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Early Childhood Governance in Delaware: Landscape Analysis & Recommendations 2026

IRMC
INTERAGENCY RESOURCE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

[This is a DRAFT report for the IRMC to consider and provide feedback, and should not be considered the final Governance report. There will be a process to collect feedback before this report and an implementation guide are finalized in Fall 2026.]

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Executive Summary

Delaware leaders have established a new vision of early childhood as a public good. Achieving this vision will require stronger system stewardship, accountability, coordination, and alignment so that existing investments, programs, and partnerships can operate together toward shared outcomes.

Early Childhood as a Public Good

Delaware has articulated an ambitious vision for early childhood care and education as a public good, one in which every child has the opportunity to thrive and every family can access affordable, high-quality early learning:

- **Every child thrives** and is prepared for school
- **Every family can access affordable, high-quality options** for care
- **Early childhood professionals are supported** as a stable, respected workforce
- **The mixed-delivery system provides real choice** and is equitable, transparent, and built to improve

As this report shows, Delaware has many of the necessary ingredients for success.The question facing state leaders is clear: how to leverage what exists to ensure investments, programs, partnerships, and initiatives operate together as a coherent system capable of achieving a shared outcomes for children, families, and providers in every corner of the state.

To help answer that question, the IRMC commissioned this report: a landscape analysis of the state system, particularly its governance and finance components, to identify the next steps for the state and its leaders on its pathway to achieving its goals. Following this analysis, the IRMC will decide and develop an implementation plan to deliver on the emerging recommendations of this report.

Scope of This Report

This report focuses on governance: how Delaware organizes leadership, accountability, decision-making, coordination, and stewardship across the early childhood system. The landscape analysis identified opportunities to strengthen system stewardship, shared accountability, investment alignment, and cross-system coordination, making governance the primary focus of this phase of work. Governance and financing are closely connected; as the path forward on governance changes is solidified, the IRMC intends to continue this work through a subsequent phase focused on financing, including how Delaware's investments can be aligned, leveraged, and sustained to support long-term system goals.

Key Insights from the Landscape Analysis

Stakeholders described meaningful investments, ongoing efforts to strengthen the system, and many examples of effective collaboration across agencies and organizations.

The findings in this report reflect how responsibilities, authority, funding, and accountability are distributed across the system rather than the performance of any individual agency or program. Viewed through that lens, three key insights emerged consistently across agencies, sectors, and stakeholder groups.

1. Delaware Has Invested Significantly but Lacks Visibility Into Results

Stakeholders described substantial investments and extensive data collection across programs and agencies. However, they regularly raised questions about how investments and implementation efforts translate into outcomes across the broader system and whether leaders have sufficient visibility to support strategic decision-making.

2. Coordination Frequently Relies on Relationships Rather Than Structures

Stakeholders repeatedly described strong partnerships, collaborative leadership, and a willingness to work across organizational boundaries. These relationships were widely viewed as one of Delaware's greatest strengths. At the same time, interviewees described what happens when coordination that frequently relies on personal relationships, institutional knowledge, and individual effort fails to deliver. Concerns related to transparency, overlapping ownership, and prioritization, among others, point to a need for structures that can deliver on the system's promise.

3. Families and Providers Often Bear the Burden of System Fragmentation

Families with young children and providers often experience the cumulative effects of a system organized across multiple programs, agencies, and service delivery structures that are not reconciled intentionally. Navigating multiple requirements, processes, and entry points creates challenges for both families seeking services and providers delivering them - detracting from both families and providers focusing their efforts on what matters most: developing Delaware's children.

Governance Capabilities Identified Through the Landscape Analysis

Delaware's early childhood system includes essential programs, substantial public investment, and a broad network of public and private partners. At the same time, stakeholders described increasing challenges in maintaining alignment, accountability, coordination, and visibility across the system as a whole.

The landscape analysis suggests that Delaware's next phase of work will require stronger capabilities for system stewardship, accountability, measurement, investment alignment, coordination, family and provider experience, continuous improvement, and implementation. These capabilities provide the foundation for evaluating governance options and determining how responsibility for the performance of the system as a whole should be assigned.

Delaware Is Positioned to Act

To strengthen the capabilities identified through landscape analysis, Delaware needs to designate and elevate a home for the work that no single agency owns today: setting shared outcomes, aligning investments, coordinating implementation, monitoring progress, and improving the experience of families and providers. This report recommends that the state should establish an elevated, empowered Early Education leader overseeing a Division of Early Childhood within the Department of Education (DOE), with the authority to carry out the responsibility to coordinate these functions across agencies, programs, and partners.

An elevated position of Early Education and a Division of Early Childhood within DOE best combines stewardship, accountability, cross-system coordination, and implementation feasibility, and it keeps early childhood aligned with the education infrastructure already in place rather than pulling the two apart. This governance structure is needed to signal statewide priority, match the scope of the work, strengthen system accountability, create clear budget ownership, and develop clear operating processes. It builds on the programs, partnerships, and investments Delaware has already made.

This is the decision that comes first. State and local roles, shared measurement, investment alignment, and continuous improvement all depend on having an entity that can set direction, coordinate action, and monitor progress.

Delaware is positioned to act. The state has built strong foundational infrastructure and cross-sector partnerships, and its size lets leaders move faster than larger states can. Delaware has examined and adapted its system before, and stakeholders described renewed alignment around the questions that have to be answered next, even though many of the challenges are not new. There is a shared sense that the time to act is here and the state is increasingly aligned around both the opportunities ahead and the key questions that must be addressed to create a coherent, effective, and sustainable early childhood system.

Part I. Setting the Context

Strong Foundation, Increasing Complexity

Over the past 15 years, Delaware has built the foundational components of a strong early childhood system:

- **2010**: Delaware codified the Interagency Resource Management Committee (IRMC) in Title 14, charging it with building a coordinated early childhood system, and won roughly $50 million through the federal Race to the Top grant.
- **2011**: The state launched tiered reimbursement through Delaware Stars Rating System, paying higher subsidy rates to higher-rated providers.
- **2016**: The Delaware Early Learning Professional Development Committee published its recommendations for strengthening the early childhood workforce and professional development system.
- **2019**: Delaware moved the Office of Child Care Licensing into the Department of Education to better align child care and education oversight.
- **2020**: In response to the pandemic, the federal government provided about $145 million in stabilization funding to Delaware , helping keep more than 500 providers open.
- **2023**: Delaware raised Purchase of Care reimbursement from 70% to 85% of the 75th percentile market rate, and has since expanded the no-copay eligibility threshold to 150% of the federal poverty level.
- **2025**: Delaware stakeholders expanded and revitalized the IRMC through SB 153. The IRMC then
    - Established a shared vision for ECE as a public good
    - Developed shared language across agencies and partners
    - Built cross-agency understanding of Delaware's current ECE system
    - Identified priorities related to governance, funding, quality, and data
- **2026:** Following huge investments in the budget for eligibility, co-pays, and special education, the IRMC is poised to have a shared statewide strategy to achieve its vision of ECE as a public good, along with an implementation plan that details the next steps for the system including the data and accountability infrastructure to define expected outcomes, measure progress, and make evidence-based decisions about how limited resources are directed towards strategies with the greatest impact for children and families.

As programs and services expanded, responsibilities became distributed across multiple agencies, funding streams, contractors, local partners, and implementation entities. New initiatives were often layered onto existing structures, creating additional opportunities and supports while also increasing system complexity.

