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## **FOREWORD**

This document describes the needs assessment process undertaken between October 2017 and March 30, 2018, by the Framingham Coordinated Family and Community Engagement (CFCE) EEC grant funded program, organization better known as the Early Childhood Alliance of Framingham (ECAAF), a program proudly administered by the Framingham Public Schools (FPS), and kindly supported by its community partners. ECAAF is dedicated to promoting and supporting the healthy growth and development of young children, prenatal through age eight, strengthening families and advocating for access to high quality learning experiences. ECAAF brings together not only community organizations and families, but several Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) programs that include: the Mental Health Consultation (Enable, Inc.), Access Management Information and Referral (Child Care Resources), and the Educator and Provider Support program (Center for Childcare Careers).

## **SETTING THE STAGE: 2010 NEEDS ASSESSMENT BACKGROUND AND PROGRESS**

In 2010, ECAAF built a network of key stakeholders to participate in a comprehensive needs assessment. The result led to the development of a strong governance body, an organizational structure, and a strategic plan.

In summary, 2010 findings included:

- Insufficient affordable child care, informal play spaces, and parent support resources to meet the current need
- Long waiting lists at available programs
- No one central doorway to access care, so parents found systems and processes cumbersome and confusing
- Disparity in access, often due to socio-economic or linguistic factors, resulted in pockets of young children with less school readiness as they entered kindergarten, with a long term impact on school and future life success

At the core of the 2010 strategic plan was the development of a centrally located “One Stop Shop” for all young families in the community. This “home in our community” would provide a central doorway for parents of children prenatal through age eight to access education and care programs, family education and support services, and provide a place to meet informally. This “home” would also provide the early education and care community a place to collaborate and coordinate services, share learning and resources, work to impact policies, and build sustainability for early childhood programs.

Now in 2018, we can say progress was made in meeting identified needs. We have multiple satellite locations that better meet the need of providing **family education** and **targeted outreach opportunities**. Instead of one place to “Play, Learn, and Grow Together”, we learned that offering multiple sites increased accessibility to all families, from those who are more isolated to those who have a means to get to the centrally located “One Stop Shop”. Furthermore, multiple appropriate spaces in the community helped to bring together our early education and care network.

We accomplished the expansion because of supportive partnerships from community organizations and funders allowing us to join together to build the resources needed to implement the previous strategic plan. The outcome resulted in having permanent homes at the Fuller Middle School, where the Framingham Public Schools Parent Information Center is located, “the school registration hub”, and a designated “Early Learning Zone” at the main branch of the Framingham Public Library. These two central locations permit the CFCE access and outreach opportunities to all families.

ECAF is especially grateful to the Sudbury Foundation, Framingham Public Library, and the Framingham Public Schools for their core belief that investing early creates dividends later and valuing the work of the ECAF/CFCE programs. The library received capital improvement funds from the Sudbury Foundation to fulfill common strategic plan goals to ensure access to early learning resources. This common vision led to the creation of a designated space for the ECAF Early Learning Zone at the library to offer “Play, Learn and Grow Together” parent-child education opportunities.



The generous funding from the Sudbury Foundation for **capacity building** allowed ECAF to develop a strong governance and organizational structure. Many of our accomplishments would not have happened without this initial “foundation” investment that led to building trusting relationships with our community partners and developing meaningful collaborations to support common goals.

Another area where progress can be noted is in the way ECAF **links to comprehensive resources**. Back in 2011/12, a comprehensive hard copy *Resource Guide for Early Childhood*, which ECAF called a parent’s roadmap to early childhood, was designed. The Resource Guide included a range of information from identifying early education programs and community support services to educational information about how to look for a program and prepare for the transition to school. Since then ECAF developed a website, Facebook and Twitter presence, and large listserv. Now ECAF has multiple vehicles for parents to find out about its programs and services with links to its partners. Within the website are the following: ECAF activity calendar and announcements; Resource Guide for Early Childhood; links to important partners; **transition supports**; ECAF

Leadership Council page; and family and community engagement resources. In addition, ECAF posts announcements on other websites that include: Brain Building in Progress, Framingham Town Planner, Framingham Community Calendar, Community Kangaroo, and Macaroni Kid. ECAF continues to post hard copies on bulletin boards in key locations in the community and send emails to our distribution lists.

The use of social media platforms has provided unforeseen advantages and tactics that have increased visibility and added to targeted outreach strategies. Beyond flyers, we have a monthly calendar that is distributed through these multiple methods of communication to community partners, families, and social media outlets and other “friends” Facebook groups. A significant difference since 2010!

