

earlychildhoodalliance  
ONONDAGA



**2021**  
ANNUAL REPORT

# Dear Friends,

In “The Very Hungry Caterpillar,” beloved children’s author Eric Carle tells the story of a caterpillar becoming a beautiful butterfly. Thinking about this magical process, one has to wonder; how did the caterpillar know it was the right moment to become the butterfly? How does anyone know when the moment for change has truly arrived? When does a community know the time has come to move in a new direction that will result in better outcomes for all?

For Onondaga County, that call to change came in 2015, when local early childhood stakeholders confronted the hard truth that too many children were arriving to school unprepared and the majority were failing to read on grade level by third grade. It was time to do the difficult work of transforming into a community that invests in families and provides our youngest children with the conditions for optimal child development. We knew we could no longer wait for the state or federal government to make the transformational investments our early childhood system sorely needed. If it was going to happen, it was up to us as a local community, and thus the Early Childhood Alliance (ECA) was born.

In the seven years since our launch, the ECA has worked to bring together community leaders, early childhood stakeholders, and families to identify gaps, secure resources, and begin the hard work of building a more cohesive system of supports for children and families. We have benefited from strong engagement from Onondaga County, philanthropic partners, and the business community. We are proud of our widespread partner engagement in ECA committees and of the parents participating in our Parent Advisory Council. We especially want to lift up the leadership of County Executive Ryan McMahan, who embraced early childhood as a key strategy in his anti-poverty initiatives and has been steadfast in his support for early literacy, child care, and ending generational poverty.

In the following pages, you will read about the work the ECA and our partners have collectively advanced and the many ways our initiatives are making an impact on families and providers. You’ll see data that quantifies the reach of our work and stories that qualitatively bring that work to life. As you look through the report, you will see that we have come a long way on our transformational journey to a more equitable early childhood system, but there is still much work to be done to put all children on the right path for school readiness and life-long success.

As we write this letter, there continues to be more talk than action at the national level when it comes to transformative investments in our early childhood system, but there is still hope. Maybe we will look back at 2022 as the year that young children and their families became the top priority, transforming our nation’s early childhood system into a beautiful butterfly. While the future remains unclear, we will continue to move forward locally. We will continue to pull together partners who are ready to invest in and grow strategies that promote healthy children, strong families, and high quality early learning. We hope you will join with us as we recommit ourselves to transforming into a community where all children are healthy, thriving, and ready to succeed in school and life.



**Laurie Black**  
*Director, Early Childhood Alliance*



**Meg O’Connell**  
*Executive Director, Allyn Family Foundation  
Chair, ECA Leadership Council*



**Steve Gorczynski**  
*CNY Regional President, M&T Bank  
Chair, ECA Business Council*



*The ECA moved into our new home at the Salt City Market at 484 South Salina Street in July. Our offices are on the second floor, co-located with the Allyn Family Foundation and the Good Life Youth Foundation.*





# About the ECA

## MISSION



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

## VISION



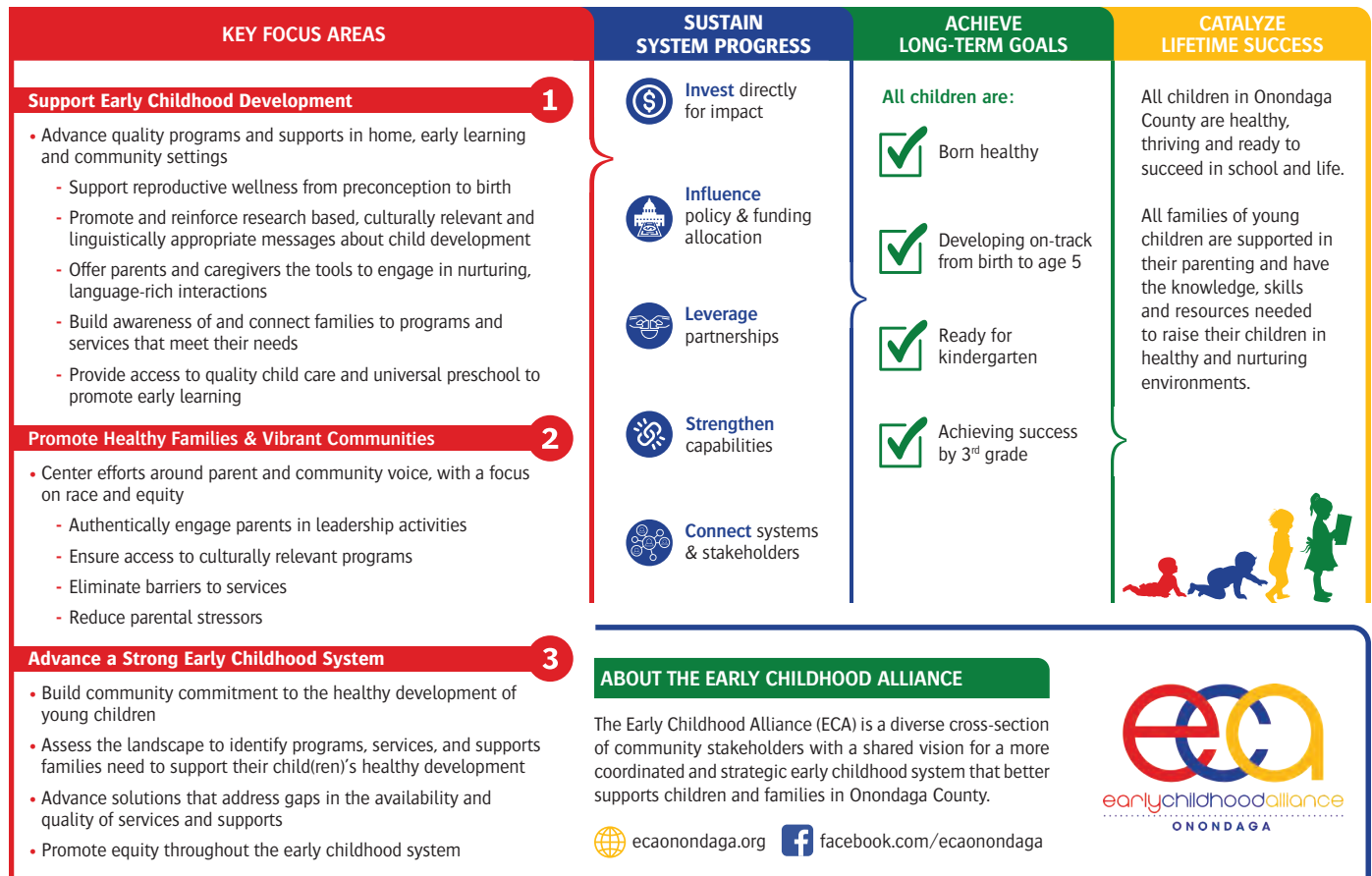
All young children in Onondaga County are healthy, thriving, and successful in school and life; and all families of young children are supported in their parenting and have the knowledge, skills, confidence, and resources they need to raise their children in healthy and nurturing environments.

## VALUES



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

## The ECA Theory of Change



# Our Priorities

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The ECA is committed to advocating for and achieving equity by advancing an anti-racist early childhood system, ensuring that all children in Onondaga County are born healthy and reach their full potential. Our priorities include:



Promoting optimal child development for all children



Advancing high quality early literacy environments for all children



Improving quality across all child care providers



Advancing reproductive well-being for all women



Increasing family & community engagement in early childhood system building



Enhancing the quality of supports for the early childhood workforce



Influencing the early childhood system to advance improved outcomes for children & families

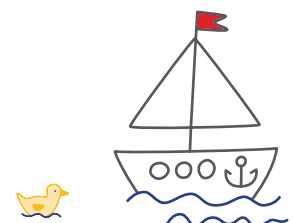
## Centering Equity In Early Childhood System Building .....

Ensuring that all babies and children thrive in Onondaga County means that we address all forms of disparity impacting the lives and well-being of families. Putting words into action, we must work toward dismantling the barriers that prevent us from realizing the vision we have for our community and commit to:

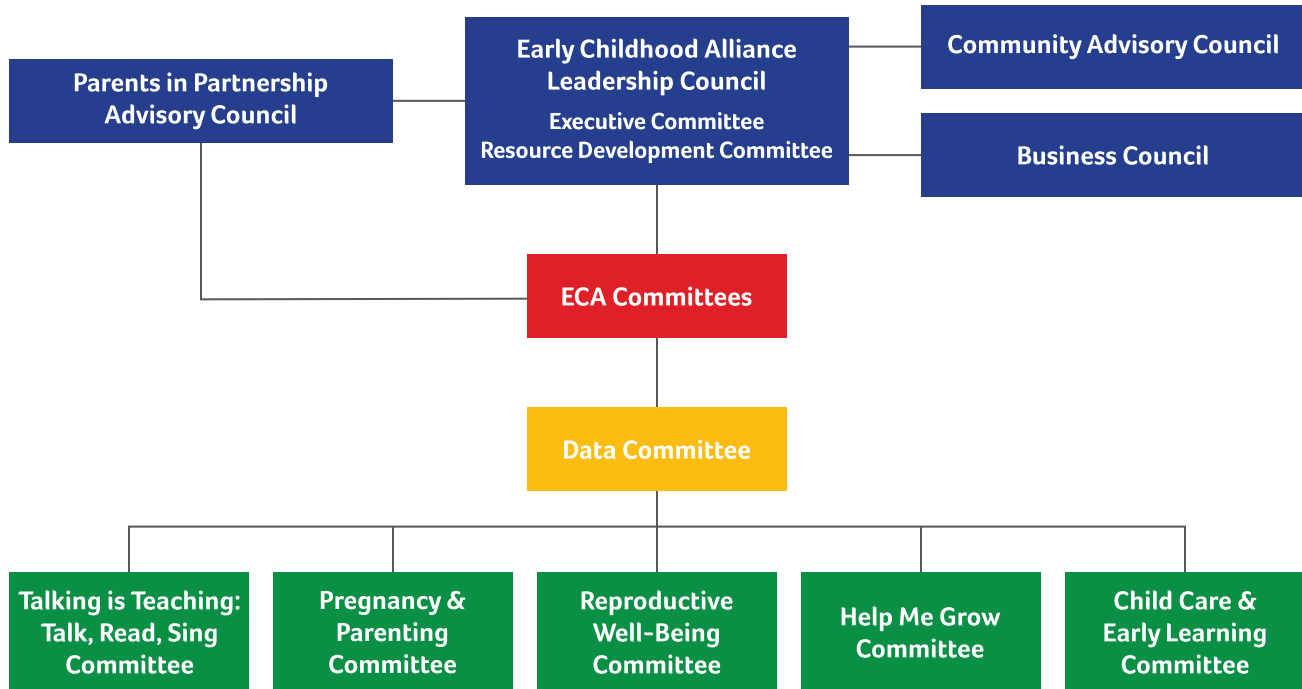
- Being a culturally diverse coalition that works for equity of access to opportunities and resources and promotes anti-racist policies that allow all families and young children to reach their full potential.
- Centering families and their voices in our work and striving to include parents as equal partners in designing and implementing policies and programs. We prioritize racial equity at the forefront and fully embrace parents as leaders.
- Advancing data-informed programs that are transparent and subject to critical analysis.
- Working with state and local governments to ensure funding is targeted to those most vulnerable and marginalized.

“Equity is fairness and justice achieved through systematically assessing disparities in opportunities, outcomes, and representation and redressing [those] disparities through targeted actions.”

**Urban Strategies Council**



# ECA Committee Infrastructure

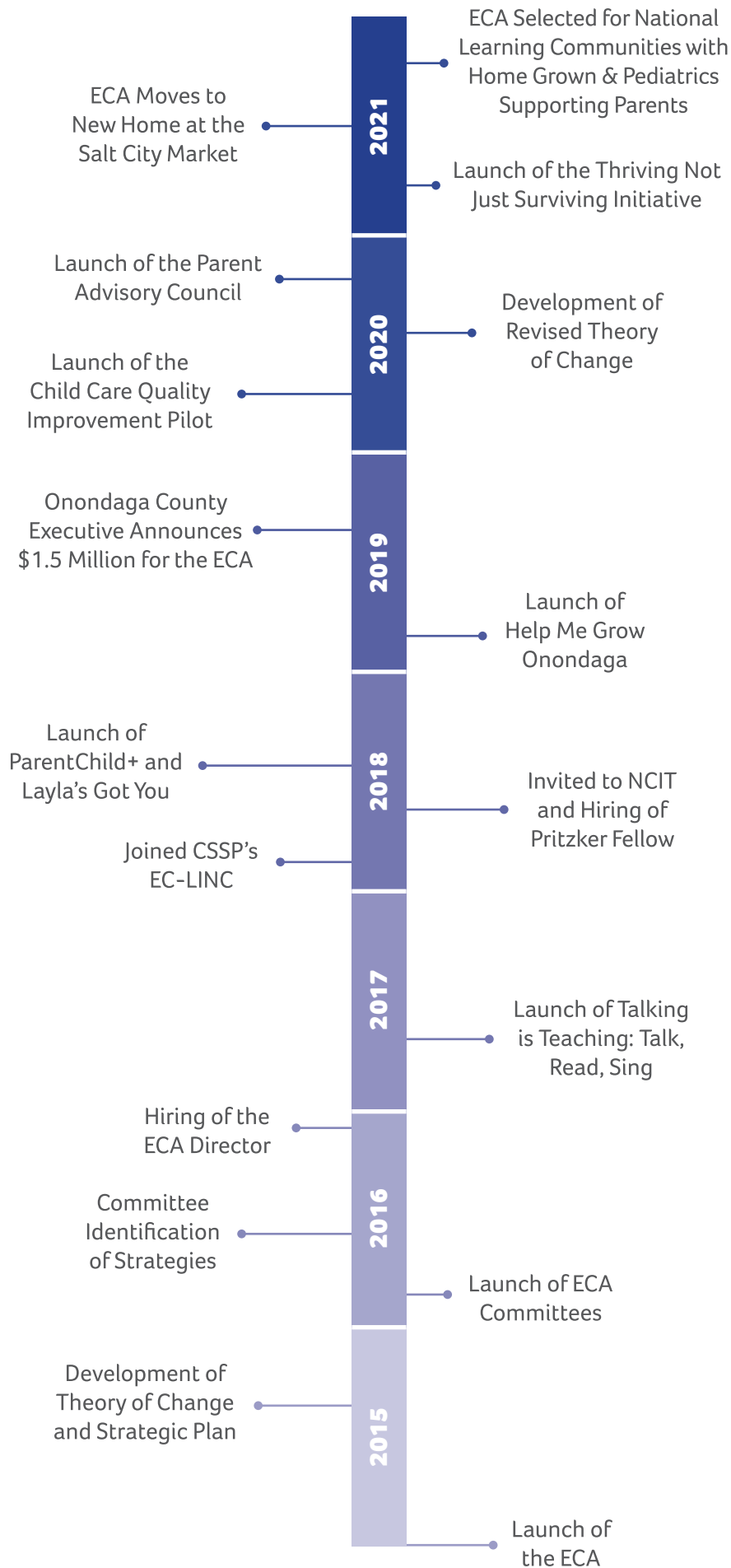


..... “ .....

*Healthy and positive child development emerges best in the context of nurturing, warm, and responsive early parent/caregiver child relationships, when children are surrounded by safe communities with strong trust and social connectedness.*

**Center for the Study of Social Policy**

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## Our First Seven Years

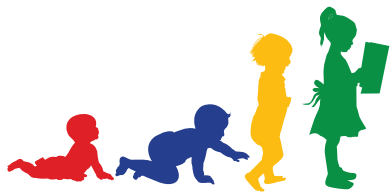
The Early Childhood Alliance (ECA) was launched in 2015 at the recommendation of the Onondaga Citizens League (OCL), following the release of their 2013-14 study entitled, Early Childhood and School Readiness: Creating a Community Where All Children Thrive by Five.

One of the biggest challenges revealed by the study was the lack of a strategic, systematic approach to early childhood issues. While the study found many helpful services operating in the area, it also revealed that a lack of coordination and collaborative goal-setting limited the potential impact on young children and families. The primary reason for formalizing the ECA was to bring community leaders, early childhood stakeholders, and families together to build a cohesive system of supports.

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

The timeline at left outlines major accomplishments and milestones achieved in our first seven years.

# Community Context



**30,597**  
children 0-5  
in Onondaga  
County (2020)

**11,077**  
children 0-5  
in the city of  
Syracuse (2020)



**1 in 5** children  
in Onondaga County  
live in poverty (2019)

**50%** of the  
children in Syracuse  
live in poverty (2019)

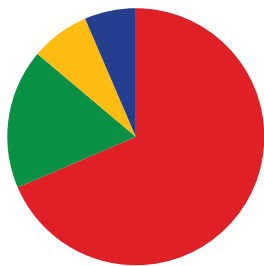


**\$268** Weekly cost  
of center-based care for  
an infant in Onondaga  
County (2022)

**\$514** Weekly cost  
of center-based care for  
an infant and a toddler in  
Onondaga County (2022)



## Number of Births in Onondaga County Per Year (3 Year Average, 2015-17)



■ White: 3,323 ■ Hispanic: 359  
■ Black: 853 ■ Asian/Pacific Islander: 313



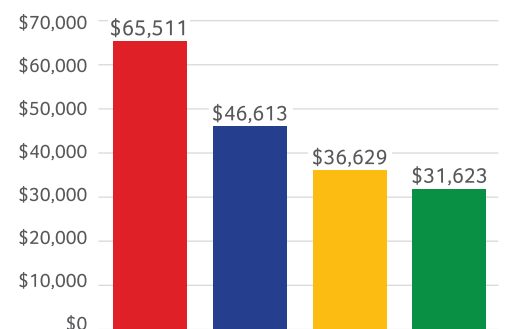
**70.4%** Percentage of children  
in Onondaga County under the  
age of six with all parents in the  
household in the workforce (2019)

**63.6%** Percentage of children  
in the city of Syracuse under the  
age of 6 with all parents in the household  
in the workforce (2019)



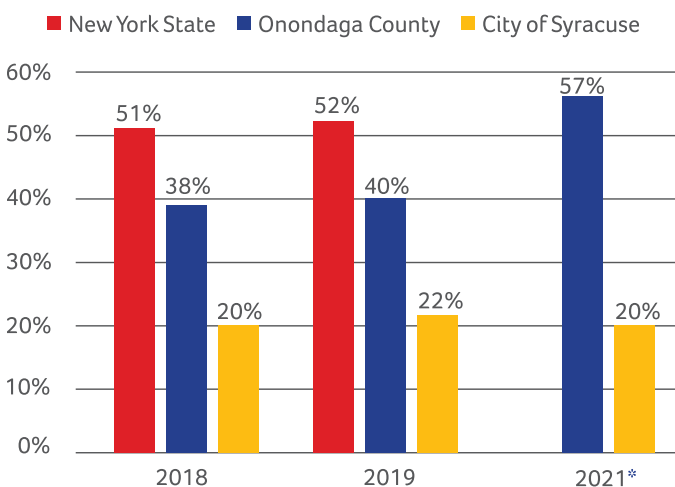
*\*This data point can be used as a direct measure of the demand for child care in a given community.*