As Delaware Expanded...	The System Also Became More Complex	Examples
New funding streams	Multiple accountability structures	Early childhood supports are administered across DOE, DHSS, and DSCYF, and funded through multiple federal, state, and local funding streams, each with distinct reporting, compliance, and accountability requirements- inclusive of the data systems used to administer them.
New programs and services	Multiple eligibility pathways for families	A family may apply for Purchase of Care, TANF, SNAP, publicly funded pre-K, home visiting programs, developmental services, home visiting and other supports; each with separate eligibility criteria and applications. There are limited formal processes to identify eligibility for multiple services or connect families across programs or services.
New workforce initiatives	Multiple implementation partners	Workforce supports, including professional development, credentials, technical assistance, and coaching, are delivered through multiple organizations and state partners. As the number of teachers, programs, requirements for credentials, and definitions of quality has changed over time stakeholders described challenges understanding who is responsible for setting strategy, aligning investments, and being accountable for workforce outcomes across the system.
New quality improvement efforts	Multiple measurement approaches	Programs use a variety of approaches to measure and monitor quality and child outcomes including the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework, Teaching Strategies GOLD and other curriculum, licensing requirements, and program specific reporting. As a result, stakeholders described limited visibility into quality and outcomes across settings.
New family supports	Multiple entry points and navigation pathways	Families may access services through Help Me Grow / 211, the Children & Families First care referral line, pediatricians, child care providers, multiple home visiting programs (i.e. Parents as Teachers, Nurse-Family Partnership, Early Head Start), and other community based organizations. Stakeholders described challenges helping families navigate program options where eligibility may be based on income, developmental delays, or other requirements with no guidance or formal processes. There is no formal feedback to know if referrals ultimately result in successful connections to services across programs.

Stakeholders described a patchwork of efforts that have grown over time but were not designed to operate as a single coordinated system.

Today, Delaware's early childhood system includes significant investments across multiple agencies and funding streams. Purchase of Care (POC) alone served more than 12,000 children aged 0-12 per month in FY2025 and represented approximately $126 million in annual expenditures across state and federal funding sources.

The result is a system with substantial assets, infrastructure, and expertise—but also increasing complexity in how investments, programs, and responsibilities interact.

Significant ECE Investment and Continued Efforts to Strengthen Alignment

Over the past decade, Delaware has undertaken numerous strategic planning efforts, governance reviews, workforce studies, funding analyses, legislative initiatives, and stakeholder engagement processes focused on strengthening the state's early childhood system. These efforts have contributed to meaningful progress, including expanded investments, stronger partnerships, quality improvement initiatives, workforce supports, and enhanced services for children and families.

At the same time, many of these efforts identified similar cross-cutting challenges. While the specific recommendations varied, recurring themes consistently included:

- Coordination across agencies and programs
- Alignment of funding, accountability, and decision-making
- Family access and navigation
- Workforce recruitment, retention, and compensation
- Alignment of quality standards and improvement supports
- Cross-system data, measurement, and transparency

Even as Delaware has continued to make progress on delivering for children and families, the persistence of these themes reflects the complexity of building a coordinated early childhood system across multiple programs, funding streams, agencies, and community partners. As Delaware's investments and initiatives have expanded, so too has the complexity of the system itself.

Many stakeholders described Delaware as entering a different phase of system development. Earlier efforts often focused on building programs, expanding access, strengthening quality, and increasing investment. Increasingly, stakeholders described the next challenge is ensuring those investments function together as a coherent system

Several factors make this moment distinct:

- Delaware has established early childhood as a statewide priority through sustained public investment, cross-sector partnerships, and ongoing leadership engagement.
- The Interagency Resource Management Committee (IRMC) has articulated a shared vision for early childhood as a public good.
- State leaders are exploring new approaches to local implementation, family navigation, regional coordination, and business engagement.

- At the same time, these same leaders face increasingly complex decisions regarding governance, funding, accountability, workforce sustainability, and long-term system stewardship.

The central question is not whether the state should invest in early childhood, but how existing investments, responsibilities, and initiatives can be organized to function as a coherent, accountable, and sustainable system alongside that growing investment.

Part II: Key Insights

Key Insight 1: Delaware Has Invested Significantly but Lacks Visibility Into Results

Stakeholders described Delaware as a state that has demonstrated its commitment to children and families by putting real money into early childhood. Across agencies, the state contributes funds for POC, preschool, early intervention, home visiting, developmental screening, workforce supports, quality improvement, and family supports, all aimed at better outcomes for young children and families.

Interviewees described limited visibility into spending by function across agencies and funding streams. While individual programs and agencies may track expenditures for their own purposes, interviewees consistently described challenges understanding how investments collectively support seats, quality improvement, workforce development, family supports, and system infrastructure across the broader early childhood system.

Throughout the information gathering process, the system-level questions were raised as lacking clear answers to the people working within the system every day: how much the state spends on subsidized seats before kindergarten, how much goes to classroom quality, how much supports the workforce, how many children are served across the whole system, and which investments are actually changing outcomes. For example, when asked about the state's earlier investment in the Delaware Stars Rating System, one respondent said no one has "taken the lie detector on what is working," and warned that the state too often keeps funding things that don't work because no one wants to be the one to stop. Responses like these help to illuminate the challenges of Delaware's fragmented system, within which individual leaders or individual funding streams may have specific information, but people working within or across the state's system feel distant from those answers or how to find them.

A few patterns were named repeatedly:

Investments are spread across agencies with no shared early childhood budget. Early childhood dollars sit in several agencies and divisions, without a budget that shows how those dollars are being used for early childhood, inside or across agencies. That makes it near impossible to see the full scale of public investment, spot duplication or gaps, or decide where the next dollar would do the most good. The data problem runs underneath the budget problem. One respondent described having no shared place for data and no view across teams, because "we have to ask departments for permission to see the data." Another respondent pointed to a deeper constraint: when one component of the state's data system is owned by an outside vendor, so even when a team wants to use the state's own data, it often can't.

Delaware cannot track spending by function. Stakeholders described little visibility into how much the state spends on different functions, like subsidized seats, classroom quality, workforce, family supports, or system infrastructure. Stakeholders named questions about large funding streams that support early childhood like TANF, including how those funds contribute to the number of children served and how they could be leveraged to increase access for families

Stakeholders raised questions about how major funding streams contribute to early childhood priorities and outcomes. Several interviewees pointed to TANF as an example, noting that without a clearer understanding of how resources flow through the system that support early childhood and support access, it can be difficult to identify opportunities for improvement, make strategic investment decisions, or understand how different funding streams contribute to statewide goals.

Children are counted by program, not as a system. Delaware tracks seats, services, and participation through individual funding streams. Each program can report on itself, but that makes it hard to answer how many young children are served overall, which children are missed, and where the geographic and demographic gaps are. University researchers studying capacity noted that an unduplicated count of children receiving state-funded support or Purchase of Care is possible only by matching records across systems, and that in the meantime they are left estimating, including a rough estimate that most providers run at about half their licensed capacity.

Quality is hard to assess without a shared definition of it. After the Delaware Stars Rating System ended, stakeholders described challenges understanding quality and outcomes consistently across settings because programs rely on different measures, standards, and reporting structures. One interviewee said Delaware has a hard time defining quality at all: "you can talk to 5 different people and you'll get 5 different definitions," and the decision to drop the rating from the rating system left no agreed yardstick. One stakeholder named the consequence directly: the state moved away from the old quality system, "we are giving this money but there isn't accountability" [to classroom quality or child outcomes]. Quality work continued, but without a shared framework the state cannot say whether its quality dollars are changing children's experiences.

Some investments can be counted but not yet evaluated. There are examples of places where Delaware has made investment that it can document, but there are mixed reactions on the value of the investment and the data collection to demonstrate value isn't yet established. The state's decision to focus on CDA attainment is one example: Delaware has elected to invest substantially in CDA credentials and built a strong process that leads to increased attainment: one interviewee described a roughly $26 million pool of quality awards, a $1,000 bonus for completing a CDA, and a goal of moving from about 7 percent of the workforce holding a CDA to 50 percent by 2031. However, that state investment is not yet matched with an evaluation of how workforce investments connect to broader quality, workforce, and child outcomes. Without that evidence base, confidence in the value of this investment is mixed: while the workforce hub reports a 300 percent return on CDA credentials, others in the field are more blunt with their concerns that the "CDA requirement isn't improving quality in the classroom" and that experienced educators are often just going through the motions. While Delaware can count the CDA's attained through the investment, the mixed reaction in the field paired with the lack of measurable outcomes may have the impact of undermining confidence in the system.

