

ELEVATE MAINE/SOMERSET

A RURAL EARLY CHILDHOOD PARTNERSHIP PROJECT REPORT

June 2020



Welcome from the Maine Early Learning Investment Group (MELIG).

In 2012, MELIG formed as a consortium of business leaders who understood that the success of Maine's economy depends on **investing in high quality early childhood education** starting at birth. Our initiative, ***Elevate Maine***, was designed to demonstrate the impact that such an investment has on school readiness and to raise public awareness about the benefits and financial return on such an investment.

In 2013, MELIG formed a private-public partnership with Educare Central Maine and its regional administrative partner, Kennebec Valley Community Action Program (KVCAP) and selected rural Somerset County as the site for our demonstration project which we refer to as ***Elevate Maine/Somerset***. This project's goal was to fundamentally change the early childhood education system in Maine --- one community at a time.

Elevate Maine/Somerset is an on-the-ground, replicable model for a **coordinated birth-to-kindergarten-entry quality early care and education system** in the greater Skowhegan area. It is a strategic partnership with rural family childcare and center-based programs designed to elevate instructional practices; increase family engagement; provide comprehensive services such as nutritional, oral, mental, and physical health education and support; and offer ongoing evidence-based evaluation to meet or exceed quality benchmarks.

The project was initiated with a 2015 federal Early Head Start:Child Care Partnership grant awarded to KVCAP/Educare Central Maine. MELIG joined as a private investor to fund the costs not covered by the grant, including hiring an independent evaluator to track and measure child, parent/family, and provider progress and outcomes, and our collective investment over a five-year period.

MELIG and its program implementation partners believe ***Elevate Maine/Somerset*** is about breaking the cycle of poverty, through a two-generation approach, and improving Maine's economy in the short- and long-term. By replicating core features and strategies of the first rural Educare Central Maine school across a national network, this two-generation service model pilot project offers local and regional providers, public schools, policy-makers, state agency leaders, and advocates specific strategies for how other communities can deliver effective and coordinated high-quality early care and education services to families with young children living at or below poverty.

We hope you enjoy learning about this project's impact and the opportunities this report offers to create broader systemic improvements to Maine's early childhood education services to ensure a stronger economic future for all in Maine.

Chris Emmons, Co-Chair, MELIG
Retired CEO, Gorham Savings Bank

Jim Clair, Co-Chair, MELIG
CEO, CSSHealth

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This pilot project was made possible by members of MELIG and the businesses with whom they worked and/or engaged for critical investment:

Jim Clair, MELIG Co-Chair, Owner, Clair Group of Companies, Former CEO, Goold Health Systems
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 Meredith Strang Burgess, President/CEO, Burgess Advertising and Marketing
 Honorable Paula D. Silsby, Former United States Attorney for the District of Maine

Past Founding MELIG Members:

Steve Rowe, CEO, Maine Community Foundation	James Conlon, Former President/CEO, Bangor Savings Bank
John Peters, Former CEO, Downeast Energy	Beth Newlands Campbell, President, Hannaford Supermarket
Steve Rich, Former President/CEO, WBRC Architects	

INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education is a Critical Investment for the Maine Economy

The quantity and quality of workforce was rated one of the most important factors in supporting business retention and expansion according to a recent business survey by the Maine Development Foundation, prepared for the Maine State Chamber of Commerce. [Making Maine Work, 2018]

However, only about one-third of Maine fourth graders (36%) are reading at proficient and above levels. This is alarming because these scores are a predictor of future outcomes such as educational attainment, employment, and earnings. Less than half of Maine children receive any kind of pre-kindergarten schooling, which means that many begin their formal education behind their peers. ^{1,2}



Fourth Grade Reading Scores

36% of Maine and U.S. fourth graders tested at proficient and above levels in reading in 2017. The Maine Economic Growth Council's benchmark is 50% by 2020.

MAINE 2017

36%



MAINE 2020

50%

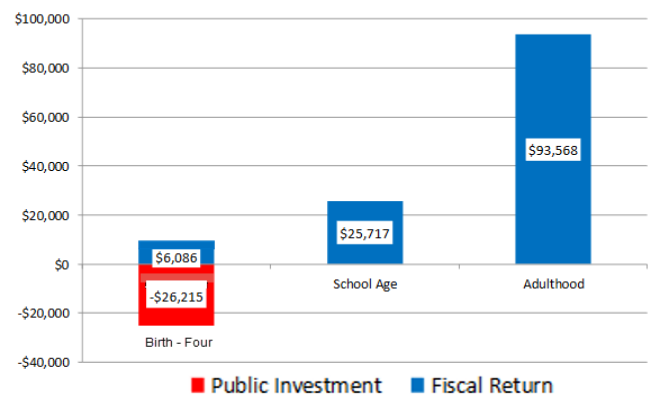


“Public investment in early childhood education is not more government spending, it is a reallocation of government spending (away from special education, child protective services, and so forth).”

This is the conclusion of Professor Philip Trostel of the University of Maine. ³ He calculates a 5-to-1 return on early childhood investment:

- **\$26,200** public investment in the average child from birth to kindergarten pays itself back and
- Saves **\$25,000** more by the end of that child's high school (in reduced special education, juvenile crime, etc.) and
- Returns to the taxpayers an additional **\$93,000** in the child's adult years from higher income through higher tax payments and lower public assistance costs.

Estimated Fiscal Effects of High-Quality Early Education in Maine



The number of economically disadvantaged* students in Maine classrooms has increased by almost 10% since 2008-2009. Today in Maine, eight counties have School Lunch eligibility rates for subsidized meals above 50%. Put another way, large numbers of children are living in low-income families. ⁴

Despite the increased number of low-income families, in program year 2015–2016, there were only 3,273 Early/Head Start slots for more than 14,000 poor Maine children under age 5, or less than a quarter of those needed to serve all potentially income-eligible children. Over the past four years the numbers remain with 10,000+ young children with some of the greatest risk factors not receiving needed services.

To meet the Making Maine Work and Educate Maine's state goals of ensuring more Maine students succeed in school and are prepared for college or the workforce, public policy and investment must focus on young children from low-income families, where there is an opportunity for the most dramatic progress. ²

* Economically disadvantaged is defined using the criteria for the National School Lunch Program which provides free and reduced-price school meals to children living in households with income at or below 185% of the poverty level, \$45,510 for a household of four.

THE PROJECT

Elevate Maine/Somerset Partnership

This report summarizes initial results from the *Elevate Maine/Somerset Partnership* Project reflecting the first four years of services.

The Project is a public/private partnership between Kennebec Valley Community Action Program (KVCAP)'s Early Head Start and Head Start and the Maine Early Learning Investment Group (MELIG). KVCAP's implementation partners include Educare Central Maine and the MSAD 54 School District. Educare Central Maine is a high-quality, two-generation focused early learning and development center. It partners with families and communities to ensure school readiness for children from birth to age five. It serves as Waterville public school's pre-kindergarten.

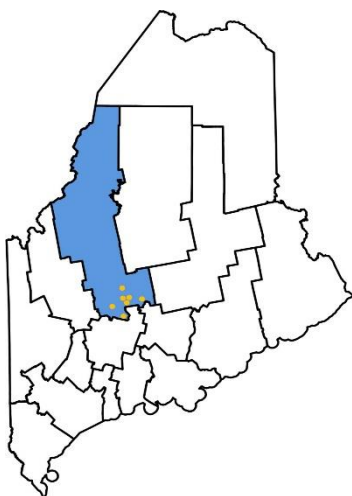
The Project applies core concepts and strategies of Educare Central Maine's high-quality birth to kindergarten-entry service delivery model in rural, high-need Somerset County, Maine. While Educare Central Maine operates in a model state-of-the-art early learning center, the Project demonstrates the opportunities, successes, and challenges of service delivery in rural dispersed settings, resulting in higher quality learning experiences.

KVCAP and MSAD 54's long standing history of effective collaboration to deliver holistic programming laid the foundation for a comprehensive birth through grade 3 model that works to align and integrate staff training, assessment, and student growth tracking across learning environments. The Project demonstrates just how this can occur in rural Maine.

Project goals:

- 1) Elevate the quality of instructional practices in both Center-Based settings and Family Childcare homes (referred to as HomeStart - a KVCAP Early Head Start:Child Care Partnership implementation brand/model).
- 2) Enhance family engagement and parent education to support their child's learning and development.
- 3) Provide comprehensive child and family services including nutritional, oral, mental, and physical health.
- 4) Gather data and analyze child-parent-family progress and provider/teacher quality improvement.
- 5) Expand local and statewide awareness of the importance of quality early care and education.