## Median Household Income in Onondaga County (2014-18)



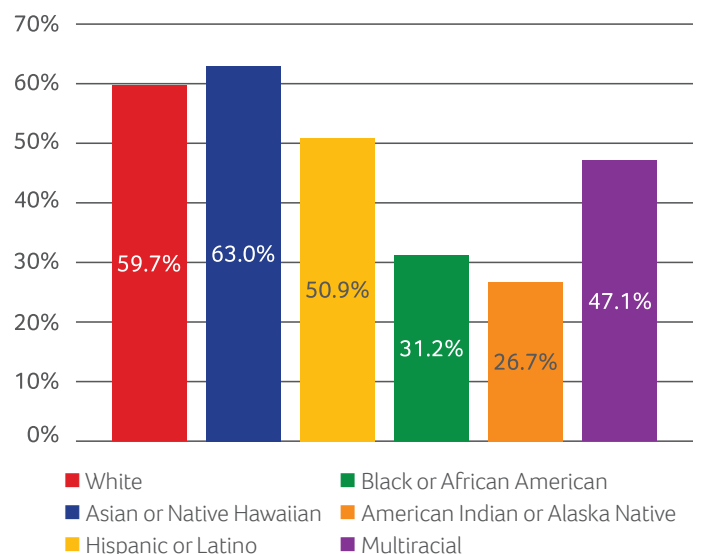
■ White ■ Asian/Pacific Islander ■ Hispanic ■ Black

## Percentage of 3rd Graders Meeting New York State ELA Standards (Scoring Level 3 or 4), 2018-2021



\*Statewide ELA scores are not available for 2021.

## Percentage of 3rd Graders in Onondaga County Meeting New York State ELA Standards (Scoring Level 3 or 4), 2021



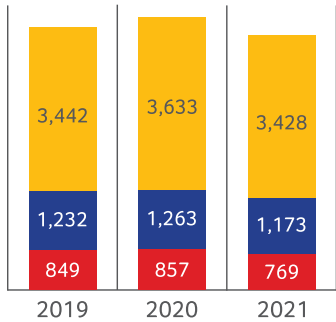
**Note:** Due to the extraordinary circumstances precipitated by the pandemic, approximately 4-in-10 enrolled students participated in state assessments in 2021. Because only 40% of student results are available, state assessments are not representative of the state's student population. The results should not be compared statewide, by statewide subgroup, or with prior year's results. In addition, assessments were not administered in 2020.



# Anchor Programs in Onondaga County

## Licensed & Registered Child Care Slots

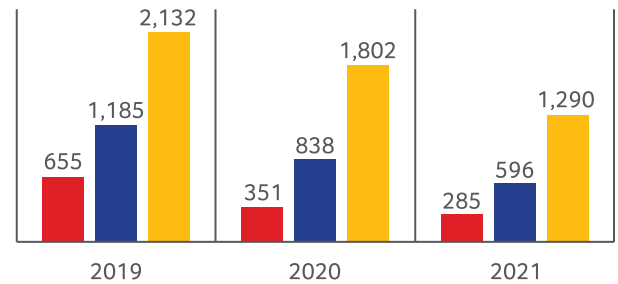
■ Infant ■ Toddler ■ Preschool



**Note:** Licensed and registered child care includes: day care centers, family day care homes, group family day care homes, and school age child care. In order to obtain a license or registration for a child care program, providers must meet minimum health, safety, nutrition, and training standards.

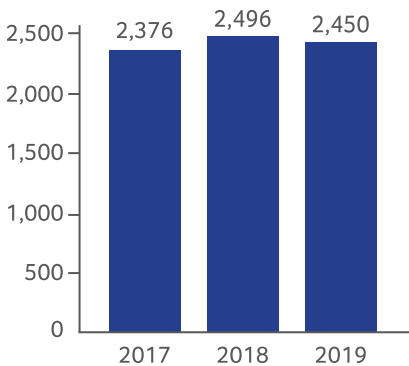
## Number of Children Receiving Child Care Subsidies

■ Infant ■ Toddler ■ Preschool



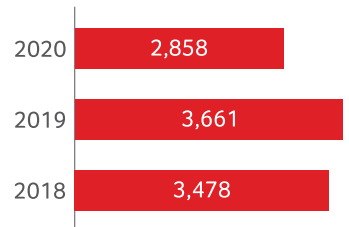
**Note:** Onondaga County distributes child care assistance through the Department of Social Service's subsidized child care programs. Subsidized child care is available for certain eligible parents/caretakers to enable them to work.

## Early Intervention Clients (Birth-Three)



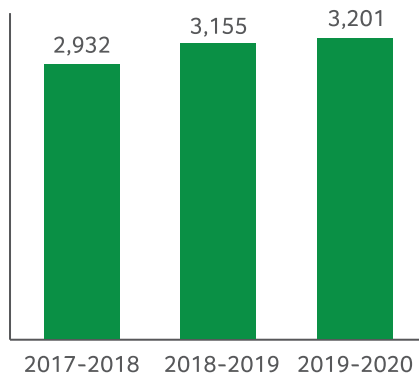
**Note:** Early Intervention Programs provide services to children ages birth to three who have been diagnosed with a disability, who are not learning and growing at the same rate as their peers, or who are at risk of developmental delays. The earlier a child receives services, the more time there is to influence positive outcomes.

## Preschool Special Ed Clients (Three-Four Years)



**Note:** Preschool Special Education Programs provide therapeutic and educational services for three and four-year-old children with developmental delays and strive to reduce the adverse effects of those delays.

## Number of Three & Four Year Olds Enrolled in State-Funded UPK



**Note:** UPK is publicly funded, high-quality preschool open to all children. UPK allows children of all socioeconomic and racial backgrounds the opportunity to attend a well-designed preschool program, leading to significant long and short-term benefits to their cognitive and social development.



**15,658** Children enrolled in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library in 2020.

**Note:** Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is a book-gifting program that mails free, high-quality, age appropriate books to children from birth to age five. The program strives to instill a love of reading at an early age while promoting rich home literacy environments.



**1,790** Home visiting clients (moms and infants) served in 2020 through Onondaga County's Healthy Families program.

**Sources (Pages 6 & 7):** Number of Children and Children in Poverty: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 and 2020 American Community Surveys; **Child Care Costs:** Child Care Solutions; **Births Per Year and Household Income:** New York State Department of Health - Onondaga County Health Indicators by Race/Ethnicity, 2015-2018; **Parents in the Workforce:** U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates; **Child Care Slots and Subsidies:** Child Care Solutions; **Early Intervention & Preschool Special Education:** Onondaga County Health Department, 2019 and 2020 Annual Reports; **UPK:** NYS Education Department; **Imagination Library:** Literacy Coalition of Onondaga County; **Home Visiting:** Onondaga County Health Department 2020 Annual Report



# Poverty Impacting Child Development in Onondaga County

A child raised in poverty faces additional barriers to optimal child development. In Onondaga County, one-in-five children are growing up in poverty and in the city of Syracuse, one-in-two children. In fact, Syracuse has one of the highest child poverty rates in the country - not a distinction we want for our community.

In order to overcome the many barriers and challenges facing families in poverty, we need to design effective supports that will help parents access the resources they need to be the best parents for their children. Strategies like the Federal and New York State Child Tax Credits are imperative to helping to mitigate the impact of poverty on families in our community.

In December 2021, Governor Kathy Hochul signed the Child Poverty Reduction Act, committing New York to cutting child poverty in half in ten years and providing the tools needed to achieve this bold goal. The Act establishes the Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council to develop a strategic plan and requires an annual public report of the effects of budget proposals on child poverty and regular reporting on progress.

The Children's Defense Fund (CDF-NY) estimates the annual cost of child poverty in the United States to be \$1.03 trillion, or around \$69,581 per child. That figure includes:

- Increased health costs
- Reduced earnings
- Increased costs associated with homelessness
- Increased costs associated with child welfare
- Increased criminal justice costs

Assuming that the per child cost of child poverty in Onondaga County is comparable to the per child cost of child poverty in the United States, CDF-NY estimates that the annual cost of child poverty in Onondaga County is around \$1.3 billion<sup>1</sup>.

## Poverty & Child Development

The following excerpts from a Child Trends publication<sup>2</sup> outline just a few of the many ways poverty can impact child health and development.

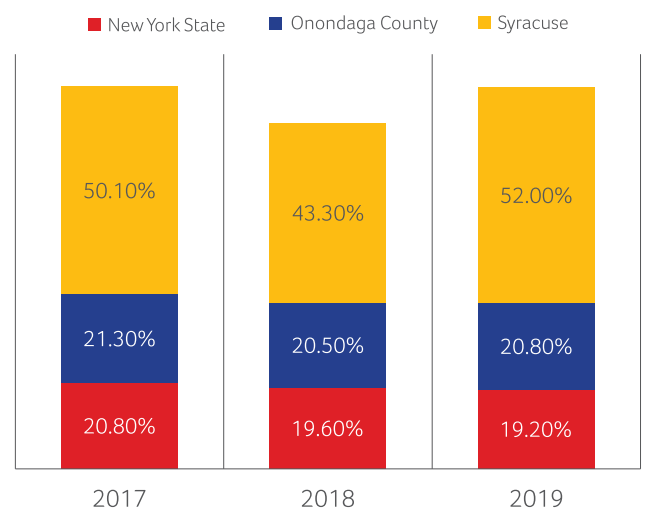
### Poverty Creates & Widens Achievement Gaps

Children growing up in poverty, when compared with their economically more secure peers, fall behind early. Starting in infancy, gaps are evident in key aspects of learning, knowledge, and social-emotional development. When left unaddressed, these early gaps become progressively wider.