In regards to family education and playgroups, Framingham did not have the advantage of a Family Network EEC grant funded program, and, therefore, that type of family education was very limited to the Community Partnership for Children (CPC) activities. In 2009, after the consolidation of grants and the initiation of CFCE funding, Framingham started playgroups at a housing authority development community center and a Head Start classroom, traveling with 4 bins. As mentioned earlier, today ECAF is proud of our expansion to permanent spaces with classroom equipment and materials at two permanent homes. However, the program continues to offer groups in other accessible locations as well (local early intervention program motor space, WIC, affordable housing developments, and local family shelters).

The Brain Building in Progress Initiative set the stage for a larger venue of educating the public on the importance of early education. Six years ago, ECAF launched this initiative through the development of what has become our signature annual family and community event celebrating young children and the importance of early education. In 2012 attendance was close to 100 families. Today over 200 families look forward to this event with over 35 partners volunteering time and resources that not only expose families to high quality early learning activities in the *brain building zones* but to important linkages to comprehensive resources. On this special day one can easily witness the capacity building investment as the Framingham early childhood community joins together and collaborates in a large family and community engagement activity that highlights strong partnerships and dedication to early education for all families.

Much progress can be seen over the last eight years with CFCE grant funding and enormous community partner in-kind support. The 2018 Needs Assessment continues to reveal our strengths as well as needs still unmet. Now it is time to review the 2018 needs assessment findings. Our experience and what we have gained over the years will guide us in the next phase of program development, planning, and refinement of ECAF/CFCE goals.

***Framingham History of Early Education and Care  
Timeline***

1993~ MA DOE introduces Community Partnership for Children Grant (CPC)

2001~ Received PCHP grant

2005~ MA Department of Early Education and Care is created

2009~ CPC programs merge under the Coordinated Family and Community Engagement Grant (CFCE), Needs Assessment, and the Early Childhood Alliance is created

2010~ ECAF engages in Strategic Planning with newly invigorated Leadership Council

2015~ ECAF becomes ECAAF  
Subcontract with YMCA to serve Ashland

2016 ~ ECAF "Early Learning Zone" at the Library (opens March 2017)

2017~ \*Received Competitive CFCE grant

\*Decision for ECAAF to revert back to ECAF. The MetroWest YMCA was trained by the Framingham CFCE and from both an organizational and logistical viewpoint, the FPS and YMCA agreed that the YMCA could extend outreach to serve Hopkinton and Holliston, as these communities were already a part of their service areas and beyond the jurisdiction of the Framingham Public Schools.



***COMMUNITY CONTEXT***

***PARTNER PARTICIPATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:***

Fortunately, the majority of participants from 2010 remain active ECAF Leadership Council members. Now in 2017-18, the ECAF leadership has pulled together a dynamic and committed group of community early childhood educators, city and community resource support professionals, legislators, and parents to collect data and support the ultimate goal of updating the ECAF strategic plan based on up-to-date needs assessment findings.

We deeply appreciate the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care for initiating this needs assessment activity. The ***needs assessment process*** was monitored by the ECAF Steering Committee, a subset of the ECAF governing body and staffed by Jane Cohen DeHaven, Coordinator, Early Childhood Alliance. We would also like to acknowledge the contribution of the following 37 Early Childhood Alliance of Framingham members for their participation in this process. Their energy, expertise and willingness to come together to explore common goals and create collaborative solutions are essential informing the FY19 plan. This is not by any means an all-encompassing list as there are many others to thank for their assistance in providing meaningful information and data, including numerous families, community providers, school personnel, volunteers, and more.