The *Elevate Maine/Somerset* mission is to ensure that program participants arrive at school healthy and ready to succeed. This report provides insights into the Project's results with the goal of encouraging more Maine communities to design similar models based on these core components.



Project services include:

- Evidence-based instructional practices aligning curricula and assessment between early care and Pre-K.
- Culturally-competent and effective parent/family engagement and partnership in the child's development.
- Effective collaborations with community services to enhance supports.
- Strong focus on continuity of service through blended federal, state, and private funds (including MELIG funds).

The Project data in this report is based on evaluations conducted by an independent research team led by Dr. Alan Cobo-Lewis at the University of Maine and gathered over the five-year Project. Since the Project's inception in 2015, a total of 113 children (61 Head Start-eligible; 52 private-pay) and their parents were served in nine provider sites (as of June 2020): two Center-Based sites and seven Family Childcare sites. Children

ranged in age from 6 weeks to 4 years (pre-kindergarten). In addition to the enrolled children, another 200+ children have been positively impacted by services, although not involved in the evaluation process.

Background

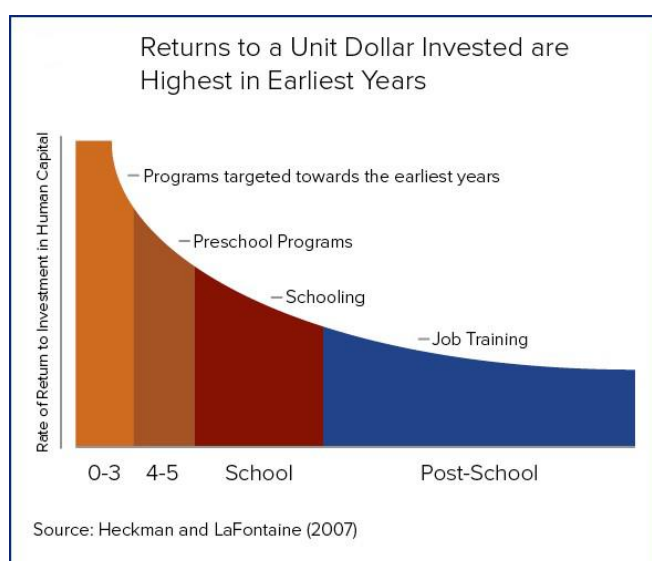
Early childhood teachers and professionals have long touted the importance of quality early childhood education. From the opening of the first kindergarten in 1855 to the renaissance of Montessori schools in the 1960s, women educators were at the forefront of early childhood education. ⁵

In 1965, the first Head Start program was launched as part of President Johnson's Great Society campaign. It was designed for children ages 3-5 from low-income families to help break the cycle of poverty by providing a comprehensive program to meet their emotional, social, health, nutritional, and psychological needs.

In 1994, Early Head Start was established for low-income children under age 3 due to growing understanding that learning begins at birth, and that parents whose children are enrolled in Head Start need to work and/or complete their education.

Throughout this period, teachers largely owned the messaging about the value of early care and education. However, as more and more research emerged highlighting the economic impact of quality programs like Early/Head Start and quality Pre-K, new advocates emerged. One of the early new messengers, Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman, argued that starting early gives a greater return. ²⁵

In 2007, the Maine Governor's Children's Cabinet interest in these ideas resulted in the Summit on Early Childhood Investment, which brought together 120 Maine policy and business leaders along with national experts. Together they outlined a plan to advance these goals in Maine. The most immediate outcome from the Summit was an exploration of the benefits of bringing the first Educare School to Maine and New England.



The Educare model, implemented nationwide, is based on research from early childhood development, education, social work, and other allied fields. Its core features are high-quality teaching practices, intensive family engagement, embedded professional development, and data utilization. ⁶ Educare Central Maine opened in Waterville in 2010 and has served as a demonstration school and program for these principles.

Following the Summit and the report of Governor Baldacci's *Business Round Table on Early Childhood Investment*, the Maine Early Learning Investment Group (MELIG) was created by business leaders to engage the private sector in expanded private/public investments, communications, and advocacy in early care and education.

The five-year *Elevate Maine/Somerset* Project investment between MELIG, KVCAP and Educare Central Maine began in 2015 upon receiving a federal Early Head Start Child Care Partnership grant. Here is the story of the Project's successes, challenges, results, and recommendations based on its evaluation and collective learning.

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

A Whole Family Approach is Key

From the prenatal period through the first years of life, the brain undergoes its most rapid development, and early experiences determine whether its architecture is sturdy or fragile. During early sensitive periods of development, the brain's circuitry is most open to the influence of external experiences, for better or for worse. As reported in the Harvard Center on the Developing Child research, during these sensitive periods, healthy emotional and cognitive development is shaped by responsive, dependable interactions with adults, while chronic or extreme adversity can interrupt normal brain development. ²

Early experiences are an important public health issue. Much of the foundational research in this area has been referred to as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Adverse Childhood Experiences have been linked to

- risky health behaviors,
- chronic health conditions,
- low life potential, and
- early death.

As the number of ACEs increases, so does the risk for these outcomes.

The wide-ranging health and social consequences of ACEs underscore the importance of preventing them before they happen. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) promotes lifelong health and well-being through *Essentials for Childhood*, assuring safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments for all children. *Essentials for Childhood* can have a positive impact on a broad range of health problems and on the development of skills that will help children reach their full potential. ⁸

"The level of caring about not only the child, but the family in this program is what made the difference."

-- Stacy Pierpont, Parent
[full story here](#)

Family engagement is a cornerstone of the success of this Project. Focusing on the whole child means involving the family and meeting children's health needs as well as supporting child development and early learning. Engagement opportunities include home visits, parent and child goal setting, program planning, training, and evaluation. This approach extends beyond the educational setting to help children, families, and communities thrive.

Key to the success of family engagement is the partnership with Project staff. Families are engaged in home visits/family conferences designed not only to build trust and address environmental risks, but also to empower parents in their role as their child's primary teacher, supporting their child's learning progress at home. Goal-setting sessions help parents support their child's development as well as make progress toward their own family, educational, and workforce development goals. The staff/parent relationship may include referrals for behavioral/medical/oral health services for children as needed, including those with disabilities, and an array of family supports. Parents have input into the program, again strengthening the home:school connection and recognizing the learning that occurs in the childcare setting for the child.



"We have to provide for the social and emotional well-being of the students. We have to provide for their academic needs, and we have to provide support and information to the parents. There has to be a constant feedback loop with the parents." -- Jon Moody, Superintendent MSAD 54