### Poverty Has Negative Effects on Families and the Home Environment

Poor parents report higher stress, aggravation, and depressive symptoms than do higher-income parents. Children in poor families have fewer books and other educational resources at home, and they are less likely to experience family outings, activities, and programs that can enrich learning opportunities. Their families are more likely to experience housing instability.

## Child Poverty (Birth to Age 5)<sup>3</sup>



1. Children's Defense Fund-New York. *Child Poverty in Onondaga County*. Mar. 2021, <https://www.cdfny.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2021/05/Child-Poverty-in-Onondaga-County.pdf>.

2. Murphey, David, and Zakia Redd. "5 Ways Poverty Harms Children." *Child Trends*, 8 Jan. 2014, <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/5-ways-poverty-harms-children>.

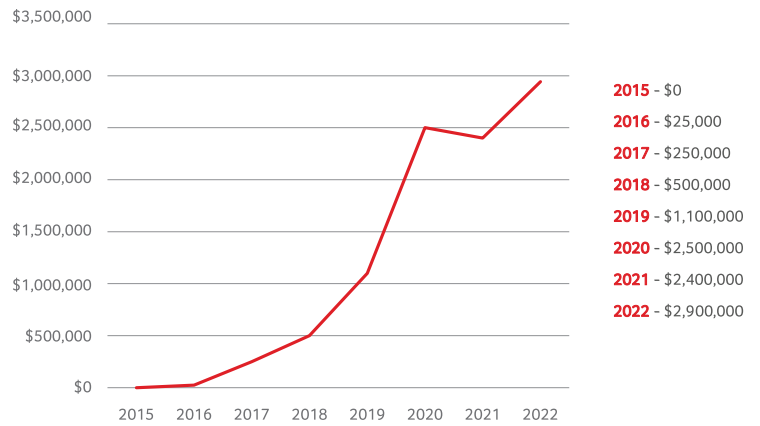
3. United States Census Bureau. "S1701 | Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months." *ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables*, 2017-2019, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=poverty&tid=ACSST1Y2019.S170>.

## Onondaga County: Leading Investments in Our Future .....

In 2019, County Executive Ryan McMahon announced his poverty reduction strategy for Onondaga County, which prioritized new investments in early childhood education. Included in his first proposed budget was \$1.5 million for initiatives of the ECA, including Help Me Grow, Talking is Teaching, and the Child Care Quality Improvement pilot.

Despite the impact of the pandemic in 2020, County Executive McMahon remained steadfast in his investments and proposed a second year of funding for early childhood in 2021. With that investment, the ECA was able to leverage an additional \$1 million in funding to expand our reach and impact. Funding support for the ECA has grown from \$2.5 million in 2020 to an estimated \$2.9 million in 2022. Throughout this report, you will see the impact that this collective investment is having on our early childhood system in Onondaga County.

### Annual Funding

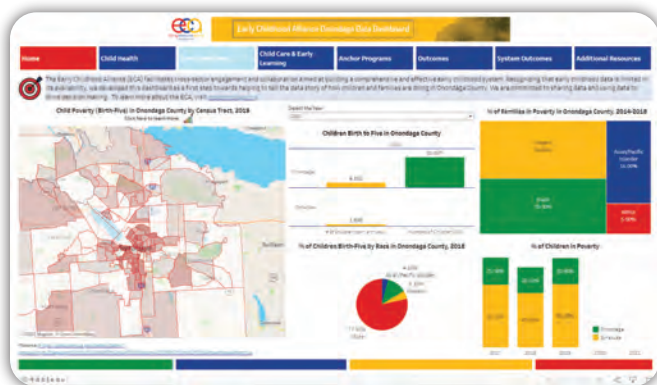


**Note:** Included in the County Executive's 2022 budget was \$1.5 million for Talking is Teaching, Help Me Grow Onondaga, ParentChild+, three child care quality pilots (a center-based initiative, a family child care home-based initiative, and a legally exempt care initiative), and an Early Childhood Parent Leadership initiative to engage parents in co-developing community level early childhood strategies.

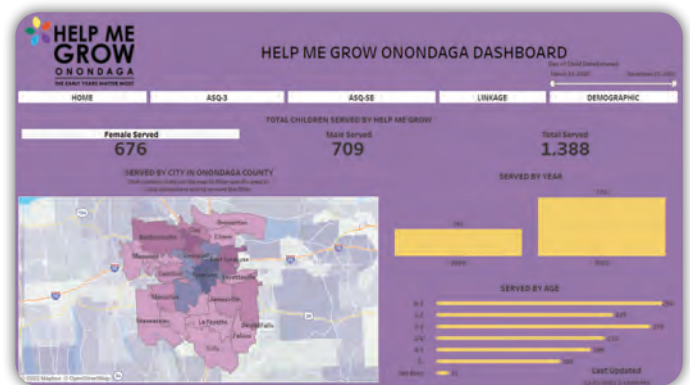
## Data Dashboards Showcase Disparities Across Race & Ethnicity .....

A key strategy in achieving a more equitable early childhood system is utilizing data to help inform the discussion about distribution and reach of programs. Right from birth, children in Onondaga County face differential outcomes in factors such as low birth weight, late or no prenatal care, and teenage and/or unmarried parents. Disparities in the frequency and impact of these factors persist between racial and ethnic groups, and we see those disparities reflected in the 3rd grade ELA and Math scores we monitor to assess the progress we are making as a community.

In May, the ECA began the process of making data more widely available to partners and families by launching the Help Me Grow data dashboard. In conjunction with this report, we are also releasing an ECA data dashboard that concentrates the range of early childhood data points in one location. The dashboards may be viewed at the links provided below.



**ECA Data Dashboard:** <https://tabsoft.co/3JOOSjF>



**HMG Data Dashboard:** <https://tabsoft.co/3va8wms>

# System Impact

Our success as an early childhood alliance continues to be our engagement with stakeholders from all levels of the early childhood system, as well as our increased visibility with state and national early childhood partners. In 2021, the ECA coordinated 48 meetings with more than 800 attendees (includes duplicates). We were also invited to participate in a number of statewide and national discussions and advocacy groups, deepening our understanding of system building and helping to showcase the work we’re doing locally.

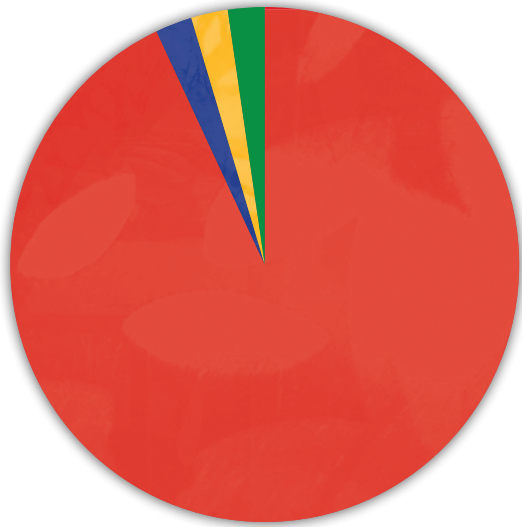


## Measuring Stakeholder Satisfaction.....

In November, the ECA asked our stakeholders to complete a satisfaction survey to help inform our work moving forward. The table below and the charts and quotes on the facing page summarize the feedback from 42 respondents.

Question	% Agree or Strongly Agree	
My understanding of the local early childhood system (i.e., its importance, complexity, and/or challenges) has improved as a result of my involvement with the ECA.	93%	(40/43)
My organization is better connected to other early childhood stakeholders as a result of our involvement with the ECA.	91%	(39/43)
Elected officials and community leaders demonstrate a deeper understanding of the local early childhood system (i.e., its importance, complexity, and/or challenges) as a result of the ECA’s work.	84%	(36/43)
The ECA is effective in securing new funding to support a strong early childhood system.	93%	(40/43)
The ECA is effective in identifying needs and gaps in our community’s early childhood system.	100%	(43/43)
The ECA is effective in leading community efforts to address needs and gaps within the early childhood system.	95%	(41/43)
The ECA is effective in engaging parents as partners in its work.	79%	(34/43)
On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate the ECA’s value to the community?	9.3 average	
The ECA convenes a diverse group of stakeholders with regard to professional sectors.	95%	(41/43)
The ECA convenes a diverse group of stakeholders with regard to race and ethnicity.	74%	(32/43)
On a scale of 1 to 10, how satisfied are you with the ECA’s work as a convenor and leader for the community’s early childhood system?	9.1 average	





**95%** of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that **Onondaga County is better off because the ECA exists in our community.**