When programs end or change, Delaware learns little from what happened. Stakeholders described almost no systemwide capacity to assess what should continue, stop, or change when major initiatives shift. Interviewees cited as an example of this their concerns that, aAs the state moved on from Delaware Stars Rating System and as COVID-era stabilization funds ended, no one captured clearly what had worked and what had not. One interviewee described the result as motion without movement: "nothing has actually moved, they have done a lot of starting and stopping," and multiple people suggested that the field keeps talking about the same things year after year. Respondents shared concerns about a system that wasn't transparent in what it was learning and how it applied to the next initiative (e.g., people don't wait long enough to see outcomes before switching to the next thing), and questions about whether investments were progressing the system and what it could deliver in child outcomes (e.g., more than half a million dollars a year invested over a decade with a lack of access to measurement that showed if kindergarten readiness improved).

Currently, policymakers lack the information they need about how money is spent, what is working, and where a new dollar would matter most. The work ahead is to make the spending legible: a single early childhood budget, spending organized by function, program data pulled into a system-level view, a definition of quality the state can measure across settings, and a line drawn from dollars to outcomes. That visibility would help Delaware account for what it already spends, and make the case for what comes next.

Key Insight 2: Coordination Frequently Relies on Relationships Rather Than Structures

Stakeholders described Delaware's early childhood system as collaborative and built on strong working relationships. Those relationships are one of the system's real assets and let people move quickly, fill gaps, and keep services running across agencies and programs.

But the same stakeholders described coordination that depends too often on who knows whom, who has been in the field long enough to remember how things work, and who is willing to step outside their formal role to solve a problem. When those relationships hold, the system can look more coordinated than it is. When a relationship breaks down, when someone leaves, or when a cross-agency problem needs a final decision, the missing structure becomes visible.

In the landscape analysis, several patterns came up repeatedly:

Cross-agency work runs on informal coordination. Stakeholders described providers frequently seeking guidance from trusted individuals rather than navigating through a defined pathway. Interviewees shared that providers may contact state staff, technical assistance providers, intermediary organizations, or community partners they already know, who then help connect them to the appropriate resources, programs, or agencies. While stakeholders viewed this support as valuable, they also noted that access to information and assistance can depend on knowing who to call rather than following a consistently defined process - and that this work required time and effort not typically accounted for in their job descriptions.

Stakeholders emphasized that this dynamic can persist even when formal structures exist. One example raised in detail was Early childhood mental health consultation, which operates across DHSS, DOE, and DSCYF, with funding split between CCDF quality dollars and state funds. DOE now administers most quality dollars, but the mental health consultant funding stayed at DHSS, so the work is sustained through an MOU with DSCYF. This arrangement was described as "a perfect example of why maybe it made sense a long time ago, but not anymore." because of the level of staff effort required to deliver ("jumping through a ton of hoops that still exist and are currently impeding work instead of helping it.").

This example is included because it illustrates that coordination challenges persist even when formal agreements and partnerships are in place, and those challenges can threaten the continued coordination over time. The initiative continues to function because individuals across agencies recognize the value of braiding funding to increase access to this important service, and are figuring out how to take on the additional coordination required. However, as government leaders know, arrangements that rely heavily on individual effort can become vulnerable to staff turnover, leadership changes, and shifting priorities.

Several stakeholders also noted that effective coordination depends on consistent communication and information sharing across organizations. Interviewees described situations where partners learned about decisions, changes, or developments after the fact and felt surprised by information that affected their work. Stakeholders noted that these situations could strain relationships and make coordination more difficult. As a result, many emphasized the importance of establishing processes that support consistent communication, transparency, and shared understanding across agencies and partners.

Overall, interviewees described a system where coordination is frequently achieved through individual effort that supplements existing structures. As Delaware's early childhood system grows more complex, stakeholders increasingly raised questions about whether this approach can be sustained or scaled, and how coordination can be embedded more consistently into structures, processes, and accountability mechanisms that are sustainable over time.

When relationships can't resolve an issue, there is often no clear decision-maker. Stakeholders described cross-agency work stalling when no single person or office holds the authority to assign responsibility, approve a change, or settle a conflict. One stakeholder described moving a decision up her own agency's chain only to watch it stall, because no counterpart in the other agency had the authority, or the obligation, to act on the other side. Staff often know exactly whom to call. What they lack is a defined path for elevating a barrier and getting a decision.

Families and providers face many front doors and no single pathway. No one entity is responsible for helping a family or provider move through the full range of early childhood services, eligibility rules, and follow-up steps. One agency leader summed up the family experience plainly: "from a family's perspective it should feel seamless... right now it is not, it is duplicative and there are so many touch points they have to go through to get what they need." When a referral is made, agencies often cannot see whether the family ever connected to the service. A community partner who helps families with developmental screening described pediatricians referring families and later learning the families never received services, because "there's no systemic way that the loops are closed."

Institutional knowledge lives in people, not systems. Stakeholders named staffing and leadership turnover as a direct risk. When experienced people leave, what they know about how funding streams interact, how decisions actually get made, and whom to call leaves with them. One stakeholder described the cost of recent turnover at DHSS: "everyone in DHSS is new... the historic information [of how to run the program] got lost." One interviewee noted that the relationships work now, but the people holding them will not always be in their seats, and the state has no structure that would preserve those connections once they move on.

These examples connect back to a consistent theme: while the relationships in Delaware let committed people solve problems, they aren't a substitute for organizational rhythms, clear ownership, and decision rights that survive a staffing change. The work ahead is to build that structure underneath the relationships, so coordination is woven into the work and holds up even when the people in the seats change.

Key Insight 3: System Complexity Results in Complexity for Families and Providers

Stakeholders described Delaware's early childhood system as a collection of programs, funding streams, and supports that each do something useful on their own. Together, they are meant to improve children's development, help families find care, support providers, and increase quality. But because they sit across different agencies, with their own eligibility rules, applications, timelines, data systems, and paperwork, the experience can feel fragmented to the people the system is built for.

For families and providers, that fragmentation shows up as time, paperwork, uncertainty, and repeated explanations. A family has to work out which program applies to them, which office to call, what documents they need, and what happens after a referral. A provider has to manage requirements, portals, and deadlines across several state and local systems while also staffing classrooms and keeping a business open.

A few patterns came up repeatedly:

Families face many front doors and not always a clear way through. Depending on a child's age and needs, a family may interact with child care subsidy, developmental screening, early intervention, home visiting, behavioral health, preschool special education, public pre-K, state-funded early care and education, social services, or community-based supports. Each has its own rules, referral process, and timeline. The state sees distinct programs with distinct purposes. The family sees one complicated system and has to figure out where to start and how to keep moving. One stakeholder put it plainly: "[In Delaware], we are great at building programs, but not so much at explaining them." They described needing time to work out the interplay between Purchase of Care and ECAP eligibility, and said it was easy to imagine a family without that background giving up half way through. One community-based stakeholder who helps families with screening made the same point about home visiting, asking where the simple chart is that tells a family whether they even qualify, and noting that when eligibility takes multiple steps to figure out, families stop trying.

Referrals do not always produce a connected experience. Families get referred from one program to another, but the system often has no consistent way to know whether the family ever connected, what got in the way, or whether the original need was met. That leaves families to follow up, retell their story, and find the next step on their own. It also limits the state's ability to see where families get stuck. Where the loop does close, it works: one interviewee described a home visiting referral process where a call specialist now reaches out to finish enrollment for the family, which "makes it a real referral" and takes the burden off the family. That model is the exception, not the rule.

When pathways are unclear, providers become the navigators. Providers and community partners routinely help families read paperwork, answer eligibility questions, and connect to other services, even when nothing in their role asks them to. One stakeholder who works directly with families described a community organization that will take a phone call, ask where a family lives and what care they need, and work to connect them, then added: "I don't think a lot of families know about this." Useful supports exist, but families often can't find them, so the people closest to families end up absorbing the work, on top of staffing shortages, classroom needs, and financial pressure.

Providers also have to get through the administrative system themselves. Opening or running a program may include dealing with licensing, background checks, fire marshal requirements, Purchase of Care, quality improvement, workforce supports, grants, training systems, and local rules, each in a different office, on a different timeline. Licensing specialists walked through what it takes to open a single family child care home: a few hundred dollars for zoning, a fire extinguisher on every floor, a fire marshal inspection, a business license, and insurance, adding up to close to a thousand dollars and a two-to-three-month wait before a provider can open. Smaller and family-based providers feel this most, since they have the least administrative capacity to chase funding, join quality efforts, and stay in compliance.