48%

of higher income Maine children
are enrolled in preschool

vs

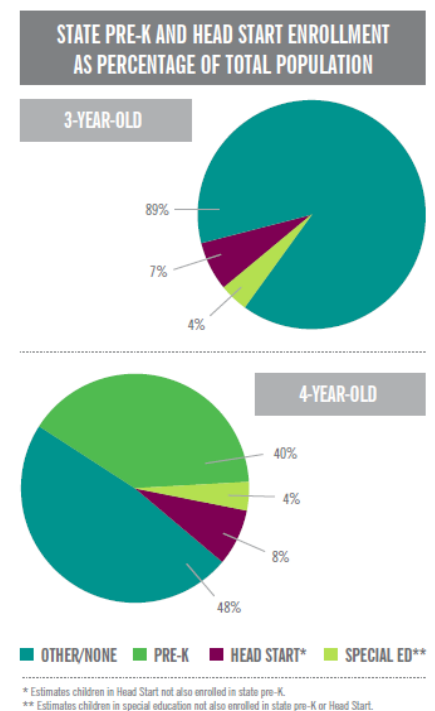
36%

of lower income Maine children

Source: Kids Count Data Center
www.datacenter.kidscount.org

Child & Family - Critical Components and Observations

1. Children enrolled in this Project, like many children in Maine, face significant challenges due to a multitude of ACEs, such as child abuse and neglect (10%), domestic violence exposure (2%), homelessness (10%), adult mental health needs (13%), incarcerated parents, etc. Eighty-five percent (85%) of children served in Maine's Head Start programs live below the federal poverty level and/or receive TANF/SSI and/or are homeless and/or are in the foster care system. [14](#)
2. Often children and families experience numerous adult caregivers before the child enters kindergarten. Studies have shown that the effects of multiple ACEs can be diminished with strong attachment to a caring adult. Lack of care continuity is an ongoing issue due to factors such as family relocation, transportation issues, and loss of funds for childcare support. [10](#)
3. A Partnership was initiated for this Project with the Somerset County Economic Development Corporation. It was referred to as *Back 2 Work*, with a goal to provide individualized and targeted support to Project parents to break any barriers to completing their education and/or accessing workforce opportunities. Community workforce partners can play important roles in breaking the barriers to parent educational and workforce-readiness.
4. Parents of Early/Head Start children are more likely to increase their educational levels during their children's early years than other at-risk parents, making them more productive members of the workforce. They invest more time in learning activities with their children and non-resident fathers spend more days per month with their children. [13](#)
5. Effective family engagement in early childhood is a critical part of quality early care and education. With 68% of Maine children under the age of 6 having both parents in the workforce, more children will require care from birth until they reach public school. [9](#)
6. If Maine is to meet its goals for quantity and quality of workforce, substantial increased investment in early childhood education is required. In 2018, only 39.5 percent of eligible children were enrolled in Head Start programs due to lack of funding. [11](#) Maine Head Start is primarily federally funded. High quality comprehensive services and standards, with monitoring and skilled supports, yield higher outcomes. [27](#)
7. Maine ranks 37th among the 50 states and the District of Columbia in terms of its financial commitment per child in preschool. This puts Maine at a disadvantage in competing with other states based on adequate supply of qualified workers. [12](#)
8. In school, full-day Head Start children are more likely to meet reading benchmarks by the end of kindergarten compared to students who had half-day preschool or no preschool. Early Head Start children have significantly fewer child welfare encounters during their elementary years and are healthier, thus lowering state costs. [13](#)
9. As adults, Head Start children have a higher likelihood of graduating high school, attending college, and receiving a post-secondary degree, license or certification. They are 7% less likely to be in poor health than their siblings who did not attend. [13](#)

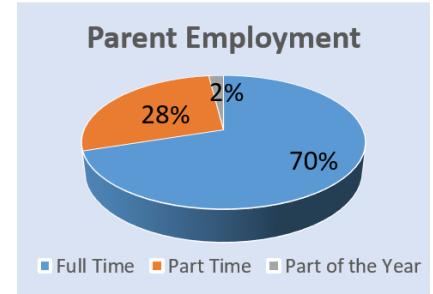
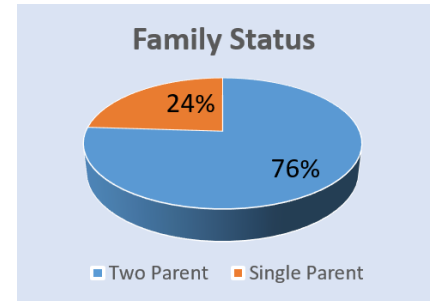


Family Profile

The children enrolled in the Project come from backgrounds with high cumulative risk factors including child poverty, child welfare involvement, rural isolation, teen/single parent stress, unemployment, and lack of access to quality early care and education. ¹⁵ Most families participating in the Project receive childcare subsidies, without which they could not afford to enroll their children.

Parent interviews show that:

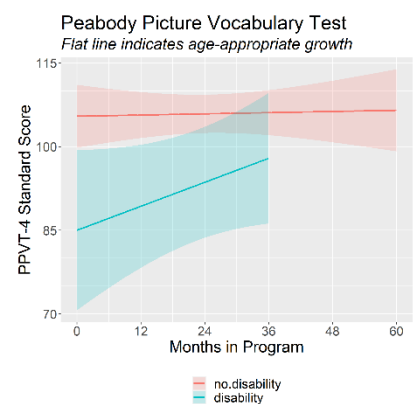
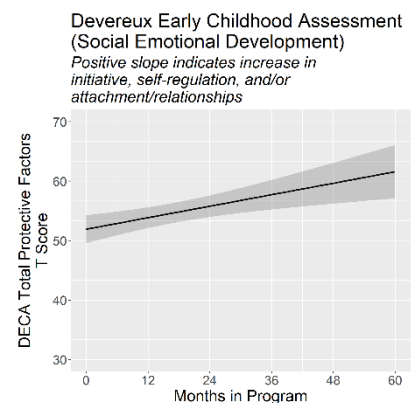
- 76% of children are in 2-parent households
- 100% of parents are employed; 70% of which are full-time. Employment rates have increased since the project began.
- Median education of children's primary caregiver is High School + tech training/certificate.
- 18% of families worried about food running out at least sometimes, and 13% actually ran out of food.
- 4% of families worried about homelessness at least sometimes, and 2% actually experienced homelessness the previous year.



School Readiness – Child Outcomes

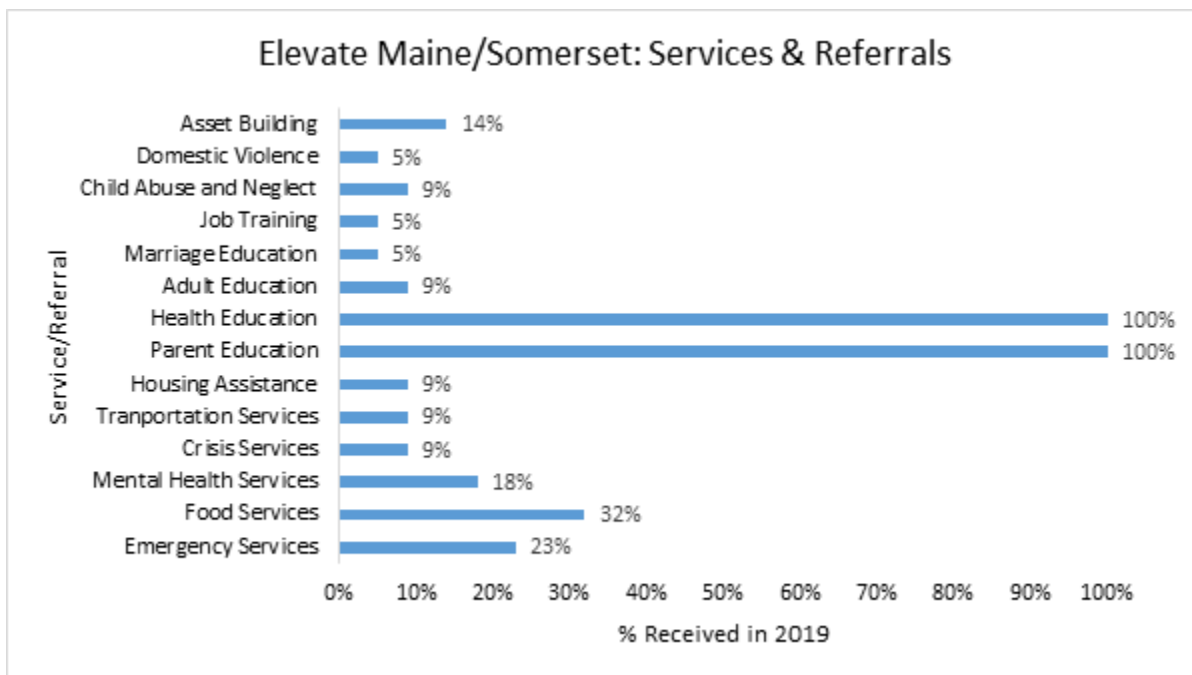
Multiple assessment tools or procedures are utilized in the Project to fully understand child progress across all areas of child development and early learning. Collectively, the tools below provide the school-readiness results for this Project.

- **Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA)** is a strength-based assessment tool that focuses on identifying key social and emotional strengths in children 4 weeks – age 5. It supports early intervention efforts to reduce emotional and behavioral concerns by assessing risks in the social development of very young children. ¹⁶
- **Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT)** measures a child's receptive (hearing) vocabulary and provides a quick estimate of verbal ability. ¹⁶
- **Communicative Development Inventories (CDI)** is a McArthur/Bates Computer Adaptive vocabulary tool used for children 8 – 30 months of age. This parent report instrument captures important information about children's developing abilities in early language including vocabulary, comprehension, production, gestures, and grammar. Results show that children are gaining an additional month of growth over the course of a year (2019). ¹⁶
- **Teaching Strategies Gold (TSG)** is a research-based assessment system with objectives for learning and development assessed in 6 domains (Social-Emotional, Physical, Language, Cognitive, Literacy, and Mathematics). TSG data for Early Head Start eligible children shows that after being enrolled in the Project for just six months, all children met or exceeded the age-appropriate standards in 5 out of the 6 developmental domains, with growth shown in all domains.