- 93% Strongly Agree
- 2.3% Agree
- 2.3% Disagree
- 2.3% Not Sure

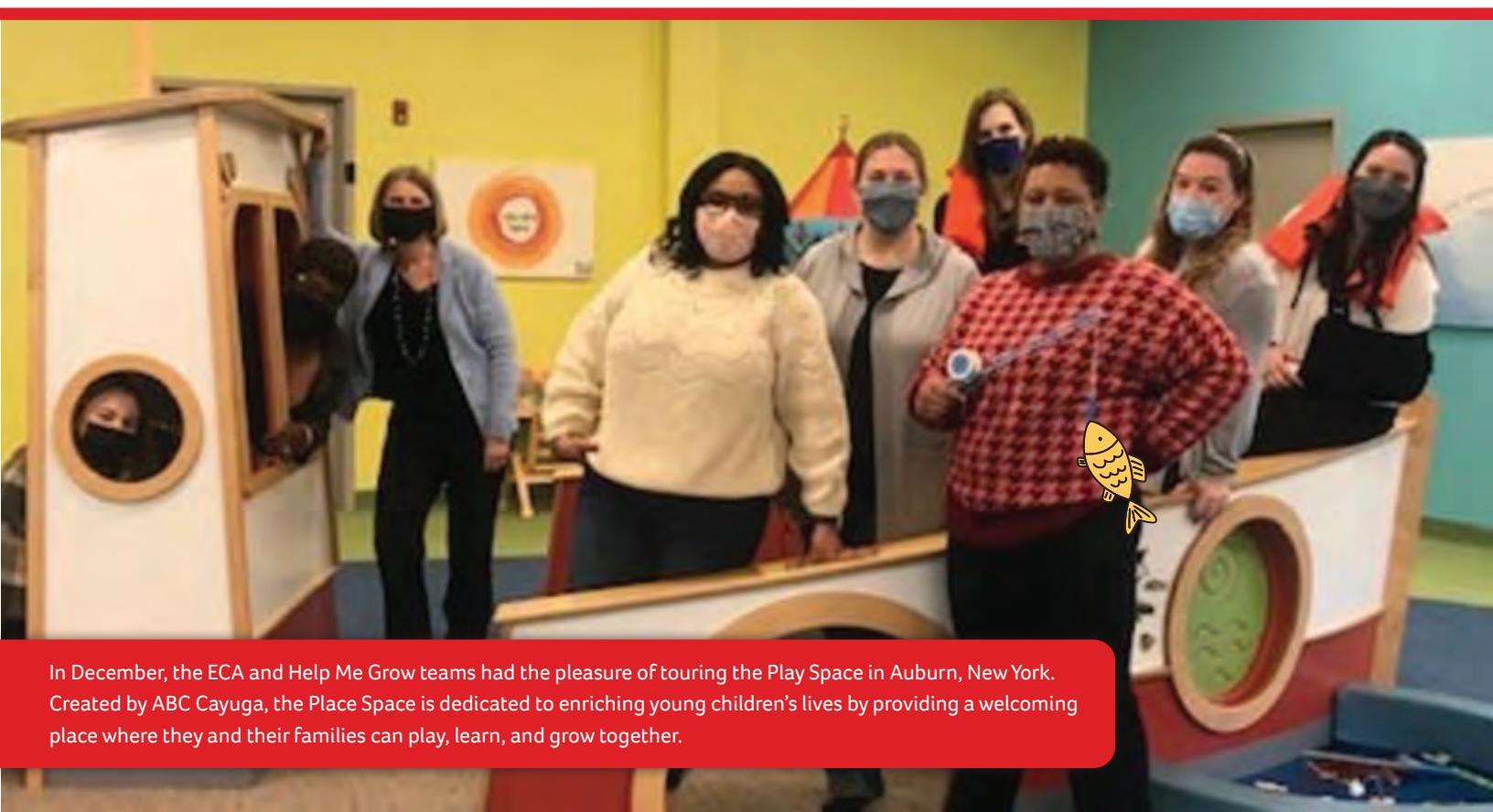
**65%** of survey respondents indicated that the ECA has **positively impacted how they do their work** and can identify at least one way that the ECA has **benefited their organization and/or the community.**



“ The ECA has done a great job at being a convenor... Pulling together public entities, private entities, founders, municipalities... and moving this forward. ”  
**Survey Respondent**

“ A big value is that coordination and bringing multiple people to the same table...Without that, we would just be doing the same thing we’ve always done...not really ever acting or working together. ”  
**Survey Respondent**

“ With the ECA, you feel like you’re investing your time and energy to make things happen and to really make a difference [for children and families]. ”  
**Survey Respondent**



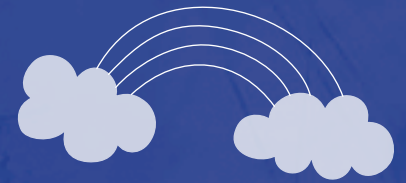
In December, the ECA and Help Me Grow teams had the pleasure of touring the Play Space in Auburn, New York. Created by ABC Cayuga, the Place Space is dedicated to enriching young children’s lives by providing a welcoming place where they and their families can play, learn, and grow together.







# Initiative Reports



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The ECA is investing in young children and their families when it matters most. Through the initiatives outlined below, the ECA is supporting new parents so their children are healthy and ready for kindergarten; providing health and developmental screenings along with referrals and follow-up services; strengthening the quality of child care; and providing support for a better coordinated and more effective early childhood system.



**Parents in Partnership**  
Increasing parent/caregiver voice and engagement in the work of the Early Childhood Alliance and its partner organizations.



**Child Care & Early Learning**  
Improving the quality of infant and toddler child care, resulting in optimal child development and school readiness.



**Help Me Grow Onondaga**  
Empowering parents and caregivers with knowledge about child development and increasing developmental screening.



**ParentChild+**  
Ensuring all children have equal possibilities from the start, using education to break the cycle of poverty for low income families.



**Talking is Teaching**  
Helping parents recognize their power to boost their children's early brain and vocabulary development through simple, everyday actions.



**Reproductive Well-Being**  
Reducing unintended pregnancies and promoting reproductive wellness for all women in Onondaga county.



# Centering & Engaging Parent Voice



The **Parents in Partnership Initiative** seeks to build partnerships with families, identifying their strengths and connecting with non-profits to support community programs. Parents in Partnership is charged with building a collaborative early learning system that centers the voice of parents in the decision making and planning.

## Initiative Activities & Outcomes

Initiative Activities	2021	2020
Parent Advisory Council Meetings	14	4
Parents on the Parent Advisory Council	10	5
Parent Workshops - Thriving Not Just Surviving, Parent Cafes, & Parent Events	44	14
Parents Engaged in Workshops	156	131
Parent Focus Groups	4	5



**100%** of Thriving Not Just Surviving program participants showed an increase in self-efficacy.



**80%** of participating parents indicated that Parents in Partnership has increased their ability to be heard.



**79%** of ECA partners and families indicated that Parents in Partnership impacted the way they view parent collaboration, leadership, and engagement.

“ I met new people...I felt heard and I got advice. I actually changed and did things in a different way with the kids, and that makes me happy. ”  
**Parent Participant, Thriving Not Just Surviving**

## Parent Leaders Share Their Expertise

In 2021, the ECA launched our Parent Advisory Council, offering parents the opportunity to serve in a leadership role and advise the ECA on our strategies and system-building efforts. At the Council’s monthly meetings, participants share their parenting experience and expertise and help shape our efforts to engage and support all parents in our community. One of our inaugural parents is Heather Yousey, a mother of two daughters under the age of five. In 2020, Heather graduated from the ParentChild+ program and was identified as a parent who was interested in taking on a leadership role. Heather has been a valued member of the PAC and has contributed in a number of forums to help improve ECA program design and implementation.



## Spotlight on Success .....

The Parents in Partnership Initiative's first priority for 2021 was the launch of the Parent Advisory Council (PAC), a group of ten parent leaders who lend their experience and expertise to guide the ECA's work. In addition to seeking the Council's feedback and ideas, we were pleased to offer them several training and leadership opportunities throughout the year.

This year also saw the reinvigoration of our Peer to Peer Program\*, designed to positively engage and educate mothers and help them build social capital. In response to low attendance, a member of the PAC suggested renaming the program to appeal to a wider audience, and *Thriving Not Just Surviving* was born. Through the next few iterations of the program, the ECA's Director of Family Engagement and Peer Coordinator were able to develop active and consistent engagement with a core group of women, whose feedback was overwhelmingly positive. 100% of participants agreed that they had learned something they would use in their daily life, and 100% felt supported in setting/reaching personal goals.

\*Thriving Not Just Surviving is funded by the Health Foundation for Western and Central New York's Co-Creating Well-Being Initiative.



## Participation in CSSP's EC-LINC Initiative Guides Efforts to Center and Engage Parent Voice .....

Participating in the Center for the Study of Social Policy's (CSSP) Early Childhood Learning and Innovation Network for Communities (EC-LINC) has had a significant impact on our community by providing us with a deeper understanding of early childhood system building and the central role equity and parent voice play in effective systems change. Participating in EC-LINC has helped our community deepen our understanding of how to integrate parents into our system-building and to learn from other communities about best practices in parent engagement. In 2020, the ECA was able to use county funding to hire a Director of Family Engagement. Having a dedicated staff member has allowed us to participate in the CSSP Parent Leadership Network and benefit from the technical assistance support of CSSP. The ECA has embraced the guiding principle that effective early childhood system building requires families leading, guiding, and shaping the future of our work. Learn more about CCSP's work at [www.cssp.org](http://www.cssp.org).



**Center for the Study of Social Policy**  
Ideas into Action



In February 2021, CSSP released a resource brief spotlighting the work of the ECA entitled, "Coalition-Building, Fast and Slow: The Early Childhood Alliance of Onondaga County." To read the brief, visit <https://cssp.org/resource/early-childhood-onondaga-brief>.