New investments can add help without removing complexity. Stakeholders welcomed new funding, but several pointed out that new programs often layer onto the existing system rather than simplifying it. As one interviewee put it, "every time there's a new investment, there's a new hoop to jump through." When each new program arrives with its own application, report, contact, and eligibility rule, the state can add real resources and still leave the system harder to get through than before.

This is not only an administrative problem: Families with more time, language access, technology, or personal connections can usually work the system; families with fewer resources are the ones who miss supports they qualify for. One stakeholder described what that looks like from the inside: "people don't have the money or time to figure it out," and even when you know what your kids need, "sometimes I can't even do better." The same gap shows up for providers, where the programs with the most administrative capacity capture the most support and the smallest providers fall behind.

Why Delaware Is Positioned for Its Next Phase of Work

The findings described throughout this report identify opportunities to strengthen alignment, coordination, and system performance across Delaware's early childhood system. At the same time, stakeholders consistently emphasized that Delaware enters this work from a position of considerable strength. Rather than building a system from scratch, Delaware has already established many of the foundational components, relationships, and capacities needed to support its next phase of development. Stakeholders shared existing assets that Delaware should leverage moving forward.

Existing Infrastructure

Delaware has already built many of the core functions associated with a strong early childhood system. Stakeholders pointed to Purchase of Care, Delaware Stars Rating System, developmental screening and referral initiatives, workforce development efforts, family support services, publicly funded early learning programs, and early childhood mental health supports as examples of existing infrastructure that can serve as a foundation for future improvements. While stakeholders identified opportunities to strengthen coordination and alignment, few described a need to create entirely new systems or functions.

Cross-Sector Leadership

Stakeholders consistently described Delaware's ability to bring together leaders from state agencies, providers, advocacy organizations, philanthropy, business leaders, community organizations, and intermediary partners around shared priorities. Many pointed to the IRMC process itself as evidence of Delaware's capacity to convene diverse stakeholders, examine complex challenges, and engage in collaborative problem-solving across traditional organizational boundaries.

Delaware's Scale

Stakeholders consistently described Delaware's size as a strategic advantage. Compared with larger states, leaders are often more accessible, relationships can be built across agencies and organizations more easily, and new approaches can be tested and refined more quickly. While Delaware's size does not eliminate complexity, stakeholders consistently viewed it as an asset that makes alignment and coordination more achievable.

Shared Vision

Stakeholders described increasing alignment around several core goals, including improving outcomes for children, supporting families, strengthening providers, and ensuring that public investments contribute to shared results. The IRMC's work has helped create a common framework for discussing these issues and has encouraged stakeholders to examine the early childhood system through a broader systems lens rather than through the perspective of individual programs or agencies.

Continuous Improvement

Delaware has a long history of examining and strengthening its early childhood system. Stakeholders pointed to governance reviews, strategic planning efforts, workforce studies, funding analyses, and cross-sector initiatives as evidence of a system that regularly reflects on its performance and seeks opportunities for improvement. The findings described throughout this report build upon, rather than replace, years of previous work and learning.

Part III: System Implications

Delaware has built many of the components of a strong early childhood system. The next phase of work is ensuring those components operate together as a coherent system.

Across all three key insights, stakeholders described challenges related to visibility, coordination, and user experience. While these challenges appeared in different forms, interviewees frequently connected them to a common pattern: many parts of the system operate effectively on their own, but insufficient structures exist to help those parts function together as a coherent whole.

Stakeholders consistently described important programs, substantial investments, numerous programs and initiatives, and responsibilities distributed across agencies, funding streams, and partners throughout Delaware's early childhood system. The challenges identified in this report emerged most often at the system level, rather than the staffing level - and specifically, at the points where programs, funding streams, agencies, and responsibilities intersect.

What the Findings Suggest

Over the past fifteen years, the state has focused on building programs, expanding services, increasing investments, strengthening workforce supports, improving quality, and expanding access for children and families. The findings suggest that future progress increasingly depends on Delaware's ability to align and connect existing efforts.

Across interviews, stakeholders consistently identified challenges related to visibility, coordination, accountability, and user experience. While these challenges appeared in different forms, they frequently emerged at the points where programs, funding streams, agencies, and responsibilities intersect. As a result, many stakeholders expressed a desire to move beyond understanding the performance of individual programs and toward understanding the performance of the system as a whole.

Taken together, the findings suggest opportunities to strengthen the structures, processes, and capacities that help existing investments, responsibilities, and partnerships operate as a coherent system capable of advancing Delaware's vision for children, families, providers, and communities.

Capabilities Required for a Coherent Early Childhood System

The landscape analysis suggests that Delaware's next phase of work will require more than individual program improvements. Across interviews, document review, and stakeholder engagement, a common set of system capabilities emerged as necessary to support a more coherent, accountable, and outcomes-focused early childhood system. Regardless of governance structure, these capabilities are critical to achieving Delaware's vision for children, families, providers, and communities.

Capability Required	Landscape Analysis Finding	Questions for Consideration
System Stewardship and Accountability	No single entity is consistently accountable for the performance of the system as a whole.	Who should be responsible for stewarding the system and ensuring progress toward shared goals?
Shared Outcomes, Measurement, and Learning	Leaders have limited visibility into how investments, services, and outcomes connect across the broader system.	How should Delaware define success, measure progress, and use information to improve results?
Strategic Investment Alignment	Investments are distributed across multiple agencies, programs, and funding streams with limited mechanisms for aligning resources toward shared priorities.	How should resources be prioritized and aligned to support shared outcomes?
Cross-System Coordination and Implementation	Coordination often relies on relationships, informal processes, and individual effort rather than formal structures and accountability mechanisms.	What structures and processes are needed to coordinate decisions and implementation across agencies and partners?
State-Local Partnership & Implementation	Achieving statewide goals requires translating shared priorities into effective implementation across diverse communities, providers, and partners.	How should Delaware balance statewide priorities with local flexibility and implementation?
Improve Family & Provider Experience	Families and providers experience the system through multiple entry points, requirements, and processes that are not consistently designed as a coordinated pathway.	What should a coordinated early childhood system feel like for families and providers?
Continuous Improvement & Learning	Sustaining progress requires mechanisms to assess performance, learn from implementation, and adapt over time.	What structures are needed to help the system learn, improve, and adapt over time?
Implementation Feasibility	Governance changes must be practical, sustainable, and achievable within Delaware's political, fiscal, operational, and administrative context.	What approach can realistically be implemented and sustained in Delaware?

These findings point to several capabilities that will be important regardless of governance structure.

System Stewardship and Accountability

Stakeholders repeatedly described uncertainty about who is responsible for the performance of the early childhood system as a whole. While programs, grants, contracts, and regulatory functions generally have clear ownership, stakeholders identified fewer mechanisms for addressing issues that span agencies, funding streams, and initiatives. Stakeholders frequently distinguish between accountability for individual programs and accountability for the performance of the early childhood system and its ability to deliver for children under 5.

Shared Outcomes, Measurement, and Learning

Stakeholders consistently described difficulty understanding whether investments in access, quality, infrastructure, and services are collectively producing desired outcomes for children, families, providers, and communities. A coherent system requires the ability to define shared outcomes, measure progress, assess effectiveness, identify emerging needs, and use information to support continuous improvement and future decision-making.

Strategic Investment Alignment

Early childhood investments flow through multiple agencies, funding streams, initiatives, and implementation partners. Stakeholders repeatedly raised questions about how resources align to priorities, how tradeoffs should be assessed, and whether investments collectively support desired outcomes. In a fragmented system, differing policies, regulations, and priorities can make it challenging to reconcile funding and ensure that every dollar is spent effectively and efficiently towards the system's goals. A coherent system requires the ability to understand investments across the broader system, strategically maneuver funds and their requirements together, and align resources toward shared goals.

Cross-System Coordination and Implementation

Stakeholders consistently described Delaware's collaborative culture as a strength, but noted that coordination often depends on relationships, institutional knowledge, and individual effort. A coherent system requires durable structures and processes that support coordination, clarify responsibilities, preserve institutional knowledge, and translate shared priorities into action over time.