Family Needs and Services

As part of the goal to improve the quality of life for parents and children, the following services/referrals were made for families within the Project who were Early Head Start enrolled.



PROVIDERS

Coaching Support is Essential

Significant resources were allocated to build a progression of professional development and educational opportunities for Providers to positively impact child and family outcomes. Provider partners receive ongoing coaching from Project staff in the best practices of early childhood education, with mentoring designed to reflect on learning environments and build on effective parent engagement strategies.

Based on the experience of the Project’s leadership staff, collaboration between providers and project staff is the foundation for improved child outcomes. We know that when early childhood providers try to adopt new models and improve their practices, they need three types of professional development support:

1. Knowledge development
2. Skill development
3. “Actual use in the field” support (technical assistance)

*“The program encourages professional education and growth so I am looking into earning my bachelor’s degree in Early Childhood Education. I would highly recommend to any other childcare providers to join the program”. -- Darlene Steeves, Provider
full story [here](#) (page 26)*

Technical Assistance (TA) comes in different forms, including coaching, mentoring, consultation, and peer-to-peer networks. We know the direct support that coaches offer to providers is critically important. Coaches also need leadership support to do this work and time for reflection themselves. In 2017, Maine’s Technical Assistance Competencies, including a Self-Assessment, were co-developed through a collaborative effort with Educare Central Maine, Maine Roads to Quality, and the University of Maine Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies, which define the relevant knowledge, skills, and dispositions required by TA professionals who support early childhood practitioners. Subsequently, these Technical Assistance partners have developed a Maine Technical Assistance Credential, which will be a framework and resource for improving the skills of early childhood education professionals offering Technical Assistance to others in the field. It is currently being field tested. [17](#)

Provider - Critical Components and Observations

1. Initially, Project providers were not all convinced about the benefits of the changes the Project was advocating. However, as trust was built between providers and project staff, providers understood the Project’s value and their role in improving outcomes. There is now a growing interest among providers across various communities wanting to participate and better serve low-income children and their families.
2. Providers build competency through observation, reflection, feedback, and deep discussion as they continually improve their knowledge and skills in designing responsive and intentional curricula. Weekly individualized discussions, communities of practice, and ongoing coaching dialog are among the strategies utilized to promote reflection and growth in offering high quality learning opportunities.
3. Provider workforce development is vitally important to improving early childhood education. The chart below compares Family Childcare provider education levels. Assistants working in these homes have lower levels of education. [18](#)

	Elevate Maine / Somerset	Statewide
Bachelor’s degree or higher	20%	11%
Associate’s degree or certificate	60%	12%
Some college or Credential	20%	20%
High school or GED	0%	34%
Less than high school or GED	0%	23%

4. Provider retention due to low pay and lack of benefits (insurance, retirement, etc.) is also an issue. Many providers make 30% less than public school teachers, so many are lost to the public schools. [19](#)
5. As a result of the Project, Providers partner by using a research-based curriculum, implementing child assessments, and some have systems in place to facilitate the hiring of new childcare employees.
6. Both Educare Central Maine and MSAD 54 conduct regular joint staff meetings, curricula training, assessment/data review, and annual goal-setting between preschool and public school settings.
7. Private Family Childcare providers and small centers have barriers to reaching accreditation, which would lead to a Step 4 QRIS rating. The time intensive nature, perceived value, and cost are prohibitive.

Measurement

1. Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)

QRIS is a systemic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early and school-age care and education programs. Providers that participate in Maine's Quality for ME QRIS have access to targeted technical assistance from a range of organizations, resource materials, and publicity.

Maine's QRIS rating system has 4 steps, with 4 being the highest level. Seventy-one percent (71%) of this Project's active providers have moved up at least one step on QRIS since the project started. Of these providers, one has advanced two steps and two providers have advanced three steps since the project started. The following data shows active Elevate Maine/Somerset Project providers in comparison to providers statewide.

71% of the Project's active Providers advanced at least one step on Maine's Quality Rating System.

Family Childcare Providers		
QRIS Step	Statewide	Elevate Maine/Somerset
Step 1	75%	20%
Step 2	11%	40%
Step 3	12%	20%
Step 4	2%	20%
Center Based Providers		
QRIS Step	Statewide	Elevate Maine/Somerset
Step 1	58%	0%
Step 2	12%	0%
Step 3	9%	50%
Step 4	21%	50%

2. Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)

The CLASS assessment tool examines social-emotional and instructional interactions that contribute to children's social competence and academic achievement. Ten subscales are organized into 3 dimensions and scored on a 7-point scale. This assessment tool is conducted annually with all Elevate Maine/Somerset providers.

CLASS Dimensions

Instructional Support

Concept Development
Quality of Feedback
Language Modeling

Classroom Organization

Behavior Management
Productivity
Instructional Learning Formats

Emotional Support

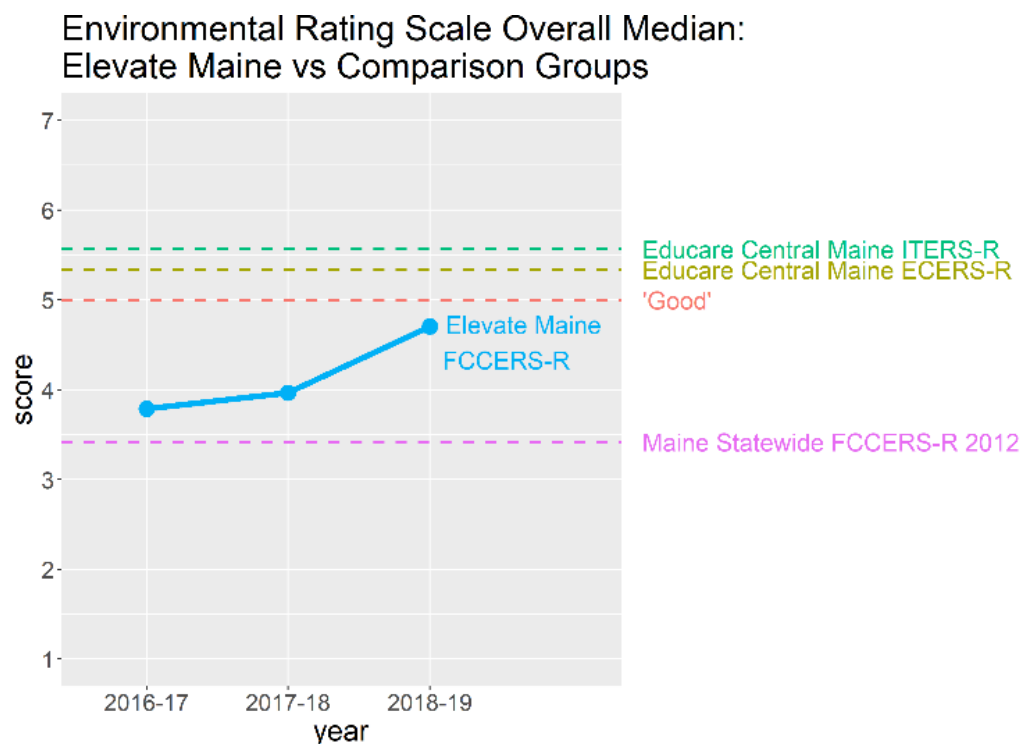
Positive Climate
Negative Climate
Teacher Sensitivity
Regard for Child Perspective

3. Family Childcare Environment Rating Scale, Revised (FCCERS-R)

The FCCERS-R scale is designed to assess family childcare programs for both early childhood and school age care groups. This assessment tool consists of 37 items organized into 7 subscales:

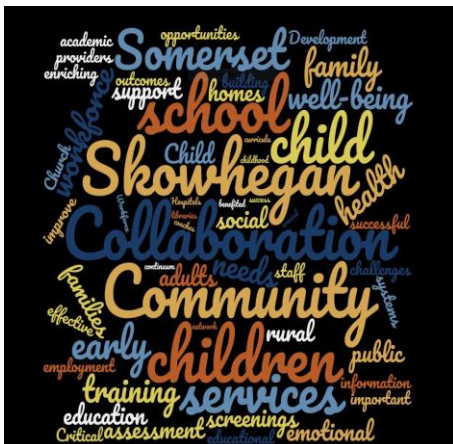
- Space and Furnishings
- Personal Care Routines
- Listening and Talking
- Activities
- Interaction
- Program Structure
- Parents and Provider

Project Providers have increased the overall average score since the beginning of the Project, with more notable gains in the areas of 'Activities' and 'Listening and Talking'. Offering a variety of intentional activities for children supports their curiosity in their environment and facilitates growth in all developmental domains. Helping children to understand and use language at an early age is also critical as it supports the development of strong linguistic abilities.