# Ensuring All Children Develop On Track



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

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

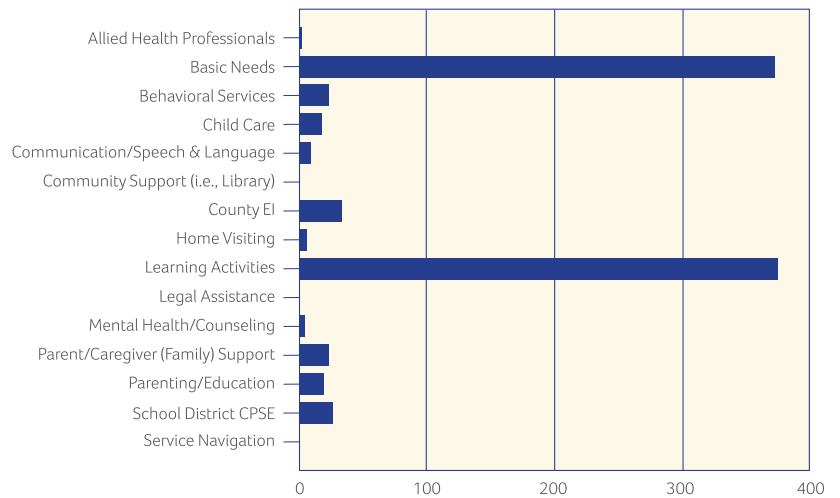
“ Help Me Grow was very helpful! They took the time to make sure we got the help we needed for our son and pointed us in the right direction. They checked in with us consistently to make sure everything was going smoothly. ”

Onondaga County Parent

## Initiative Activities & Outcomes

Initiative Activities	2021	2020
Total Intakes	877	349
Intakes From Pediatrics	181	42
Referrals to Services	740	495
ASQ & ASQ-SE Screens Completed	1,342	391
Screens Completed Through Child Care	1,038	192
Books, Balls & Blocks Parent Education Events	9	5
Community Outreach Events Attended	30	12
Individuals Reached Through Outreach Events	1,579	547

Total 2021 Referrals By Category



**Note:** 2-1-1 serves as the central access point for referrals to Help Me Grow Onondaga. As a result of the ongoing pandemic, the majority of referrals received in 2021 centered on basic needs, allowing us to connect families to community organizations offering diapers, formula, and food. Our goal in the coming year will be to help families connect to the other child development resources Help Me Grow Onondaga has to offer.

**91.7%** of follow-up survey respondents were satisfied with the services and supports they received from Help Me Grow.



**74%** of families who completed a screen and received support indicated that Help Me Grow increased their knowledge of child development.



**46%** of families who completed a screen and received support indicated that they were doing something new to support their child’s development.



## 2021 Successes .....

- Partnered with local libraries to pilot a new Books, Balls, and Blocks event format focusing on the ASQ:SE-2, the importance of social emotional development, and community mental health supports available to children and families.
- Established new partnerships with several early child care and education programs throughout the county, helping them to implement developmental screening programs with parents and teachers and linking children and families to services and supports.
- Engaged with hundreds of parents at community outreach events, helping to promote the importance of parents being actively engaged in the monitoring of their child’s development.
- Partnered with a local retired pediatrician to reach out to new pediatric practices and build referral and screening partnerships.
- Invited to present its innovative, virtual adaptation of the traditional Books, Balls, and Blocks event model at the Help Me Grow National Forum.
- Delivered “Welcome Packets” to every pediatric practice in Onondaga County, resulting in increased pediatric referrals and eight new pediatric partnerships.



## Supporting & Empowering Parents .....

**The following is a case report from Help Me Grow’s Pediatric Resource Specialist :** I was following up with a young mother whose son was referred to Help Me Grow due to an elevated M-CHAT (Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers) score. She’d been notoriously difficult to reach, so I was surprised to receive a reply almost as soon as I sent her a text message. I called her back per her request and found her frantic and in tears. She was confused and worried that she was, “Doing a bad job of raising her son.” She expressed her concerns that her son was unlike other children his age, as he was almost two years old and had not spoken a word. She worried the lack of speech was her fault, as she did not know how to talk to and interact with a child so young. I tried to calm her down and suggested that she complete a developmental screening, which would indicate how her son was progressing in the five areas of development. After completing the screen, the mother and I discussed her son’s results. He was developing appropriately in most categories but scored in the monitoring zone for two of them. I assured the mother I’d send her some learning activities to help keep him on-track and reviewed some of the tips with her over the phone. She thanked me profusely noting that, just a few days before, she had been wishing someone would help her be a better mother. “When you texted me, it was like God listened to me,” she said.

# Supporting Early Literacy



**Talking is Teaching: Talk, Read, Sing** is a public awareness and action campaign that helps parents recognize their power to boost their children’s early brain and vocabulary development through simple, everyday actions. Aimed at increasing early literacy opportunities for all children in Onondaga County, the initiative has three core components:



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



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



**Pediatric Practice Outreach** - Free books distributed at well-child visits in partnership with the Reach Out and Read program. Branded bibs and T-shirts also distributed.

“With Talking is Teaching, we are seeing the improved understanding of the need to start reading right from birth and of reading daily. I think that the data will really bear that out, that people have increased the frequency of reading.”

**Talking is Teaching Partner**

## Spotlight on Success

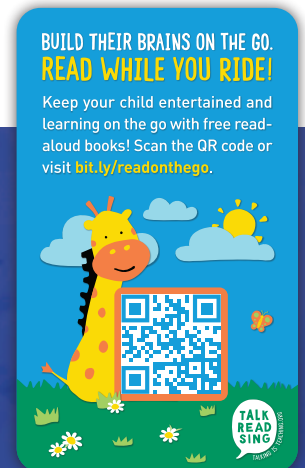
### StoryWalk Onondaga Brings Reading Outdoors

In June, Talk, Read, Sing Onondaga partnered with Onondaga County Public Libraries to launch StoryWalk® Onondaga, an interactive literacy initiative that encourages families to walk, talk, and read together while enjoying the great outdoors. The summer/fall series kicked off at the Downtown Farmers Market in Clinton Square with the late Eric Carle’s “From Head to Toe,” receiving rave reviews from parents and children alike.



### Making Good Use of Idle Time

At the recommendation of committee members, two new marketing campaigns, Read While You Ride and Read While You Wait, were launched to encourage parents and caregivers to make good use of idle time - either waiting for/riding the bus or sitting in waiting rooms - by reading with their little ones. Campaign signage links parents to a website with hundreds of books to choose from.





## Initiative Activities & Outcomes .....

Initiative Activities	2021	2020
Tote Bags Distributed	989	1,010
Books Distributed Through Pediatrics	3,065	2,500
Materials Distributed	6,961	5,070
Individuals Reached During Outreach	1,546	1,380
Media Campaign Impressions (Billboards, Transit, TV)	5 Million+	3 Million+

“ We love to give out the Talking is Teaching tote bags. Families accept them willingly and truly enjoy the items they receive. Feedback from the parents is that the information and items are useful and really help them with communicating better with their young children. Many parents seem not to know that just talking, reading, and singing with their children every day helps growth with not only the children, but their entire family. ”

**Autumn**  
Family Worker, PEACE Inc.



**51%** of surveyed individuals are familiar with the Talking is Teaching Campaign.



**75%** of participating families are reading 4 or more days a week post tote bag delivery, and **29%** are reading 7 days a week.

## Tote Bag Deliveries Promote Increased Reading .....

Since 2017, the ECA has partnered with home visitors, pediatric practices, and child care providers to distribute Talking is Teaching tote bags to more than 3,600 families across Onondaga County. As trusted messengers of the campaign, these providers use the tote bag deliveries as opportunities to emphasize the importance of talking, reading, and singing with children every day.

The goal of the tote bag strategy is to increase the amount of daily reading families are doing with their children, and three rigorous Randomized Controlled Trials (RCT) with the Maxwell School X Lab have shown it to do just that. On average, participating parents read to their child(ren) approximately 3.6 days a week prior to the tote bag delivery and 4.9 days a week after, a 36% increase that demonstrates the incredible power of trusted messengers and the high reach, low cost impact of the Talking is Teaching Campaign.

*Special thanks to our tote bag strategy funders - the ECA Business Council, Onondaga County, M&T Bank, and the CNY Community Foundation - and our partners in distribution - Catholic Charities of Onondaga County; Child Care Solutions; Onondaga County Health Department Division of Healthy Families; PEACE Inc. Head Start; Syracuse Community Health Center; and Upstate Pediatric and Adolescent Center.*





# Building a High-Quality Child Care & Early Learning Infrastructure



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

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

“ I have learned different skills to help teach my children. It’s so many ways to teach them - every day it’s a different topic. I have also progressed because of the ‘Hello Cards’ and ‘Creative Curriculum.’ My coach always asks what I need help on or if I do. She gave me new strategies that can help me and even had me do trainings. ”

**Day Care Center  
Teacher Assistant**

## Implementation Plan



- Creative Curriculum Training Completed
- Coaching Begins
- Participants receive all training & tools
- Coaching continues
- All tools/assessments are implemented
- Coaching continues

## Initiative Activities & Outcomes

Activity	2021	2020
Children Participating in CCQI	83	150
Participating DCC & FCC Locations	10	11
Number of Providers Receiving Coaching	33	39
Total Value of Stipends Distributed to Providers	\$209,750	\$142,422
Provider Turnover	15%	6%
Total Hours of Coaching Provided by CCQI Coaches	1,166	795



**91%** of participating child care programs remained open.



**65%** of participating providers reported that the stipend helped with retention.



**100%** of participating child care programs conducted developmental screenings.

## 2021 Successes .....

- Despite the competing pressures facing the providers participating in CCQI, the Child Care Solutions team was able to maintain active engagement from all three (3) Child Care Centers and the seven (7) Family Child Care providers who stayed open during the pandemic.
- CCQI intentionally centered equity in its design by selecting the child care centers in our community that have the highest number of children receiving subsidies (a measure of family need). In 2021, 18 Onondaga County providers closed - only one CCQI provider closed. The quality coaching provided by the CCQI team, as well as the stipends offered to participants, are likely two of the reasons the Centers were able to stay open throughout the pandemic.
- CCQI, in partnership with Help Me Grow Onondaga, implemented bi-annual developmental screening programs at each participating Child Care Center and Family Child Care site, connecting families and children to developmental resources, supports and services as needed.



