, testing results and eligibility requirements met among children with IEPs and FSSPs as they

transition between early childhood learning through 3rd grade.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

1. Offer to conduct a community member survey among family members attempting to access ECS services to determine barriers, challenges and opportunities to developing a seamless, one-stop navigation portal.
2. Promote facilitation of quarterly cross-agency coordination meetings at the state and local levels to identify gaps, align goals, and identify opportunities to share resources locally and address geographic barriers in rural communities.
3. Use ECAC's *State of Early Childhood Annual Report* to spotlight system innovations and local models showing effective coordination and/ or data-use.
4. Partner with state data and technology teams to enhance ECIDS and integrate family experience indicators.
5. Facilitate family roundtables to gather feedback on service navigation and publish an annual *Family Experience Snapshot* that identifies gaps and opportunities to address them.

The most frequently cited need—voiced by more than 2,000 survey respondents including families, early childhood providers, along with Key Informant Interviewees and Retreat participants is the lack of affordable early care and learning in Nevada. Families across low- to middle-income levels increasingly find child care out of reach and unsustainable, at best. Respondents encouraged ECAC to champion a dedicated state funding stream to support universal pre-K for four-year-olds, expand early childhood services, and incentivize employers (e.g., through tax credits) to businesses that offer child care benefits. Many emphasize the need for the state to view early care and education as a public good similar to providing Nevada's children an education through its support of K-12 schools.

GOAL

Establish sustainable funding streams for early childhood systems and improve affordability of early care and learning programs.

OBJECTIVES

Shed light, voice and attention on the deep need for *affordable* early care and learning programs along with opportunities for the state to invest in funding streams and strategies that mitigate the need by:

1. Raising public, legislative and policymaker awareness as to the economic and social value of investing in early care and learning and the costs incurred by not making the investment.
2. Identifying and promoting diversified, stable and shared funding sources that reduce reliance on federal grants and strengthen long-term sustainability.
3. Promoting the development of a universal, state-funded pre-kindergarten program for all four-year olds.
4. Exploring incentives for businesses to offer child care and early learning benefits and the state identify ways to allocate funds from revenue sources that ensure a permanent early childhood system funding source.
5. Discovering ways to assist families from being cut-off from support as they work their way towards self-sufficiency known as the "Cliff Effect" (e.g. Dynamic Adjustment Policies).

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

1. Maintain a *Fiscal Landscape Report* detailing all early childhood funding sources, system gaps and Nevada's national rankings in early childhood systems.
2. Publish Return on Investment (ROI) briefs and infographics that show how early learning investments strengthen Nevada's children, families, communities, workforce and economic growth.
3. Promote collaborative study and discussion among state agencies, early childhood advisory bodies, stakeholders and legislative staff on exploring public-private partnerships and dedicated state funds that can make early care and learning affordable for Nevada's families.
4. Provide materials that show how the costs of child care and early childhood education impacts household spending through press releases, policy briefs and testimony to inform legislative and policymaker decision-making.
5. Integrate *Funding & Affordability Indicators* within the ECAC's *State of Early Childhood Report* to track trends and Early Childhood System progress.

ECAC's unique mandate and mission to strengthen state-level collaboration among early childhood sectors by making strategic recommendations that increase participation of children in early childhood programs and enhance the systems and services that support them. This goal leverages ECAC's position to drive policy change, influence decisions at the state level, and ensure that early childhood is embraced as a leading priority in Nevada.

GOAL

Elevate the visibility and value of early childhood learning and care achieved through a coordinated Early Childhood System dedicated to enhancing children's lives.

OBJECTIVES

Shed light, voice and attention on the value and promise of early childhood care and learning for children, families, communities and society by:

1. Strengthening and enhancing the Family Engagement and Leadership program that prepares family members to serve as partners in planning and implementing ECAC goals.
2. Creating materials accessible in multiple languages to expand family and ECS stakeholder awareness as to the issues and needs facing early care and learning in Nevada.
3. Becoming the "go to" source to receive authentic, lived-experience stories and voice among state agencies seeking input from community members and ECS providers to better inform their policy and decision-making.
4. Distributing materials that translate the Return On Investment that ECS yields as an effort to also educate policy-makers, legislators, the press and the public as to the costs of not doing so.
5. Assembling an Early Childhood Data Toolkit of charts, infographics and briefs highlighting trends, issues, and childhood needs impacting the Early Childhood System among the Four Priority Focus Areas.
6. Provide "Community Engagement Mini-Grants" to fund local non-profits, faith-based groups, and libraries to host community/neighborhood events that provide information, referrals and resources to families seeking assistance in early childhood services.