COMMUNITY

Building Community Trust and Relationships is Critical



A 2018 community needs assessment, as part of the supporting material for the Project, shows the need for both Family Childcare settings in very rural areas and Center-Based programs in more populated rural service areas. Significant child and family poverty (both generational and situational), low educational attainment, livable wage employment challenges, and lack of access to quality early care settings due to income and availability, are all factors of rural isolation and diminish opportunities for children to develop school readiness skills required to succeed. Need significantly exceeds enrollment opportunities. [20](#)

Somerset County has more negative risk factors than any other county in Maine. These risk factors include no prenatal care, infant mortality, child maltreatment, state custody, poverty, substance misuse, teen births, high school dropouts, crime, unemployment, and domestic violence. [Additional risk data here.](#)

Having MSAD 54 as a partner in this pilot has been vital to a shift in community understanding and investment regarding the importance of early childhood education. The district clearly messages the value of an education system that supports children and their families from birth through grade 12. This outreach is stimulating action to help community members understand the impact of early intervention. The development of a web of resources including the school and other community partners supports the mission of the Project to promote healthy growth and development of children and their families, beginning at birth.

Community - Critical Components and Observations

1. A network of credentialed coaches and 'ready' providers is needed. Beyond that, all sectors of the community need to be enlisted to support the Project goals, including but not exclusively public schools, social service organizations, and businesses.
2. Ongoing community education and relationship building is crucial to success. Project staff work tirelessly to participate in targeted organizations and community forums, joining together with law enforcement, health professionals, religious sectors, and others to build the trust that is essential to any partnership. The "boots on the ground" approach is most effective.
3. Relationships with public schools are vital as they allow for joint professional development and effective transition from early childhood programs into the K-12 system for families, educators, and administrators.
4. When reconfiguring or rebuilding K-12 schools, consider co-locating early care and education services or programs. For example, Skowhegan Early Head Start has benefited from its location on the school campus, which was supported through the school board and administration. In partnership, KVCAP is actively involved in the new public elementary school construction planning with hopes for a Birth to Five 'wing'.
5. Consider how local, state, and federal funds can be coordinated or combined to support early care and Pre-K elements such as screenings and assessment, parent engagement, parent education, provider and teacher training, etc.

"When our youngest learners enter the K-12 system prepared to learn and socialize and their parents understand the important role they play in their child's education, the entire school district can achieve its goal and the community is strengthened as a whole."
--Jon Moody, Assistant Superintendent,
MSAD 54

Partners for Success

Local and regional partners are critical to the Project's direct service coordination in order to create lasting change. Successful community change requires a significant commitment of time and effort by all partners. Together, they approach a problem (in this case, barriers to effective early childhood education services) using both qualitative and quantitative data. They agree upon strategies informed by that data and clear measurements for success at progressive developmental points of the initiative. The result is expected to produce long-term service delivery improvements between the early childhood provider community and the K-12 system and other essential service providers. For this Project, partners working tirelessly to forever change the early education system include (among others):

- *Area school districts* – Pre-K – Grade 3 staff partnership meetings to assign curricula and assessment; planning for sustained parent engagement; adult education; Pre-K and K shared trainings, data collection, and reporting across the early care and K administration and direct service staff
- *Catholic Charities / USDA / SNAP-Ed / Farm to Table Food programs* – locally grown fresh foods and other food information
- *Child Development Services (CDS)* – onsite developmental delay screenings and intervention supports
- *Community Action Agencies* - multiple service programs for low-income families, e.g. Head Start, housing, heating assistance, and transportation
- *Community Dental Clinic* – dental cleanings and exams onsite in centers with in-office services
- *Department of Education* – Public Pre-K expansion collaboration
- *Department of Health and Human Services - Child Protective Services* – helps identify priority enrollments; collaboration with staff on safety interventions
- *Kennebec Behavioral Health (KBH) and Redington Fairview General Hospital* – onsite health and mental/behavior screenings; child and provider training for improved child outcomes
- *Lions Club* - vision screenings onsite in centers
- *Literacy Volunteers* – reading comprehension supports
- *Local grassroots committees* -
 - *Skowhegan Woman's Club*
 - *Rotary Club*
 - *Main Street Skowhegan*
 - *SCARP- Somerset County Area Resource Providers*
- *Maine Families Home Visiting* – voluntary home visits
- *Public libraries* – family literacy activity space, read-along programs, onsite computers for homework, and workforce training programming
- *Skowhegan Federated Church and Centenary United Methodist Church* - faith-based partners providing meeting space and food
- *Somerset County Economic Development Corporation's Back2Work initiative* - eliminating barriers to school or workforce training and employment
- *Somerset Public Health* - Move More Kids and Let's Go programming
- *University of Maine* – Lead Evaluation Partner to collect data using research-based assessments, observations, and interview techniques
- *WIC / Maine General Medical / Inland Hospital* – maternal nutritional and health services



FUNDING

Blended Funding is a Key to Success

Project success lies in gathering community support and finding resources to support the program needs. While government grant programs will cover a large portion of early childhood education, other investors must be found.

The greatest challenge in raising private sector investment for this Project is related to the very reason that Somerset County was chosen --- limited resources. Few businesses in the region have discretionary assets to contribute. Those businesses and foundations who were engaged successfully understand the broader implications for breaking the cycle of poverty as a statewide economic strategy. Ninety percent (90%) of private investments have come from businesses (and some foundations) whose target markets do not include this region.

“Quality early care and education programs help lay the groundwork for creating Maine’s future workforce. Considering Maine’s workforce challenges, investing in these programs is more important now than ever before.”

-- Jim Clair, The Clair Group; Co-Chair of the Maine Early Learning Investment Group

Funding - Critical Components and Observations

1. Government funds supporting this Project include:
 - Early Head Start Federal Grant
 - Early Head Start:Child Care Partnership Federal Grants
2. MELIG support enabled the Project to fund:
 - Evaluation of Somerset Project-enrolled children and families, providers, and Educare Central Maine Administrative support
 - Coach / Mentor salaries, benefits, and travel
 - Parent and Provider education / training
 - Provider stipends to assist with increased staffing costs, substitutes, etc.
3. Several Maine foundations participated in this Elevate Somerset Project, contributing more than \$570,000 over five years:
 - Davis Family Foundation
 - Bangor Savings Bank
 - Harold Alfond Foundation
 - John T. Gorman Foundation
 - Maine Community Foundation – Western Mountain Committee
 - Morton-Kelly Charitable Trust
 - Skowhegan Savings Bank Foundation
4. In addition, MELIG was awarded a three year grant of \$300,000 from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to further the goals of the Elevate Somerset Project and Kellogg’s national two-generation, evidence-based priorities.



5. MELIG members and 68 other individuals personally contributed bringing the business and individual investments to \$583,330. These businesses include:

- Axiom Technologies
- Baker Newman Noyes
- Bangor Savings Bank
- Burgess Advertising & Marketing
- Cianbro
- Dead River
- Dirigo Capital Advisors, Inc.
- Downeast Energy
- Drummond Woodsum
- Franklin Savings Bank
- Goold Health Systems
- Gorham Savings Bank
- Hannaford Supermarket
- Key Bank
- Maine Community Foundation
- MMG Insurance
- Reed & Reed, Inc.
- Sappi
- WBRC

6. In approaching funders, careful messaging is important. Recent research on the economic benefits of early education broadens the discussion to include more stakeholders and has proven to be especially effective in policy implications. This research highlights significant rationale for investing in high quality early learning experiences for children and ensuring strong family engagement and parent voice in those experiences:

- Improving health outcomes for children, reducing later healthcare costs, and maximizing human potential.
- Ensuring the quantity and quality of Maine’s future workforce by preparing children to succeed in education, thus ensuring they are ready for the jobs of the future.
- Enabling parents of young children to access affordable quality care so they can participate in the workforce, further their own education, and achieve improved financial stability.
- Preparing all Mainers for educational and workforce success, so they can contribute to the tax base as adults and productive community members.



Strong, consistent messaging leads to participation from funders who are essential for accomplishing these goals.

REVENUE AND EXPENSES

What resources can a community draw on to do this important work? This Project had the benefit of both federal grants and the MELIG private investments. However, below are resources that were accessed and coordinated among community partners and depict a sample of partner opportunities across Maine.