*“ It has been a great experience. We’ve learned to create and implement our lesson plans more effectively, and we’ve seen growth in our children. They’re able to catch on and reach the goals we set for them. ”*

**Family Child Care Provider**

## The Need for Child Care Takes Center Stage .....

In July, members of the ECA Community Advisory and Business Councils came together to learn more about the significant investment of federal resources in child care in New York State and its potential impact on providers in Onondaga County.

- Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul, now Governor, spoke about the new resources New York State will be investing in child care and her role chairing the Governor’s Task Force on Child Care Availability.
- County Executive Ryan McMahon spoke about the role his administration has played in preserving child care in Onondaga County during the pandemic and his support for strengthening child care moving forward.
- Lori Schakow, Executive Director of Child Care Solutions, highlighted the impact the pandemic has had on the supply of child care in the county.
- Sarah Merrick, Commissioner of the Onondaga County Department of Social Services - Economic Security, reviewed the recommendations included in the final report of the Governor’s Task Force on Child Care Availability.
- Dede Hill, Schuyler Center Policy Director, briefed the ECA on the new federal dollars included in the state budget.



## Strengthening Families



Launched in Onondaga County in 2018 by Catholic Charities, the **ParentChild+ Core Model** provides two years of twice-weekly home visits to under-resourced families with children between the ages of 18 months and four years. All services begin when the child is between 18 months and 3 years. Services, books, and toys are provided to families at no cost. The ParentChild+ Core Model empowers parents as their children’s first and most important teachers and helps parents create a learning-rich environment in their homes.

The **ParentChild+ Family Child Care Model (FCC)** builds on the success of the Core Model to reach even more children through family or home-based child care. Early Learning Specialists work with family child care providers to offer professional learning support that capitalizes on their talents and passions while strengthening their observational and reflective capacities. Over the course of the 24-week program, family child care providers receive 48 home visits and acquire a library of books, educational materials, and guide sheets that support the facilitation of learning through play.



## Initiative Activities & Outcomes

Initiative Activities	2021	2020
Number of Children Served	169	144
Number of Providers Served	8	5
Number of Outreach Events	29	NA
Number of Sessions Held	3,330	3,000
Number of Books Distributed	1,131	795
Number of Toys Distributed	799	705

“ I absolutely love the ParentChild+ program! It was amazing getting to learn and then teach Ethan a new book or toy every week. For Ethan, it has enhanced his speech development and brought him out of his shell. He now loves to read every day and still uses all of the items he received. I feel he is much more prepared for an actual school environment. I’m amazed and blessed to have had an opportunity to enjoy this program. ”

**Core Model Parent Participant**



**97%** of participating families demonstrated strengthened and improved parent-child interactions.



**100%** of participating children demonstrated an overall improvement in one of the five behavior areas.



**89%** of Core Model graduates entered a preschool program.



## 2021 Successes .....



As the pandemic continued, the ParentChild+ creative staff ensured program participants were actively engaged and made at-home learning a priority. Thirty (30) children/families completed Cycle I of the Core Program, and 38 children/ families completed Cycle II and graduated.



41 children from 5 providers were able to complete/graduate from the FCC program with a 100% completion rate.



2021 saw the program's highest retention rate to date - 97%.



## Meeting Parents Where They Are .....

Sandy is a 29-year-old single mother to her young son, Andre. Born in Cuba, Sandy came to the United States four years ago. Language has always been her biggest barrier, but despite the challenges, she never gave up. Sandy struggled with self-doubt, and was often frustrated because she did not feel knowledgeable about child development or age-appropriate expectations. When Andre was a year old, Sandy noticed he was having difficulty interacting with other children. She spent a great deal of time looking for help and information, but was ultimately unsuccessful in finding resources in her language.

While visiting the park one day, Sandy shared the challenges she faced with one of her friends, who suggested she look into ParentChild+. Sandy made a referral for herself and Andre that same day. Upon starting the program, she told her Early Learning Specialist that she, “Felt like a light came to me and my little one.”



ParentChild+ has been very helpful, increasing Sandy's knowledge of parenting, child development, and how to foster a learning-rich environment at home. She utilizes the guide sheets provided at each visit to interact with Andre when using the book or toy, and is very grateful the materials are available in Spanish. Sandy has seen Andre make progress in many facets. For all of the information and support she has received, Sandy says, “Thank you!”

## From Reluctant Learner to Empowered Leader .....

Jackie, a Family Daycare Provider in Syracuse, was referred to the ParentChild+ FCC program by Child Care Solutions. She has been part of the program for three months now, and her Early Learning Specialist is helping her expand her knowledge about developmentally appropriate activities for the children in her care. She is also providing her with resources that are rich in literacy and language development.

In the beginning, Jackie was reserved, choosing not to participate in the group activities. After some coaxing and collaboration however, she began to see the benefits the activities had on the children. Jackie's Early Learning Specialist consistently reminded her that she had the most knowledge of the children in her care and that, by working together, they could create a plan and execute activities that would help the children gain more skills. As the weeks progressed, Jackie became increasingly engaged. She identified the children's individual needs and strengths and developed activities that could best support them. She began leading activities and is now fully committed to the program.

Jackie is grateful for the program and the support it provides. As their next project, she and her Early Learning Specialist plan to create a reading area in her family daycare home.

# Supporting Reproductive Well-Being



Launched in Onondaga County in 2018, the **Reproductive Well-Being Initiative** is committed to reproductive justice, woman-centered care, dispelling myths, and changing social norms to empower young women with positive self-images and independent choice. Strategies include:

- Social norms campaign on social media
- Engagement of Black and Latina women, ages 16–25
- Helping young women of color be seen and heard through power building
- Convening the Reproductive Wellbeing Coalition to deepen collective community efforts to support young women and to educate and engage providers to achieve anti-racist health care

“ I’m here to fight as an ally among my sisters. ”

**Ja’Rhea Dixon**  
Layla Ambassador

## 2021 Successes

- Development of the “Little Pink Book,” a pocket-sized resource with health information and clinic finder.
- Ongoing development of culturally tailored and relevant messaging for young women.
- Development of All Things Cash, an employment page embedded on the Layla website that connects young women of color with local job opportunities.
- Launch of Finance Friday, a financial empowerment series hosted by a local financial empowerment consultant.

### Layla Ambassadors Speak at Women’s March

In September 2021, three of the Layla Ambassadors had the amazing experience of speaking at the Women’s March in Seneca Falls. The ambassadors spoke about the importance of reproductive justice and the right to make their own decisions about their bodies, and were thrilled to have the opportunity to meet the Lt. Governor. This is just one of many examples of how the Layla Campaign empowers young women and provides them with the opportunity to have their voices heard.



## Initiative Activities .....

Initiative Activities	2021	2020
Number of Young Women Reached Through On-The-Ground Engagements	30	450
Number of Leadership Opportunities for Young Women as a Direct Result of Their Work with Layla	3	3
Number of Trainings Provided/Attendance	6/225	1/NA
Newly Funded Partners (Receiving Grant Dollars from the Allyn Family Foundation or the ECA)	2	3
Number of Film Productions	1	1
Number of Active Coalition Members (Attendance at 75% of Annual Meetings)	85	60
Number of Social Media Followers	1,200	1,368



### Professional Development Opportunities Foster Networking & Community-Building

In 2021, the Reproductive Wellbeing Coalition launched a training and capacity-building series aimed at professional development centered on reproductive justice and health equity. We hosted six (6) trainings (teamwork, community-led reproductive wellbeing, and a three-part series on medical racism) attended by 125 stakeholders. Throughout the year, we found creative ways to keep the series fun and engaging. We ensured that all training topics came from coalition members and utilized speakers from within the coalition and local community whenever possible to foster increased networking and community-building.

### Empowering Young Women to Manage Their Finances

Financial Empowerment Consultant Mariama McClain, aka Miss Moneymaker, joined the Layla campaign in early 2021 in response to our young women's desire to gain better control of their financial futures. The Miss Moneymaker Finance Friday series was launched in conjunction with All Things Cash, our cash-connect platform that brings together young women of color with local organizations and businesses that offer money-making opportunities, such as employment, speaking engagements, paid programs and trainings, and other financial opportunities. Miss Moneymaker shares bi-weekly tips through our social media channels.





# 2021 Events



## Feel the Beat Family Fest Brings Community Together for Music & Fun!

In August, families from across our community came together to shake, rattle, and rock at Feel the Beat Family Fest, a free community event sponsored by the ECA's Talking is Teaching: Talk, Read, Sing Campaign. Family Fest celebrated the importance of music and movement in early childhood and featured interactive performances by the Symphoria Percussion Ensemble. The event also included music-themed crafts and activities; early childhood resources and information; raffles and giveaways; bounce houses; interactive bubble displays; fire engine tours; and more.