<b>Group Member</b>	<b>Representing</b>
Ana Farias	Child Development/Family Child Care
Anne Murphy	Framingham History Center
Audrey Henderson	AMC/Outdoor RX
Cheryl Smith	South Middlesex Opportunity Council Head Start/Child Care
Chris Walsh	State Representative
Christine Goodreau	Special Education Advocate/Parent
Christine Tibor	FPS Family and Community Engagement/Adult ESL+/PIC Office
Denise Galford-Koepfel	South Middlesex Opportunity Council/Behavioral Health/Nurturing Connections
Dr. Jerry Wortzman	MetroWest Hospital Pediatrics
Eliot Yaffa	City of Framingham, Community Development Office
Elizabeth Reith	South Bay Community Services/Early Intervention
Elizabeth Roy	Board of Trustees Framingham Public Library/Parent
Erica Toochin	Parent-Child Home Program
Heidi Kaufman	MetroWest YMCA
Helida Johnson	WIC Nutrition Services
Jacey Norton	Framingham Centre Nursery School
Jacob Hanson	McKinney Vento
Jennifer White	Criterion Child Enrichment/Healthy Families
Jessica Friswell	United Way of Tri-County
Jill Dixon	Taly Foundation
Julie Hanes	Criterion Child Enrichment Middlesex/Early Intervention
Katiucia Goncalves	PCHP Home Visitor/Brazilian Outreach
Lesley Kinney	Suburban Child
Lindsay Fox	Tufts Maternity and Pediatric Hospitalist at MetroWest Medical Center
Lucy Loveridge	Framingham Public Library
Mary Beth Brown	Child Care Resources Inc.
Matt Paradise	American Consumer Credit Counseling/Parent/Chair
Melissa Bell	Parent
Melissa Gillespie	Align Credit Union
Paula Kaminow	Edward M. Kennedy Community Health Center
Rhonda Stollerman	Enable, Inc./Mental Health Consultation Services
Robert Tremblay	Superintendent, Framingham Public Schools
Rosie Alvarez-O'Neil	BLOCKS Preschool, Framingham Public Schools
Shan Hsuan King	Parent/CFCE/PCHP
Shannon O'Malley	Framingham Public Schools Out-of-School Time
Valerie Hytholt	Framingham State University Early Education Department

## **DATA SOURCES/TOOLS/METHODS**

### **External Sources**

- 26 Key Stakeholder Interviews – guided by the same 10 questions. (interview questions attached)
- Family and Community Needs Assessment Surveys – Disseminated online, through partners, email, and on site at three locations. 51 community providers, 120 families respondents (small family sample, however representative of community) Below are links to survey.  
Community Survey: <https://goo.gl/forms/ZZBKgJlkBcZpu9bT2>  
Family Survey: <https://goo.gl/forms/a7wdQ0lO0Hy1md4k2> attached)

- Links to Data Sources/Variety of Websites
- Community and Family Focus Groups
- SWOT Analysis

***Internal Sources***

- Play, Learn, and Grow Together Group Attendance Records
- Resource and Referral Log
- Early Literacy Survey
- Family Registration Form
- Family Satisfaction Survey
- Mid- and End-of Year PCHP Evaluation Form (Family Input)
- Parent-Child Home Program Data Management Information System – CPT and PACT assessments and Intake Form demographics
- Anecdotal Accounts
- CFCE Quarterly Reports

***Additional Sources***

- Ages and Stages Parent Questionnaire and Strengthening Families Assessment from both CFCE staff input and summaries provided from partners regularly using these tools
- Comparison to 2010 Needs Assessment
- Other Needs Assessment Reports from Community Agencies (Edward M. Kennedy Community Health Center, MetroWest Health Foundation, and Framingham Community Development Office Needs Assessment)

***2018 LANDSCAPE OF FRAMINGHAM: SUMMARY OF DEMOGRAPHICS:***

Framingham is an urban/suburban community that is diverse in its population (71,954), rich in culture with a large Brazilian community and 77 world languages represented in FPS from Bilingual Department website. There is a thriving commerce with big shopping centers along Route 9 and a higher education hub where Framingham State University and Mass Bay Community College reside. Framingham is an estimated 30 minute drive west of Boston and is on the commuter rail line with a centrally located stop in downtown Framingham. Surrounding towns are somewhat affluent compared to Framingham itself. Sherborn, Natick, Ashland border to the south and east with Wayland, Sudbury, Southborough on the east and northern side. There are many large human service agencies located in the city of Framingham with the South Middlesex Opportunity Council (SMOC), Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA), Department of Children and Families (DCF), and the Framingham Housing Authority all centrally located downtown. Also located in downtown sits the police department, library, hospital, and local small businesses. A revitalization project is active, spearheaded by Downtown Renaissance.

The railroad track creates a divide in the city. On the southwestern side are many public and affordable housing developments, the Brazilian Recreation and Education Center, and four underperforming Level 4/Title 1 elementary schools. This area is characterized by a vibrant Brazilian community with multicultural restaurants, small businesses, faith-based organizations, markets, and the Brazilian Recreation and Education Center. Two community health centers are also conveniently located in the area. In addition, there is a well-established large Adult ESL program serving this diverse-language enriched community. Approximately 750 students enroll each semester with more than 700 people on the wait list. Students represent over 40 countries and speak over 30 languages. Since 2010, the waitlist numbers have grown but not significantly as the numbers were always high.