State Local Partnership and Implementation

Delaware's early childhood system depends on implementation across a diverse network of providers, schools, community organizations, health systems, and local partners. While statewide goals, funding, and policy direction are often established at the state level, implementation responsibility is distributed across many organizations and communities. As a result, achieving consistent outcomes requires mechanisms to align statewide priorities with local implementation while allowing sufficient flexibility to respond to community needs and circumstances. A coherent system requires the ability to establish clear expectations, support implementation, and maintain accountability across state and local partners.

Improve Family and Provider Experience

Families and providers experience Delaware's early childhood system as a single journey, even though programs, requirements, and services are administered separately. Throughout the landscape analysis, stakeholders described challenges navigating multiple entry points, eligibility requirements, reporting systems, and service delivery structures. Stakeholders consistently emphasized the importance of reducing administrative burden, improving navigation, coordinating services, and designing systems around the experience of the people they are intended to serve. As one stakeholder noted, "Families don't even understand if they qualify or not. If they have to figure out multiple steps, it deters families from going through the process."

Continuous Improvement and Learning

Improving outcomes over time requires the ability to monitor performance, learn from implementation, and adapt strategies based on results. While Delaware has made significant investments in programs and system-building efforts, stakeholders identified opportunities to more consistently use information about performance and outcomes to guide decision-making and improvement.

Implementation Feasibility

Governance changes must be achievable within Delaware's political, fiscal, operational, and administrative context. Successful implementation will require building on existing strengths, infrastructure, relationships, and capacity while balancing long-term goals with practical considerations related to transition and sustainability.

Part IV. Governance Options for Delaware

The landscape analysis identified governance functions that Delaware's early childhood system will need to perform effectively in its next phase of work. National governance research suggests that no single governance structure is universally effective. Rather, states organize these functions in different ways depending on their goals, existing systems, political context, and implementation considerations. As a result, governance decisions are often less about selecting the "right" organizational chart and more about determining how responsibility for key system functions will be assigned, supported, and held accountable over time.

Further, governance decisions involve both organizational structure and leadership authority. A standalone agency does not inherently require cabinet-level leadership, just as elevated leadership can exist without creating a standalone agency.

Drawing on national governance frameworks, including *Getting There From Here* and other state governance analyses, four common approaches emerge for consideration. These approaches represent a continuum from coordination-based models that rely primarily on collaboration and influence to models that align authority, accountability, and implementation within a single entity.

The governance approaches presented here should be understood as different ways of assigning responsibility for system functions rather than different visions for Delaware's early childhood system.

Cross-agency Coordination

A governance approach in which early childhood programs, funding streams, and authority remain within existing agencies while coordination occurs through interagency councils, committees, coordinating offices, or other formal collaboration mechanisms.

This approach can strengthen communication, planning, and alignment across agencies while minimizing organizational disruption. However, coordination models often rely on relationships and voluntary collaboration, which can make it difficult to establish clear accountability for system-wide outcomes, align investments, or sustain change over time.

Cross -agency Coordination with Executive Leadership

A governance approach in which early childhood programs and authority remain within existing agencies, but an elevated leader or office provides statewide leadership, convening authority, and accountability for advancing shared priorities.

This approach can elevate early childhood as a statewide priority, strengthen visibility, and create clearer ownership of system stewardship functions. However, programs, funding streams, and operational authority typically remain distributed across agencies, requiring ongoing collaboration and influence to drive implementation.

Consolidated Lead Agency

A governance approach in which a designated department, division, or agency is assigned primary responsibility for system stewardship, accountability, planning, and coordination.

This approach can strengthen alignment between system stewardship and operational responsibility while building on existing infrastructure and administrative systems. Success depends on the authority granted to the lead entity and its ability to coordinate effectively with agencies and partners that continue to play significant roles in the system.

Standalone Agency

A governance approach in which major early childhood functions, funding streams, and authority are organized within a standalone agency with dedicated leadership and accountability.

This approach can provide the strongest alignment between authority, accountability, budgeting, implementation, and outcomes. However, it typically requires the greatest degree of organizational change and may involve substantial long-term transition planning, implementation effort, and ongoing administrative considerations.

Delaware Governance Tradeoffs

Governance Approach	Primary Mechanism	Potential Advantages	Potential Considerations
Cross-Agency Collaboration	Collaboration and voluntary alignment across agencies	Builds on existing relationships and structures; minimizes organizational change; easier to implement.	Accountability remains distributed; coordination depends on relationships and voluntary cooperation; limited ability to align investments or drive system-wide decisions.
Cross-Agency Coordination with Executive Leadership	Collaboration supported by elevated leadership and convening authority	Elevates early childhood as a statewide priority; creates visible leadership and accountability; strengthens strategy while preserving existing agency roles.	Operational authority remains distributed; success depends on the authority granted to the leadership position and agencies' willingness to align efforts under an external leader.
Consolidated Lead Agency	Consolidated oversight and accountability within a designated lead entity, with shared authority.	Creates clearer ownership of system stewardship, accountability, planning, and implementation; aligns leadership with operational responsibility; builds on existing infrastructure.	Shared functions and authority with a partner agency, requiring ongoing cross-agency coordination and formal partnership mechanisms.
Standalone Agency	Consolidated authority, accountability, budgeting, and implementation within a single entity	Provides the strongest alignment between authority, accountability, budgeting, implementation, and outcomes; creates a single entity responsible for system performance.	Requires the greatest degree of organizational change; implementation may be more complex and resource-intensive; transition planning would be critical, and some funding or function may not be able to transfer.

While these approaches differ in structure, each seeks to address the same underlying challenge: ensuring that responsibility for stewarding the performance of the early childhood system as a whole is clearly assigned and supported over time. No governance structure eliminates the need for collaboration. Regardless of approach, Delaware will continue to rely on partnerships among state agencies, providers, schools, local leaders, community organizations, business partners, and philanthropy. The key distinction between approaches is how responsibility for system stewardship, accountability, and decision-making is assigned.

Of note, even under highly consolidated governance structures, certain programs and funding streams may remain subject to federal statutory and administrative requirements. For example, IDEA Part B responsibilities remain assigned to the State Educational Agency, which may affect the extent to which some functions can be consolidated organizationally. As a result, ratings reflect the degree to which a governance structure supports investment alignment and accountability rather than the ability to fully consolidate all funding streams.

The capabilities below were derived from recurring themes identified through stakeholder interviews, document review, landscape analysis, and national governance research.

Government Capability	Cross-agency Coordination	Cross -agency Coordination with Executive Leadership	Consolidated Lead Agency	Standalone Agency
Overview	Individual agencies have high authority, but limited collective impact.	Strategy and authority sits outside program administration, increasing strategy and measurement but reducing collaboration	Shared system stewardship with an elevated leader and authority to drive change	Increased autonomy and authority, but limited influence on funding that cannot consolidate
System Stewardship & Accountability	Low	Medium	High	High
Shared Outcomes, Measurement & Learning	Low	Medium	High	High
Strategic Investment Alignment	Low	Medium	High	Medium
Cross-System Coordination & Implementation	Medium	Medium	High	High
State-Local Partnership & Implementation	Medium	Medium	High	High
Improve Family & Provider Experience	Low	Medium	Medium	High
Continuous Improvement & Learning	Low	Medium	High	High
Implementation Feasibility	High	Medium	Medium	Low

Rationale for Ratings

Capability	High	Medium	Low
System Stewardship & Accountability	Clear ownership for system performance	Shared or indirect accountability	No clear system owner
Shared Outcomes, Measurement & Learning	Can establish and monitor shared outcomes across programs	Can influence measurement and reporting	Limited ability to establish common accountability
Strategic Investment Alignment	Can align investments and budgeting across priorities and funding streams through clear accountability and decision-making authority	Can influence investment decisions and promote alignment but does not control all funding decisions	Limited ability to influence funding decisions across programs and agencies
Cross-System Coordination & Decision-Making	Formal authority to coordinate and resolve issues	Coordination relies on influence and relationships	Coordination largely voluntary
State-Local Partnership & Implementation	Can establish consistent statewide expectations across systems while supporting local implementation	Can influence alignment across agencies and local partners but relies on collaboration and voluntary coordination	Limited ability to align implementation across agencies, programs, and partners
Improve Family & Provider Experience	Clear authority and accountability for improving family and provider experience across programs, agencies, and systems	Can influence improvements across programs and agencies but relies on collaboration and shared accountability	Responsibility for family and provider experience remains fragmented across programs, agencies, and systems
Continuous Improvement & Learning	Can monitor performance and drive system improvement	Can encourage learning and adaptation	Limited authority to drive change
Implementation Feasibility	Can be implemented with relatively limited organizational change	Requires moderate structural change	Requires significant reorganization and transition effort

Delaware Context:

Certain early childhood programs remain subject to federal statutory and administrative requirements that may affect how authority, accountability, and funding can be organized. As a result, governance structures should be evaluated based on their ability to align decision-making, accountability, and investments rather than their ability to consolidate every program or funding stream.