Funding Sources for this Project’s annual income included:

Funding Source	Use	Annual Income
Early Head Start-Childcare Partnership Grant	Comprehensive Services, Continuity of Care	\$565,329
State Childcare Subsidy	Extended Day Services	\$77,834
Parent Fees	Income-based Sliding Fee Scale	\$32,723
MELIG, Philanthropic, and Foundation Support	Coaching/Support to Providers, Evaluation, Grant support	\$290,664
Community In-Kind Support	Space, Volunteers, Professional Services, Supplies, etc.	\$139,772
School District In-Kind Support	Land for Skowhegan Early Head Start Building; public school staff and administrative collaboration	\$1,560

POLICY IMPACT

Project Influences on Public Policy

Critical Components and Observations

As initially envisioned, the Elevate Maine/Somerset Project has influenced public policy through a broad reach among multiple stakeholders and new bills by lawmakers in collaboration with some of this project's partners and service providers.

1. Among many others, MELIG supported and/or contributed insights for the following:

- a. [LD 1760, First 4 for ME](#), based on the Elevate Maine Project, has evolved to address the need for an expanded community-based approach to comprehensive health, social services, and quality childcare.

In 2019, in partnership with the Legislature, input was provided for the Elevate Maine bill designed to target the same Project services to 15,902 children between the ages of 6 weeks and school age 4 who live in households at or below 185% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. MELIG testified in support of critical legislation that connects the dots between access to quality early care and education and workforce development.

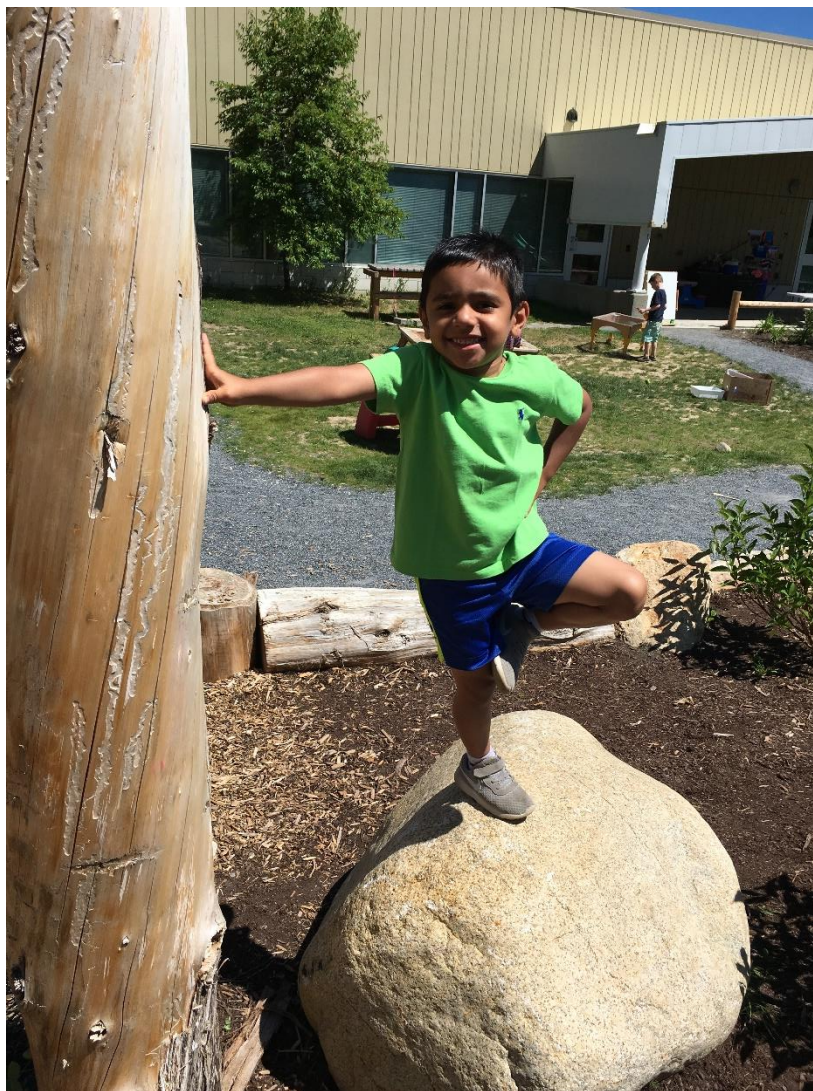
- b. [LD 1836, An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue for Infrastructure, Economic Development, Workforce Development and Energy and Environment Investment](#). This was the Governor's bill and sponsored by Senator Cathy Breen and is the first bond issue relating to funding quality childcare in Maine. This bill was carried over to Maine's 130th Legislature.
- c. [LD 1012, An Act To Provide Stable Funding and Support for Childcare](#). This bill was tabled and will be taken up in Maine's 130th Legislature.
- d. [LD 1584, An Act To Attract, Build and Retain an Early Childhood Education Workforce through Increased Training, Education and Career Pathways](#). This bill would create an early childhood educators' workforce support program to recruit and retain early childhood educators to address the dearth of quality childcare providers.

2. MELIG convened and inspired public and private partner exploration to learn more about and consider Social Investment Bonds (also known as Pay-for-Success) to support evidence-based quality early care and preschool. In January 2017, the Maine Legislature's task force on "[Public-private Partnerships to Support Public Education](#)" presented its research and findings. Legislation to implement a feasibility study was proposed, however, until the Maine Department of Education implements a common kindergarten screening, the PFS model can't move forward.

NOTE: The [Social Impact Partnerships to Pay for Results Act](#) (SIPPR) was included in the federal Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018. It created a new fund, up to \$100 million, to support 'social impact partnership projects'.

3. Maine Public's news department spent a year interviewing stakeholders, including from MELIG, for their recent [comprehensive look at childcare in Maine](#) with multiple stories that highlight the challenges that the state's parents and childcare providers face.

4. The early success of the MELIG project strengthened KVCAP's second successful federal application for an expanded Early Head Start Childcare Partnership grant. With Educare as a partner, in a relationship-based coaching approach, the influences of both the project model and Educare as a Lab School & Learning Hub to influence *Beyond the Walls* were quickly taking shape. Additionally, the Educare Learning Network supports 12 Educare Schools across the country and engages the successes of the pilot's central Maine rural childcare partnership model.
5. [Coastal Enterprises, Inc.](#) was successful in their 2019 federal grant application, launching the development of child care businesses in Maine's underserved rim counties. Educare Central Maine was the 'incubator' for the start-up design and approach of this initiative with Elevate Somerset recognized implementation success of related core features.



REPLICATION

Every Project Will Look Somewhat Different

Based on the success of the *Elevate Maine/Somerset Project*, it is anticipated that other early childhood education and care projects will be initiated in Maine, replicating identified core features and strategies. Depending on the community, every project will look somewhat different since each will reflect the culture and the resources in place.

Replication - Critical Components and Observations

1. Before initiating a new project, substantial work must be done to assess community needs, existing resources, and areas where additional resources are required.
2. Trust is critical to getting buy-in from the community, families, and providers. Building relationships through “boots on the ground” is hard work but essential to building trust.
3. Community education is an enormous factor in project success. Staff and parent participation in community organizations is vital to build awareness of the importance of early childhood care and education.
4. Data gathering must begin as the project gets organized and is ongoing throughout the project. Only by measuring actual achievements can mid-course corrections occur and project expenditures be justified.



Relationships form the foundation of our work. We know that building successful partnerships requires strong relationships, built on honest, strengths-based, and reflective communication.

--Sarah Lavallee, Program Director, Early Head Start, KVCAP

Strategies that Work

1. *Full-Day Programs:* In several studies, results show that providing full-day (7 hours/day) rather than part-day services leads to better outcomes for children. ²¹
2. *Commitment to Collaboration:* Coordination with partners, such as Early Head Start, Providers, public schools, and other community service organizations, support the healthy development of infants and young children by helping their parents and families be knowledgeable and responsive caregivers. ²²
3. *Assisting Providers and Families to Access Resources:* The myriad sources of information, available assistance, and eligibility criteria are bewildering to many. Provider and parent partnership relationships greatly assist in helping match needs and resources.
4. *High Quality Teaching and Support Staff:* Just as providers need ongoing education, so do staff. Every staff position benefits from training and reflective practices in high quality teaching practices, embedded professional development, intensive family engagement, and data utilization. Here are some of the layers of staff needed:
 - Early Childhood Coaches
 - Teachers, Mentor Teachers, Assistants and Substitutes
 - Family Service Coordinators or Home Visitors
 - Content Specialists (Infant/Toddler Health & Nutrition, Education, Mental Health, Disabilities, and Family Services)
5. *Parents as Classroom Volunteers:* Almost 3,000 current and former Head Start parents volunteered in Maine Head Start classrooms in the 2015–2016 program year, making up more than two-thirds of all classroom

volunteers. ²³ Assisting in the classroom helps the provider, builds community, and models effective strategies to better interact with their children.