Implementation Strategies:

1. Create online, highly interactive listening sessions and forums that function as Work Groups gathering ideas and insights from ECS stakeholders among the Five Priority Focus Areas. The model would also be developed for local, in-person sessions.
2. Seek out University partners that can offer a cadre of interns to perform administrative and programmatic functions along with seeking volunteers from groups such as AARP with their strong intergenerational advocacy, non-profits and faith- based organizations.
3. Create Key Performance Measures to assure that opportunities for engaging authentic voice/experience throughout all of ECAC goals and objectives are being met.
4. Promote and sponsor Legislative Engagement Events at local district offices and at the capitol by providing briefs and a toolkit for families, advocates and providers to tell their story and explain what they are advocating for.
5. Form a partnership with a university, a state agency and/or a non-profit to develop a Child Opportunity Index for each county in Nevada utilizing the Diversity Kids model. This will enable ECAC to "go local" in its advocacy and more powerfully tell the story of children's early care and learning needs when the findings being shown are close to home.

The Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) is committed to building a sustainable operational foundation that strengthens its ability to represent and elevate the voices of families, providers, and community partners with lived experience. This goal establishes stable administrative capacity, streamlining governance, enhancing communication, and cultivating strategic partnerships that position ECAC as a trusted voice for Nevada's early childhood system

GOAL

Establish a sustainable operational Infrastructure to fulfill the mission and mandate of the Early Childhood Advisory Council.

OBJECTIVES

Shed light, voice and attention to the need and opportunities to solidify an operational infrastructure that can sustain the impending depletion of resources while fulfilling its mission and mandate by:

1. Identifying and acquiring long-term administrative capacity and funding beyond the current in-kind, multi-agency, temporary federal grant-dependent model.
2. Streamlining the governance structure to accommodate impending diminished administrative support while maintaining capacity to fulfill the organization's mission and mandate.
3. Enhancing communications, brand and messaging on early childhood needs to enlighten, inform and engage the public, legislators, family members and Early Childhood System stakeholders to address those needs.
4. Exploring the feasibility and advantages of securing a "home" within state government that can provide a sustainable infrastructure and ambassador for ECAC to perform its core functions.
5. Developing state intra-agency and public-private partnerships that augment the work of ECAC in reaching its goals.

Implementation Strategies:

1. Immediately explore with the Governor's Office, the Departments of DHHS and Education and other state government ECS affiliated entities, the opportunity of receiving in-kind support and/or direct funding of two FTE administrative positions.

   One position would be dedicated to fulfilling administrative functions and communications and the other would be dedicated to facilitating community engagement and overseeing family leadership initiatives.

   With the impending loss of administrative staff to support the logistics of managing nearly 80 meetings a year among 6 sub-committees, move towards creating five Work Groups each addressing one of the five Focus Areas and respective objectives cited in the strategic plan. Meetings would be reduced by at least 50 percent. Consider creating an Executive Committee to guide work of the Council between General Membership meetings and address issues that don't require formalized action by the full advisory council.
2. Explore and establish partnerships with local universities and colleges to acquire interns to assist with communications, supporting family engagement activities, use of social media, and conducting data analysis and research to develop briefs and White Papers.
3. Maximize the use of the current OnStrategy platform to track progress on goals, objectives and key results of implementation strategies among the five overarching goals and objectives of the 2026-2028 Strategic Plan.
4. Enhance and promote ECAC's value-added role in state government as a convenor giving voice to community members, families, and providers of early learning and care. Explore the feasibility of state agencies and entities commissioning ECAC to perform and be compensated for this function.
5. Continue and enhance ECAC's work in establishing Early Care and Learning Legislative Priorities, one of which is to continue advocating for the establishment of a Governor's Early Childhood Office and another is promoting universal pre-k for four-year-olds. Develop clear funding, strategy and/or program "asks" tied to measurable outcomes when advocates and stakeholders meet with legislators.