Delaware has a shared understanding that governance structure alone will not determine outcomes for children, families, or providers. Success will also depend on effective state-local partnerships, aligned investments, coordinated implementation, and the ability to measure progress and improve over time. Ratings reflect the extent to which each governance approach inherently supports these functions.

Recommended Direction

Establish Clear System Stewardship Through an Elevated Early Childhood Leader

Delaware's next phase of early childhood system development will require stronger capacity for system stewardship, accountability, coordination, and continuous improvement.

The landscape analysis focused on how Delaware's early childhood system functions across agencies, programs, funding streams, and partners. The challenges identified in this report emerged most often at the points where responsibilities, funding streams, and decision-making authority intersect. As a result, the recommendation reflects the need for a clearly accountable entity responsible for stewarding the performance of the system as a whole.

Based on the capabilities identified through the landscape analysis, Delaware should establish an elevated, empowered leader of Early Education overseeing a Division of Early Childhood within the Department of Education to serve as the primary entity responsible for system stewardship, accountability, strategic alignment, and continuous improvement across the state's early childhood system.

Why the Department of Education?

The recommendation is grounded first in the capabilities Delaware needs to strengthen and only second in the organizational home selected to support those capabilities.

The landscape analysis identified a need for clearer system stewardship, accountability, strategic investment alignment, cross-system coordination, performance measurement, and continuous improvement. The governance analysis suggests that these capabilities are most effectively supported through a consolidated lead agency model that combines operational responsibility with clear accountability for system performance.

Within Delaware's current landscape, the Department of Education represents the most practical and feasible home for this role. Delaware already relies on the Department to support children as they transition from early childhood into the public PK-12 system. In addition, IDEA Part B preschool special education services will remain within the Department of Education regardless of future governance decisions. Because key early childhood responsibilities will continue to reside within DOE, locating system stewardship there creates stronger continuity across the years before and after school entry while building on existing infrastructure and administrative capacity.

Locating system stewardship within the Department of Education recognizes that early childhood and public PK-12 are part of a broader developmental and educational continuum. It creates stronger opportunities to align expectations, planning, data, investments, and outcomes across the years immediately before and after school entry, while building on existing infrastructure and administrative capacity.

Importantly, this recommendation does not assume that all early childhood programs, funding streams, or responsibilities should be consolidated within a single agency. Many functions could continue to require strong partnerships across agencies, including health, family support, child care assistance, licensing, workforce development, and other services. Rather, the recommendation reflects the need for a clearly accountable entity responsible for stewarding the performance of the early childhood system as a whole while maintaining strong cross-agency partnerships.

Why an Elevated, Empowered Leader?

An elevated, empowered leader of the state's unified early childhood system is needed to:

- **Signal statewide priority.** An elevated, empowered leader would signal to families, providers, agencies, and policymakers that early childhood as a public good is a statewide priority that has visible, accountable leadership.
- **Match the scope of the work and strengthen system accountability.** Early childhood spans education, health, family support, workforce, licensing, and child care funding, requiring a leader with the authority to coordinate across agencies. An elevated leader would be accountable for progress towards statewide goals and hold responsibility for ensuring investments, implementation efforts, and outcomes are coherent.
- **Create clear budget ownership.** This leader should be responsible for building and presenting a comprehensive early childhood budget to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the Joint Finance Committee (JFC), and other state leaders, showing how investments align across programs and funding streams.
- **Establish clear operating processes.** This leader would be responsible for creating formal processes for cross-agency coordination, decision making, issue resolution and reducing reliance on informal relationships to ensure systems are sustainable.

This approach builds on Delaware's existing programs, partnerships, and investments while creating a clearly accountable home for functions that stakeholders consistently identified as critical to long-term system performance, including setting direction, aligning investments, coordinating implementation, monitoring progress, supporting state-local partnerships, improving family and provider experience, and driving continuous improvement. The recommended structure would provide clear responsibility for stewarding the system as a whole while maintaining strong partnerships with agencies, providers, community organizations, philanthropy, business leaders, and other stakeholders.

The analysis also suggests that establishing clear system stewardship is a prerequisite for many of the decisions Delaware must make in its next phase of work. Questions related to state and local roles, performance measurement, strategic investment alignment, family and provider experience, and continuous improvement all require an entity capable of convening partners, setting direction, monitoring progress, and sustaining accountability over time.

Delaware has ambitious goals for kids, families, providers, and communities. Establishing clear accountability for system stewardship is an important step toward ensuring the state's existing investments, programs, and partnerships can operate together as a coherent system capable of achieving those goals.

It is important to note that to achieve Delaware's vision of ECE as a public good will take substantial time and investment. As part of finalizing the report, there will be an implementation guide that supports decision makers through considerations for enacting these recommendations.

Future Decisions for System Stewardship

The landscape analysis identified several areas where stakeholders consistently described a need for greater clarity, alignment, and decision-making. Many of these decisions depend on establishing clear system stewardship and accountability.

Transitioning to a new governance structure would require a process, and would raise important questions about funding, staff positions, technology, inter-agency connections, and more in order to successfully deliver on its promise. Once a governance structure is established, Delaware will be better positioned to address questions such as:

State and Local Roles

How should responsibilities be shared between state agencies, regional entities, local communities, and implementation partners?

Shared Outcomes and Measurement

What outcomes should Delaware use to assess system performance, and how should progress be measured over time?

Strategic Investment Alignment

How should existing and future investments be aligned to support shared goals and priorities?

Family and Provider Experience

What changes would most improve access, navigation, and administrative simplicity for families and providers?

Continuous Improvement

How should Delaware monitor results, learn from implementation, and adjust strategies over time?

Appendix A

Landscape Analysis Methodology

This landscape analysis used a mixed-methods approach designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of Delaware's early childhood education (ECE) system. The work combined document review, stakeholder engagement, systems mapping, and qualitative analysis to examine how governance, funding, quality, data, and local implementation structures interact across the state. The goal was not only to document existing programs and initiatives, but also to understand how the broader system functions in practice and where opportunities exist to strengthen alignment and coherence.

The analysis began with an extensive review of existing reports, strategic plans, needs assessments, funding analyses, and prior early childhood studies. Particular attention was given to materials developed through the PDG B-5, prior statewide planning efforts, Delaware strategic vision documents, governance reports, and agency materials. Additional documents included funding analyses, family and provider reports, workforce studies, quality improvement efforts, and national literature related to early childhood governance, systems building, and implementation. Together, these materials provided historical context and helped identify recurring themes, existing infrastructure, prior recommendations, and areas requiring deeper exploration.

Stakeholder engagement served as a central component of the analysis. Over 45 individual and joint interviews and stakeholder conversations were conducted between March and May 2026 and reflected broad representation across the state. Individuals from all three Delaware counties participated, representing the full spectrum of early childhood and out-of-school-time care. Participants included representatives from child care centers, family child care homes, before- and after-school programs, summer providers, Head Start, state-funded programs, advocacy organizations, higher education institutions, local implementation partners, community organizations, and state agencies.

Stakeholder interviews included perspectives from organizations and departments spanning education, health, family support, child care, workforce, and community systems. Participants represented entities, including but not limited to, the Department of Education, Department of Health and Social Services, Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families, Office of Early Childhood Intervention, Office of Early Learning, child care licensing, Delaware's Quality Improvement System (QIS), Purchase of Care (POC), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) administration, Head Start and the Head Start Collaboration Office, IDEA Part B representatives, Delaware Readiness Teams, Delaware State University (DSU) Early Childhood Innovation Center, Children & Families First, Delaware Institute for Excellent in Early Child (DIEEC), community organizations, advocacy groups, and local implementation partners. The engagement process intentionally sought perspectives across different roles, system levels, and service settings to understand both statewide structures and local implementation realities.