6. *Active Participation in Other Organizations:* Regular attendance at local, regional, and state-level meetings such as Maine Roads to Quality, Maine Children's Cabinet, and higher education consortiums build support for early childhood care and education initiatives.
7. *Consistent messaging:* Messaging that combines economic benefits with better child outcomes leads to support from a multitude of allies and advocates that did not exist previously. It's not just the child that benefits, we are all better off.

Challenges across the Early Childhood System in Maine

1. *Insufficient Funded Openings:* There is funding for less than a quarter of potentially income-eligible children. Furthermore, because income is not the only indicator of eligibility (others include homelessness and foster child status), the number of actual eligible enrollees is much higher. So, the gap between need and children served is much higher. ²³
2. *Barriers to Serving Eligible Families:* In addition to limited funding, other barriers exist. Maine Head Start Directors cite low-income families often experience transportation challenges, mismatches between program hours and families' work schedules, and the intensity of program expectations around attendance and participation as barriers to families' initial and continued enrollment. ²³
3. *Childcare Subsidy Process:* The current two-step process and long wait times for childcare subsidies are an obstacle to parent employment. It must be simplified to allow families to quickly access childcare so they can access employment opportunities. Other states have used presumptive eligibility processes with trusted community organizations, or contracts for subsidized slots that include comprehensive services for priority families (e.g. families experiencing homelessness, children with special needs).
4. *Lack of Care Continuity:*
 - a. Uninterrupted care is an ongoing issue as families move, experience transportation problems, and/or employment changes, sometimes interrupting their funding for childcare.
 - b. Gaps for services to 3-year-olds is an identified issue. To enroll, children entering Early Head Start are required to be income eligible per Federal Poverty Guidelines 2020 ²⁶ (e.g. \$26,200 for a family of four or under) and subsidy eligible. Once enrolled, through the use of project funding supports, children are able to stay enrolled regardless of income and eligibility. After being enrolled in the program, many families have huge gains, one of which is often increased income. This is to be celebrated! However due to state policy, sometimes referred to as the "Subsidy Cliff," this may prohibit the child from transitioning to a Pre-K option at age three. State Department of Education funding only provides Pre-K funding for 4-year-olds, and only some school districts offer this.
5. *Other Family Challenges:* Family surveys show that access, quality affordable childcare, adequate health insurance, and dental care were the areas identified as most common challenges.
6. *Workforce Retention:* About 13% of Maine's Head Start teachers and 10% of Early Head Start teachers departed Early/Head Start during the 2015–2016 program year. Among teachers who left, 28% left to seek higher compensation and/or benefits in the same field. [*Head Start Workforce **UNH Maine Head Start Report, 2017*]. In 2016, national figures show that the median preschool teacher salary is \$28,570 a year, or about half (52 %) of the median elementary-school teacher salary. Childcare workers, mostly women who work in more informal settings (what many refer to as 'daycare'), earn a median salary of just \$20,320 a year, leaving them living at or below the poverty line. ²⁴
7. By design, data from this Project is based on a small sample size. Caution has been used in sharing the preliminary data to assure conclusions are based on solid evidence. Investing in more research in Maine is key.



RESOURCES

A growing number of advocacy and policy partners in Maine and beyond are promoting quality early care and education based on shared research-based messaging and communications. Below are state and national resources that MELIG and others now turn to for insight.

IN MAINE

1. **Alfond NextGen Baby Scholarship**, every baby born a Maine resident will have a \$500 Alfond Grant automatically invested for his or her future higher education expenses. That means a head start on a bright future! <https://www.nextgenforme.com/grants-for-maine-residents/alfond-grant/>
2. **Educare Central Maine**, a high-quality early learning and development center partnering with families and communities to ensure school readiness for children from birth to age five, connected to a national network of Educare Schools as a platform for change. A Lab School and Learning Hub promoting quality and collaborative partnerships to broadly influence early care and education. <http://www.educarecentralmaine.org/>
3. **Educate Maine**, a statewide organization advancing education policies and practices that prepare Maine students to be the next generation of productive, engaged citizens. Educate Maine's *Early Childhood Policy Brief*. <http://www.educatemaine.org/docs/EarlyChildhood-Policy-Brief-2016-FINAL.pdf>
4. **Family Child Care Association of Maine**, a statewide organization of providers who operate small home family childcare businesses and understand their critical role in the lives of children and families and the hard work and long hours that are required to provide the much needed child care services in Maine's diverse communities. <https://fccamaine.com/>
5. **Fight Crime Invest in Kids – Council for a Strong America (Maine)**, a national and statewide advocacy organization dedicated to bringing the voices of military and business leaders to the prevention and early childhood education conversation. <https://www.strongnation.org/readynation>
6. **First 4 for ME**, a legislative bill designed to build upon the Elevate/Maine Project through supply and access to quality early care and education for Maine's infants, toddlers, and preschool aged children. This community-based approach to comprehensive health, social services, and quality childcare is articulated in LD 1760. https://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/bills/bills_129th/billtexts/SP059201.asp
7. **John T. Gorman Foundation**, a Maine-based foundation with a focus on strategic grant-making, investing in ideas that address the causes of problems, and becoming a resource on four key issues including the goal to improve educational achievement for young Maine children. <https://www.jtgfoundation.org/resources-and-publications/young-children/>
8. **Maine Association for the Education of Young Children (Maine AEYC)**, the leading state and national organization promoting and advancing high-quality early learning for all children, birth through age 8, by connecting practice, policy, and research. www.maineaeyc.org
9. **Maine Children's Alliance**, working to advance policies that benefit children and families in Maine. <http://www.mekids.org/>
10. **Maine Department of Education**, in collaboration with educators, schools, districts and communities Statewide, strives to provide all Maine students access to educational experiences, Pre-K through adult, that lead to their success in life and career. <https://www.maine.gov/doe/home>

11. **Maine Early Learning Investment Group (MELIG)**, a group of business leaders who know the success of Maine's economy depends upon well-educated, skilled and innovative workers. They also know children's early experiences provide the foundation for success in school and work. <http://educatemaine.org/>
12. **Maine Head Start Directors**, a statewide group of Directors of organizations that provide comprehensive services to children and families of primarily low income and high needs, and includes a substructure of Content Specialist groups for an efficient approach to services throughout Maine with respect to the various cultures that exist in communities. <https://www.maine.gov/doe/learning/earlychildhood/headstart>
13. **Maine Roads to Quality**, Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network (MRTQ PDN) works with stakeholders across Maine to promote and support professionalism in the early care and education field to improve quality through the provision of a statewide system of professional development. MRTQ PDN consists of a partnership between the [Cutler Institute](#) at the University of Southern Maine, the [University of Maine Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies](#), and the [Maine Afterschool Network](#). <https://mrtq.org/>
14. **MaineSpark**, links people from every economic and educational background who are pursuing their goals with member organizations that provide support and services. Whether preparing a child for a bright future, getting ready to start work toward or complete a degree or credential, looking to switch careers, or considering a move to Maine, MaineSpark connects people to a network of beneficial resources. <https://mainespark.me/>
15. **Maine Women's Lobby**, working to improve the economic, social, and political status of women and girls in Maine through research, public policy, and leadership development. See their report on the access to and the value of quality childcare. <http://mainewomenspolicycenter.org/investinginourfuturereportrelease/>
16. **Technical Assistance Competencies for Maine's Early Childhood Workforce** (2017), developed to define the relevant knowledge, skills, and dispositions required by Technical Assistance (TA) professionals who support early childhood practitioners (serving prenatal through age 8) in Maine. They support an integrated, cross-system and cross-sector professional development system: a system whose ultimate goal is to provide high quality services to young children and their families. <https://www.educarecentralmaine.org/for-educators/maines-technical-assistance-competencies/>

Through extensive connections at local, state, and national levels, the collective "we" can and will make the positive changes necessary to improve and support early care and education.
--Tracye Fortin, Executive Director Educare Central Maine, Child & Family Services Director, KVCAP