Exposure to music and musical experiences during early childhood has been shown to accelerate brain development, particularly in the areas of language acquisition, pre-reading, and math skills. With this event, the Talking is Teaching: Talk, Read, Sing campaign hoped to encourage parents and caregivers to support their children's development by making music part of their everyday lives.



## Celebrating National Diaper Need Awareness Week

On a beautiful September day, the ECA and several early childhood partners gathered for a walk around downtown Syracuse in support of the CNY Diaper Bank and National Diaper Need Awareness Week. The Diaper Bank has done so much for families in our community, and the ECA was honored to rally around such an important cause.



## Comedy & Conversation for Parents

In December, the Parents in Partnership Initiative hosted a virtual comedy hour featuring Syracuse native and nationally acclaimed stand-up comedian Travis Blunt. Guests were treated to Blunt's trademark wit and wisecracks, with a special twist; the crazy, wonderful, life-altering world of parenting was the punchline of every joke! Blunt's sketch was followed by an open conversation about the ups, downs, and in-betweens of parenting. Facilitated by Syeisha Byrd, ECA Director of Family Engagement, the event offered parents and caregivers an opportunity to talk, laugh, and let off some steam in a judgment-free space.



## MISTER G Delights Children with Music from Around the World

In December, the ECA was thrilled to welcome MISTER G back to Syracuse (virtually) for his third concert as part of our Talking is Teaching: Talk, Read, Sing campaign. Singing plays an important role in early childhood development. In fact, studies have shown that exposure to music and musical experiences during early childhood can accelerate brain development, particularly in the areas of language acquisition, pre-reading, and math skills.

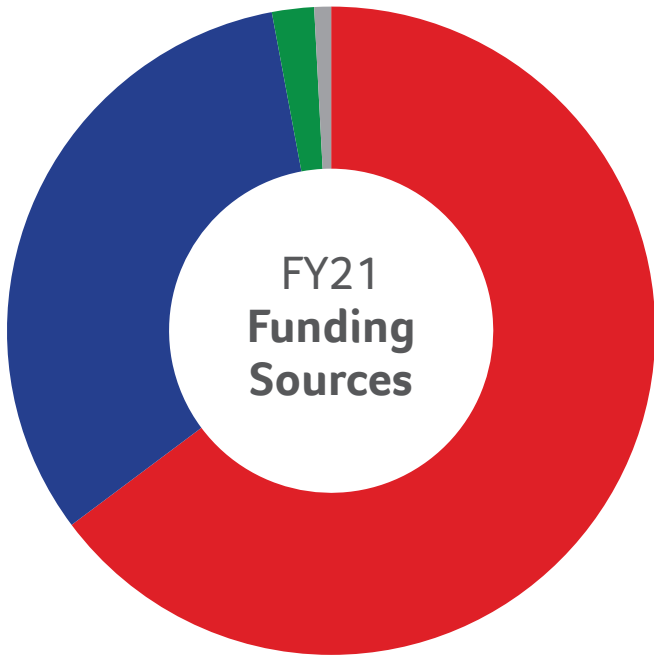
The "Music from Around the World" concert successfully engaged hundreds of children in dozens of classrooms across Onondaga County. MISTER G shared stories and songs about his life traveling around the world and singing with musicians from many nations.

Hailed as "a bilingual rock star" by the Washington Post, MISTER G has released 12 albums of original, multicultural music and received numerous accolades, including a Latin GRAMMY Award and five Parents' Choice Gold Awards. We look forward to bringing MISTER G back for another concert in 2022.



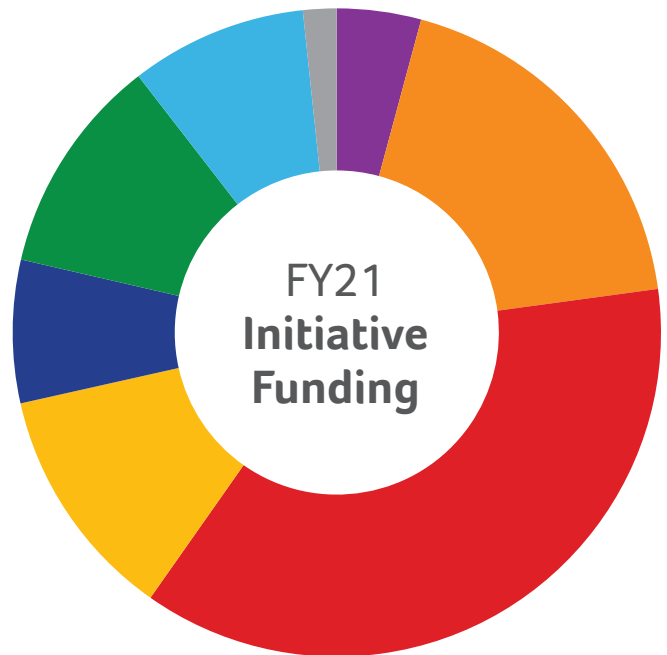


# 2021 Financial Overview



■ County	\$1,545,000	64.8%
■ Philanthropy	\$770,000	32.3%
■ State	\$0	0%
■ Business	\$50,000	2.1%
■ Other	\$20,000	0.8%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$2,385,000</b>	<b>100%</b>

■ Child Care Quality Imp.	\$880,000	36.9%
■ ParentChild+	\$280,000	11.7%
■ Parents in Partnership	\$170,000	7.1%
■ ECA Operations	\$260,000	10.9%
■ Reproductive Well-Being	\$210,000	8.8%
■ Other	\$40,000	1.7%
■ Talking is Teaching	\$100,000	4.2%
■ Help Me Grow	\$445,000	18.7%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$2,385,000</b>	<b>100%</b>





# Partners & Funders

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The ECA is grateful to all the funders that make these new initiatives and system work possible. County Executive Ryan McMahon and the Onondaga County Legislature prioritized early childhood investments as part of their anti-poverty strategy for Onondaga County, and our philanthropic and private sector partners continue to match county support to strengthen the array of services for children and families.

- Allyn Family Foundation
- CNY Community Foundation
- Excellus BlueCross BlueShield
- Health Foundation for Western & Central New York
- M&T Bank
- Onondaga County
- Dorothy & Marshall M. Reisman Foundation
- Sisters of Saint Francis of the Neumann Communities
- UnitedHealthcare
- United Way of Central New York



# Community Advisory Council

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**Meg O'Connell\*** – Chair  
The Allyn Family Foundation

**Jaime Alicea**  
Syracuse City School District

**Marnie Annese\***  
Health Foundation for  
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**Dr. Steven Blatt**  
Upstate Medical University's  
Pediatric & Adolescent Center

**Dr. Cynthia Bright**  
Retired Pediatrician

**Carolyn Brown\***  
PEACE, Inc.

**Amy Cunningham\***  
Onondaga County Department  
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Central School District

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**Robert Falter**  
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Independent Consultant

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**Rich Gasiorowski\***  
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Early Childhood Family &  
Community Engagement Center

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M&T Bank

**Dr. Indu Gupta**  
Onondaga County  
Health Department

**Hon. Helen Hudson**  
Syracuse Common Council

**Jennifer King-Reese**  
Syracuse City School District

**Linda Lopez**  
Salvation Army

**Len Lopoo**  
Syracuse University  
Maxwell School

**Michael Melara\***  
Catholic Charities  
of Onondaga County

**Sarah Merrick\***  
Onondaga County  
Department of Social Services

**Robert Myers\***  
Partners in Franciscan Ministries

**Sharon Owens**  
City of Syracuse

**Frank Ridzi\***  
CNY Community Foundation

**Ann Rooney\***  
Deputy County Executive  
for Human Services

**Mary Lou Sayles**  
Huntington Family Centers

**Lori Schakow\***  
Child Care Solutions

**Rebecca Shultz\***  
Onondaga County  
Health Department

**Elizabeth Snow**  
John Ben Snow Foundation

**Sharon St. Louis**  
Onondaga County  
Health Department

**Chad W. Underwood**  
Partners in Learning, Inc

**Kara Williams\***  
The Allyn Family Foundation

**Randy Wolken**  
MACNY

\*Leadership Council member

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M&T Bank

**John Benson**  
Barton & Loguidice

**Larry Bousquet**  
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**Terry Brown**  
TLBrown Management Group

**Aimee Durfee**  
CenterState CEO

**Zanette Howe**  
Upstate Medical University

**Joshua LaGrow**  
Learn as You Grow

**Lisa Mondello**  
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**Matthew Paulus**  
Paulus Development

**Annette Peters**  
Advance Media NY

**Robert Simpson**  
CenterState CEO

**Benjamin Sumner**  
Dannible & McKee

**Meg Tidd**  
VIP Structures

**Kimberly Townsend**  
Loretto

**Merike Treier**  
Downtown Committee

**John Trimble**  
C&S Companies

**Randy Wolken**  
MACNY

# ECA & Help Me Grow Staff

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## Early Childhood Alliance

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**Laurie Black**  
Director



**Megan Wagner-Flynn**  
Director of Early Learning Strategy



**Syeisha Byrd**  
Director of Family Engagement



**Carmen Viviano-Crafts**  
Peer Program Coordinator



**Emily Dillon**  
Director of Communications



**Julianne Cox Gorczynski**  
Talking is Teaching Program Assistant

## Help Me Grow

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**Summer Merrick**  
Program Director



**Kayla DiNicola**  
Early Learning Specialist



**Miranda Walker**  
Family Resource Specialist



**Kerrie Wenham**  
Pediatric Resource Specialist









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