Interviews followed a semi-structured approach designed to capture experiences related to governance, coordination, funding, family navigation, quality systems, workforce, data infrastructure, and local implementation. Discussions explored not only how individual programs functioned, but also how programs interacted with one another and fit within the broader early childhood system. Particular emphasis was placed on understanding family experiences, coordination mechanisms, system strengths, and areas where fragmentation creates barriers.

In addition to interviews and document review, the analysis included mapping of governance structures, funding streams, programs, and implementation infrastructure. This included reviewing agency roles, examining funding pathways, documenting quality and accountability systems, and identifying existing coordination mechanisms operating at both state and local levels. The analysis also incorporated review of available data systems and public reporting structures to understand how information currently supports decision-making and accountability.

Findings from these sources were synthesized to develop a comprehensive picture of Delaware's early childhood landscape. Rather than evaluating individual programs in isolation, the analysis focused on the broader system: how programs, agencies, funding streams, and initiatives connect; where alignment already exists; and where opportunities remain to strengthen coherence in support of Delaware's long-term early childhood vision.

Appendix B

Stakeholder Engagement Summary

PDG Governance and Finance project team has interviewed and met with a wide range of stakeholders through individual interviews and multiple group engagements.

1. Landscape Analysis Interview List

- **Interview Dates:** March 19 - Present
- **Interviewees included representatives from the following organizations and departments:**
  - Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
  - Children & Families First
  - Delaware Educator Data System (DEEDS)
  - Delaware After School Network
  - Delaware Association for the Education of Young Children (DEAEYC)
  - Delaware Early Childhood Council (DECC)
  - Delaware Department of Education
  - Delaware Head Start Association
  - Delaware General Assembly
  - Delaware Readiness Teams
  - Delaware State University Early Childhood Innovation Center (DSU ECIC)
  - Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS)
  - University of Delaware, Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood (DIEEC)
  - Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families (DSCYF)
  - Early childhood advocates and organizations
  - Former state government employees
  - Head Start leaders
  - IDEA Part B representatives
  - National Center for Children in Poverty
  - Office of Child Care Licensing (OCCL)
  - Office of Early Childhood Intervention (OECI)
  - Office of Early Learning (OEL)
  - Office of Management and Budget (OMB)
  - Office of the Controller General
  - Purchase of Care (POC)
  - Rodel
  - State Board of Education
  - State-funded early care and education programs
  - TANF administration and coaching staff
  - TAPP Network
  - Unite Us
  - United Way
  - University of Delaware (SPARQ Project Team)

2. Engagement Activities

Key stakeholder groups that the project team engaged with included:

- Legislators from the Delaware Senate and House of Representatives
- Leaders from the Delaware business community, including
  - Delaware State Chamber of Commerce
  - New Castle County Chamber of Commerce
  - Black Chamber of Commerce
  - Kent Sussex Alliance
  - Milford Chamber of Commerce
  - Central Chamber of Commerce
  - Bethany-Fenwick Area Chamber of Commerce
  - Sussex Economic Development Action Committee
  - Delaware Business Roundtable
  - Vision Coalition
- State and national advocacy groups
- State and national research organizations

These stakeholders were brought together for group engagements, including:

Meeting	Outcome
Legislative IRMC Advisory Group (4/14)	• Provided feedback for legislative initiatives • Shared a one-pager for legislators on IRMC work
Kids Caucus (5/21)	• Previewed early insights of governance and financial landscape analysis
Business IRMC Advisory Group (5/27)	• Built understanding of national and Delaware ECE landscape
House Majority Caucus (6/9)	• Previewed key insights governance and financial landscape analysis • Built understanding of ECE governance structure options

Stakeholders also requested fiscal and budget information from B-5 Accountability Committee ECE teams and will continue to source these materials to ensure the final report includes an analysis of that fiscal information.

Appendix C

Document Review Summary

A range of previous reports and recommendations were also reviewed and incorporated into the Landscape Analysis, including:

- 2010- Consolidating Early Childhood Services: An Analysis Of States' Experiences
- 2016- Advancing Our Profession: Delaware's Early Learning Professional Development Committee Final Report
- 2019 PDG B-5 Needs Assessment, and accompanying materials:
    - Delaware PDG B-5 Consolidated Needs Assessment
    - Delaware PDG B-5 Cost of Quality Executive Summary
    - Delaware PDG B-5 Cost of Quality Study
    - Delaware PDG B-5 Data Systems Needs Assessment
    - Delaware PDG B-5 Needs Assessment and Strategic Plan Literature Review
    - Delaware PDG B-5 User Experience Needs Assessment
    - Executive Summary of the Needs Assessments
- PDG B-5 Strategic Planning Synthesis - January 2020 Update
- 2020-2025 DECC strategic plan
- 2021 IRMC Annual Report
- 2022 IRMC Annual Report
- 2023 IRMC Annual Report
- 2025-2028 Strategic DDOE Plan
- Blogs and reports published by Rodel including:
    - Delaware Child Care Cost Model
    - Delaware Continues to Untangle Its Early Childhood Governance
    - Delaware: Making Progress on Consolidating and Aligning Early Childhood Services
    - First State Pre-K: "Unlivable": Delaware Families and Businesses Sound Alarm Over Child Care Crisis
    - First State Pre-K: Solutions To Delaware's Child Care Crisis
    - Most Delaware Families Can't Access Publicly Funded Child Care
    - Survey: Cost, Availability of Child Care is Holding Back Delaware Families
    - True Cost of Quality Early Learning Exceeds State Rate Twice Over
- Delaware's CCDF FY 25-FY 27 Plan
- Early Childhood Governance: Getting There From Here
- Final Recommendations of The DHSS Reorganization Committee
- Internal DHSS Documents
    - Expenditures
    - Purchase of Care Rate setting
- OEL Coaching Policy
- Purchase of Care Handbook

- Vermont Child Care and Early Childhood Education Systems Analysis

Appendix D

Additional Data and Reference Materials

Fiscal and Budgetary Deep Dive

The fiscal information included in this report was collected to inform governance discussions and identify system-level opportunities and constraints. A more comprehensive financing analysis is expected to follow as part of the IRMC's next phase of work.

Programs and Administration

Early childhood supports and services are administered by many offices and divisions across the Department of Education (DOE), Department of Health and Human Services (DHSS), and the Department of Services for Children, Youth & Their Families (DSCYF) across six major funding streams.

DHSS	
Division of Public Health	MIECHV
	Help Me Grow
	DE Thrives
	Part C Early Intervention*
	WIC
Division of Social Services	Purchase of Care (POC)
	TANF
	WIC
Division of Medicaid & Med. Services	DE Healthy Children (CHIP)

DSCYF	
Division of Family Services	Child Abuse and Neglect
	Background Investigation
Division of Prevention & Behavioral Health Services	Early Childhood Mental Health
	Intensive Family Consultation

DOE	
Office of Childcare Licensing	Licensing
Office of Early Learning	State Funded Early Care and Education Program (SFECEP)
	Head Start Collaboration Office
	Quality Improvement System (QIS)
	DEEDS - Delaware Educator Data System
Office of Early Childhood Intervention	IDEA Part B
	Part C Early Intervention Transfer*
	Developmental Screening
Student Support Services	Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

Governance and Funding Overview

Across Delaware's state system, there is limited insight on how money is spent, both internal to the state government to run the system and externally through partnerships, grants, and vendors.