NATIONAL

1. **Alliance for Early Success**, a national catalyst organization of leaders bringing state, national, and funding partners together to improve state policies for children, starting at birth and continuing through age eight. Their "Making the Case" resources are excellent. <http://earlysucces.org/resources/resource-search>
2. **Children's Funding Project**, strengthens the capacity of communities to find, align, generate and evaluate their funding by providing training, tools, and coaching. <https://www.childrensfundingproject.org/>
3. **Educare Schools and the Educare Learning Network**, working to ensure Educare Schools serve as a demonstration site and program to bolster local and state policies and investments in high-quality early care and education prioritizing quality teaching and ongoing professional development, evaluation, and effective parent engagement. <https://www.educareschools.org/>

4. **Family Childcare Network Staffing Cost Estimation Tool User's Guide**, designed to assist state, regional, and local organizations in better understanding the costs associated with operating a staffed Family Child Care program. Those seeking to expand an existing network of collaborative partners for pooling resources to meet the needs of family childcare providers may also find the tool helpful. https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/fccn_cost_estimation_tool_user_guide_0.pdf
5. **First Five Years Fund**, working to sustain and expand the support for early learning that exists at the federal level, while identifying and advancing new and innovative ways to increase access to high-quality early childhood education for children from low-income families. <https://www.ffyf.org/>
6. **James Heckman, The Economics of Human Potential**. <https://heckmanequation.org/>
7. **Office of Head Start**, the federal administration since 1965 that administers grant funding and oversight to the agencies that provide Head Start services, including the Early Head Start:Child Care Partnership grants. OHS also provides federal policy direction and a training and technical assistance (T/TA) system to assist grantees in providing comprehensive services to eligible young children and their families. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ohs>
8. **Ounce of Prevention Fund**, an advocacy organization striving to give children in poverty the best chance for success in school and in life by advocating for and providing the highest-quality care and education to children from birth to age five. <https://www.theounce.org/>
9. **Pritzker Children's Initiative**, supporting efforts to better understand the impact of policies and programs on the developmental outcomes of at-risk infants and toddlers. <http://pritzkerchildrensinitiative.org/research/>
10. **W.K. Kellogg Foundation**, which focuses on three areas of focused work – Thriving Children, Working Families, and Equitable Communities. <https://www.wkcf.org/what-we-do/overview>
11. **Zero to Three**, a national resource hub designed to see a world in which society has the knowledge and will to support all infants and toddlers in reaching their full potential. <https://www.zerotothree.org/about/our-mission-and-vision>

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17. Technical Assistance Competencies for Early Childhood Workforce, 2017
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Family Story – Stacy Pierpont

Dean came into my care when he was a year old. After trying several other daycare settings that didn't meet his needs, I heard of this program through a case manager and when there was an opening, he began here.

I took him out of a bad situation and I was not going to put him back into another one. (Before), Dean would come home every day with an injury – bite marks, bruises, scratches. Teachers gave him Kool Aid instead of water.

But after Dean enrolled in the Elevate Maine/Somerset - Early Head Start program, I started seeing differences in his behavior almost immediately because someone was working closely with him. He had many challenges and fears and his teacher worked with me to set goals for him so we could be a team here and at home. He was afraid of the vacuum cleaner – terrified, they got a toy vacuum and taught him that it was safe and fun. I was doing the same thing at home and before I knew it, he was vacuuming at home, not afraid anymore. He was terrified of water as well, but in the program, he had the opportunity to play with water in the sensory table and I think that really helped him.

He was in the program for a year and a half. I would sit with him in the mornings when he would have breakfast there. I became a Policy Council representative and got to learn more about the whole program, and really started to feel even more confident as I saw Dean's progress. Teachers would ask if I wanted to do this for a living. I brushed it off at first, but then Dean moved on to Head Start and when I saw a flyer for free substitute training, I needed training for being a foster parent anyway and I thought why not.

I ended up subbing for three months in 2018 and when I heard about an opening, I wanted that spot and started working for KVCAP. As a provider, now, I like being here a lot and the way the program teaches the teachers. Learning techniques of working with children helps me in my work and at home. It has been a good experience so far and hopefully it continues. I have plans and goals to be here for a while. The level of caring about not only the child, but the family in this program is what made the difference. Dean gained a lot of social skills, which was really important to me, and learned how to be around kids his age. He would get frustrated and he would hit – this was the only way he knew how to communicate his frustration. We started teaching him "hitting is not okay – high five instead."

We set goals and there was communication between parents and teachers. If Dean was struggling, I could always come to the teacher and talk about it to figure out how to work on it together. The teamwork with the teachers in setting goals and following through was so important. Teachers teach children friendly behaviors and give Dean a moment with his frustration to work through it. He was behind on his speech, and they gave him some sign language to use. This helped him to communicate his needs better. They gave him patience and attention and nurtured him when I couldn't be with him. This is what every parent wants. When we can't be there, we want someone to step in with the same nurturing ability and guidance. The positive contact with his peers was also something that he got in the program.

I don't hear about him hitting any more – now he is the class clown, trying to get others to laugh. He is really good at communicating his feelings now. He understands when others are sad, and when he is frustrated, he uses words like, "You make me mad," instead of hitting. This program has given my son what he needs and it has given me what I need too.

I was afraid that I would never find something like this for Dean and I would have to quit work. We were barely getting by financially to begin with, I was not getting enough hours, missing work, having to bring him with me was difficult also. But now, I keep up on my bills, I can decrease my debt and after my tax return this year, I will eliminate my debt. My home life is better because I can do more, financially for my kids, goal setting to purchase a house and more income for my family. I think it has helped that they ask my husband about his goals too, not just mine. He is part of this too. Finding this program was the best thing for him and for me!

The program's staff helped me through the whole experience with foster care. They had experience with this and it was all new to me. Any of the staff would be there to talk to a parent about what they need, allow them to share what they need to, good or bad. There is a lot of caring here.

(2019)

Provider Story - Darlene Steeves

Since enrolling as a HomeStart provider, Darlene appreciates the weekly visits from her Coach the most. Darlene embraces meal times as an opportunity to have rich interactions with the children as they sit together.

"I got started in childcare with the birth of my youngest son. I watched a couple of kids when my son was born in 1998. In the year 2000, we purchased a brand new double wide home and I became licensed through the state. In 2004, I hired a helper and together we cared for 12 kids. I took classes and earned my CDA. In 2007, I decided to close and worked as a Special Education Ed Tech in the school system. Initially working with 7th and 8th graders, then my last school year with 1st grade and kindergarten. While working in the school system, I took online classes through the University of Phoenix and graduated with my Associates Degree in 2010.

I decided to open my childcare back up in 2014 to be able to care for my grandson. I became a (Elevate Somerset) HomeStart provider in 2015 and it has been wonderful. The HomeStart program has been a true asset with all the funding and support they provide. I was able to build a nature-based play yard for the children and provide a lot of educational supplies and curriculum for the children with the funding they have provided me.

The weekly visits from my HomeStart Coordinator have been very helpful. My coordinator provides support, resources, supplies and coaching where it may be needed. HomeStart program encourages professional education and growth so I am looking into earning my bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education. I would highly recommend to any other childcare providers to join HomeStart. "

Risk Factor Data for Somerset County (Continued from page 14)

Family instability, single parenthood, unemployment and low educational status are central to perpetuating the cycle of poverty and poor child outcomes in this region of Maine.

- The overall poverty rate in Skowhegan is 29.3% compared to the county rate of 17.8% and the state rate of 12.9%.
- The overall unemployment rate in Somerset County is 5% compared to the state rate of 3%. However, over 10% of all 20 to 35 year olds were unemployed (ME Department of Labor), the adults most likely to be raising young children.
- Only 16% of adults have a bachelor's degree or higher in Skowhegan compared to 30% stateside (2017 Census Update).
- 38% of working adults, who live in Skowhegan, make under \$20,000 where the median household income is \$29,900. This compares with statewide median household income \$53,000 (2017 Census Update); 24.28% of which make under \$15,000.
- Somerset County has the highest rate of substantiated child abuse and neglect in Maine with over 80% of all cases involving children age 4 and under according to the Maine Department of Health and Human Services. In general, the rate of physical child abuse has risen almost 50% between 2010 and 2015 statewide.
- Children age 5 and under living in poverty rose between 2006 and 2016; in married families, 30.4% of young children lived in poverty and 41% in single mother homes (2017 Census Update). Scholar Mark S. Barajas of Western Michigan University, concluded in 2011 that, "children from single-parent homes score lower on tests of cognitive functioning and standardized tests, receive lower grade point averages, and complete fewer years of school when compared to children from two-parent homes."