Department	ECE program/function	ECE funding Stream	ECE Funding Stream Description	Total Amount	What we know about how that money is spent
Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS)	Subsidized child care benefits and administration	Federal CCDF (Direct Services)	Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) — federal block grant funding direct child care subsidies for income-eligible families through licensed providers; mandatory, matching, and discretionary allocations combined	$41M	12,522 children served (average monthly) Some portion of money is used by DOE for Quality Improvement and Licensing
		Federal TANF	A portion of TANF funds redirected to direct services for low-income working families	$12M	Flows directly to licensed provider reimbursements alongside CCDF and state GF; not separately tracked at child or provider level
		State General Fund	State funds for child care that serve as the maintenance of effort match required to draw down federal CCDF funds	$77M	Serves as the maintenance-of-effort base required to draw down federal CCDF matching funds
	Home visiting	MIECHV, State General Fund	Federal formula and competitive grant requiring states to implement evidence-based home visiting models for at-risk pregnant women and families with children birth through age 5	$5M	In DE funds Healthy Families America, Nurse-Family Partnership, and Parents as Teachers. Includes central intake via Help Me Grow/2-1-1, training, technical assistance, and infant early childhood mental health consultants. 634 families served; evidence-based models used (HFA, NFP, PAT)
	Identification, evaluation, and coordinated services for children birth through 2 years old with developmental delays	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C	Federal formula grant requiring states to provide early intervention services to eligible infants and toddlers	$3M	1,667 children served; state carries ~85% of cost; federal law prohibits waitlists; 29.5 FTEs
		State General Fund	State appropriation serving as maintenance of effort (MOE) required to access federal IDEA Part C funds; covers the majority of program cost	$11M	
		State ASF (Medicaid and Insurance receipts)	Medicaid and private insurance billing revenue earned by providing early intervention services to eligible children; used to offset state program costs	$5M	Revenue earned through Medicaid and insurance billing for eligible children; amount varies with enrollment and billing rates; used as MOE on federal grants

Department of Education (DOE)	State funded preschool (ECAP/SFECEP)	State General Fund	Funds directed to programs for services to eligible families of infants, toddlers, and 3 -and 4-year-old children	$19.5M	ECAP serves 1,154 seats (3- and 4-year-olds) plus 82 toddler seats = ~1,236 children; Gaps: number of classrooms and contracts not publicly reported; no classroom-level quality data; no child outcome data
	Quality Improvement Supports	Federal CCDF (Quality Set Aside)	Professional development, coaching scholarships, technical assistance, quality initiatives , workforce incentives	[Unknown]	
		State Early Childhood Initiatives Fund		$36M	Funds are largely contracted out
	Preschool SPED	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B	Federally required special education for 3- and 4-year-olds with disabilities, allocated to districts by enrollment formula	$21M	1,151 enrolled students (Sept. 2024); formula-driven by district enrollment
	PDG B-5	Federal PDG B-5	Federal competitive grant supporting ECE systems building. Funding must be spent by 12/31/2026	$11M	Funds are largely contracted out
	Licensing	Federal CCDF	Health and safety regulation and oversight of child care providers, including inspections, compliance monitoring, and training	$514K	466 licensed centers; 418 family homes statewide
		State General Fund		$153K	
Department of Services for Children, Youth, and their Families (DSCYF)	Early childhood mental health and family support	Federal CCDF	Individual contracts for early childhood mental health clinicians	$1.2M	Individual ECMH clinician contracts funded jointly by CCDF and DOE
		State General Fund	State-directed funding for Family Crisis Therapists supporting Child Development Watch coordination	$165K	2.0 FTE Family Crisis Therapists supporting Child Development Watch; positions added in 2002 per federal coordination requirement

Gaps in Governance and Funding Information

This draft report was unable to answer basic questions about, across the agencies responsible for administration of early childhood, how much funding was spent by function and for what purpose.

Function	Description of Function	Example Programs	What Was Collected	What is Missing
Seats for Children before School (0-5)	Fully or partially subsidized seats for children before kindergarten	POC, state funded preschool, district funded preschool, Head Start/Early Head Start	Most of the ~$181M across six main programs, POC represents the largest investment at $118M, serving ~12,500 monthly seats	Title I and other LEA-funded seat dollars and counts, the share of Head Start/EHS funding spent on seats, spending by age group, confirmed TANF budget for FY26
Services for children B-5	Supports for children's additional needs	IDEA Part B and Part C services, diagnostic screening, intervention supports, food and nutrition	About $20.2M are invested in services for children through Birth to Three, Child Development Watch, IDEA parts C and B	Children served through Child Development Watch, age breakdowns, unduplicated counts across Part C and Part B programs
Family Supports	Resources for families to support their children's growth and development	Home visiting, family engagement, connecting families to resources, parent training	Home visiting funding by model. MIECHV ($4.5M, 634 children), Parents as Teachers ($1.1M, 350+ families), Nurse Family Partnership ($1.8M)	ECE-specific share of Title V Maternal and Child Health ($2.1M), CACFP family-facing dollars, families and children served across all programs.
Field Supports	Supports targeted to classroom quality, provider and businesses, and teacher workforce	PD and resources for curriculum, assessment, coaching, environmental supports, credential scholarships	Delaware spends ~$36.4M in early childhood initiatives	Contract/grant information showing amounts DE spends by category, and amount spent internally
Other Functions	Investments that support the system without funding seats, services, or field supports directly	Data systems, research and evaluation, governance and infrastructure contracts	Vendor names for the major data systems (licensing/QIS, FOCUS, ASQ), a handful of known amounts, revenue loss from Tax Credit ($6.2M)	Spending amounts for most data and infrastructure contracts, funding for licensing database update, research, evaluation, and stakeholder engagement costs
School Age Care	Subsidized care layered on top of school hours	Before/after and holiday care funded through POC	Of ~12,800 kids served monthly through POC, ~4,560 or 36% are K+	The amount of funding expended for school age care

Eligibility Rules

Program	Primary Administering Department / Agency	Primary Eligibility Requirements	Age Eligibility	Entitlement vs. Limited Funding Program	Key Notes / Implications
Purchase of Care (POC)	Delaware Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) / Division of Social Services (DSS)	Income-based and workforce-linked eligibility. Families generally qualify at or below approximately 200% FPL and must demonstrate need for care through employment, education, training, or approved activities.	Birth through age 12 (older for some children with special needs)	**Limited funding / non-entitlement program** — meeting eligibility requirements does not guarantee immediate access or placement.	Functions primarily as a workforce support program. Delaware allows continued eligibility at higher income thresholds to reduce benefit cliffs and support workforce continuity. Families must complete recertification and ongoing documentation requirements.
Early Head Start (EHS)	Federally funded; administered through local grantees and community providers	Primarily income-based eligibility at or below 100% FPL. Additional prioritization may include homelessness, foster care, public assistance receipt, or other risk factors.	Pregnant women, infants, and toddlers (prenatal through age 3)	**Limited slot-based program** — eligible families may still face waitlists due to limited funded capacity.	Focuses on comprehensive child and family supports, not workforce participation requirements. Local grantees may enroll a limited percentage of over-income families based on community need.
Head Start	Federally funded; administered through local grantees and community providers	Primarily income-based eligibility at or below 100% FPL, with prioritization for families experiencing additional risk factors.	Ages 3 to compulsory school age	**Limited slot-based program**	Provides comprehensive education, health, and family support services. Eligibility criteria differ from child care subsidy programs because workforce participation is not required.
State-Funded Early Care and Education / State Pre-K	Delaware Department of Education (DOE)	Eligibility varies by funding stream and program model. Historically focused on income-based eligibility and children facing economic disadvantage; some programs expanded eligibility up to approximately 200% FPL. May also include residency or developmental criteria.	Primarily ages 3–4	**Limited funding / slot-based program**	Includes state-supported pre-K and contracted early learning slots. Operates across mixed-delivery settings including schools and community-based providers. Eligibility rules may differ across programs and blended funding models.
IDEA Part C (Birth to Three / Early Intervention)	Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) / Birth to Three Early Intervention System	Eligibility based on developmental delays, diagnosed conditions associated with delays, or established risk conditions identified through evaluation and assessment processes. Income is not considered.	Birth through age 2	**Entitlement program** — eligible children are entitled to services under federal law.	Services are based on developmental needs rather than income or workforce participation. Families cannot be denied services due to lack of funding availability if eligibility criteria are met.
IDEA Part B, Section 619 (Preschool Special Education)	Delaware Department of Education (DOE) / Local Education Agencies	Eligibility based on documented disability category and demonstrated educational need identified through evaluation processes. Income is not considered.	Ages 3–5	**Entitlement program**	Children who meet eligibility criteria are entitled to special education and related services under federal law. Services transition from Part C to school-based systems at age 3.