Heading to the northern side of the city close to Route 9 is Mass Bay Community College, a large shopping district that includes Sherwood Plaza, Walmart, Target, the neighboring Natick Mall, a new branch



library, and the MetroWest YMCA. As you head out west on Route 9, Framingham State University (FSU) sits atop a hill. This institution also has changed since 2010 as it went from a college to a highly recognized higher education institution, accredited now as a university, and is actively involved in many community collaborations. This area also includes the Danforth Art (until two years ago was located downtown Framingham and is now a part of FSU), the Framingham History Center, and the Garden in the Woods New England Wildflower Society. Alternative education opportunities for Framingham are located in this area: Keefe Technical High School, Christa McAuliffe Charter School, Learning Center for the Deaf, and two Catholic private schools.

Lastly, it should be noted that the most significant recent demographic change since 2010 is the community transitioning to a city governance structure in January 2018. ECAF is hopeful that many opportunities will arise from this new city structure and mayoral leadership.

***Additional Data Sources***

Beyond the enormous community partner support (51 respondents to the community partner needs assessment survey), ECAF looked at the following required data elements and have identified the sources in this analysis. See required FY18 CFCE Service Area with Data Elements Chart attached with report submission.

***KEY EDUCATION DEMOGRAPHIC DATA – “CITY OF FRAMINGHAM”***

The chart below shows the percentages of student race/ethnicity in the Framingham Public Schools in 2018 as compared to Massachusetts.

	FPS	STATE
<b>African American</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>7.3</b>
<b>Asian</b>	<b>5.2</b>	<b>5.2</b>
<b>Hispanic/Latino</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>White</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Multi-Race</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4.4</b>

For students enrolled in the Framingham Public Schools:

- 42% report their first language is not English compared to 2010 33%.
- 53% receive free or reduced lunches out of 8,802 students
- Four elementary schools and one middle school receive Title 1 funding
- Special needs population continues to increase: 22% compared to 17% statewide
- Highest drop-out rate is during 9<sup>th</sup> grade at 3.2%
- 337 homeless children grades 1-12 are receiving McKinney Vento assistance

Each year an estimated 700 new kindergarteners are registered; over the past few years, this number of registrations has increased significantly. According to the Parent Information Center data, 26% of these children come to kindergarten with no preschool experience, 11% are entering with special education plans, and more than 26 different languages spoken in the home. This data is based on those children registered to date for the 2018-2019 Kindergarten school year. Rosie Alvarez, director of FPS Early Childhood Education Services and the principal of BLOCKS preschool, also reports similar registration patterns regarding special needs, languages, and no prior preschool experience.

Framingham is a community with a long history of commitment to accessible quality early education and care. There are 25 licensed centered based programs, 83 licensed family child care providers according to the EEC, and two known family child care systems, South Middlesex Opportunity Council (SMOC) and Child Development and Education. Child Development and Education has a satellite office in downtown Framingham working with predominantly Portuguese and Spanish speaking providers. In addition, there are informal caregivers that include family, friends and neighbors as noted from the ECAF Play, Learn and Grow Together Group Attendance Record. Attendance records show that the children's mother or father is the predominant figure accompanying the children to our groups, but grandparents, relatives, and babysitters also bring the children.

SMOC Head Start and Child Care serves children 15 months to 5<sup>th</sup> grade home based and toddler classes (15 months - 2.9 year olds), preschool (3-5 year olds), and out of school time (K-5<sup>th</sup> grade) programs, with comprehensive education and support services. The Head Start waitlist consists mostly of 4 year olds. According to the director, there are roughly 14 children under the age of 5 that are homeless or in scattered sites enrolled in their program. Next door is Suburban Child, a large early education and out of school time program serving infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school age children. Suburban Child accepts vouchers and collaborates with Child Care Resources by providing space for a satellite location that allows local access to families either on the waitlist or receiving childcare financial assistance. The MetroWest YMCA is another large center-based program that accepts vouchers and has contracted slots. Additionally, the YMCA offers enrichment activities and out of school time programs.

There are two early intervention programs located in Framingham (only one back in 2010). Both programs offer playgroups to enrolled children and have community slots for an integrated approach to learning. The Director of Criterion Child Early Intervention for the MetroWest area shared the following data: 227 Framingham children/families served, 23 groups per week to children ages 12 months to 36 months offered, a group for infants 3-12 months (not currently active), groups are parent-child and child only, and 4 specialty groups for language development, messy/sensory play, and music. Most common delay is language, and the program has seen an increase in Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). 53% of the children are referred to the Framingham Public Schools. Primary language spoken in the home is representative of Framingham with English, Spanish, and Portuguese most dominant.

Healthy Families is located in Framingham and provides an intensive family education home visitation program to young teenage parents. According to the director, Healthy Families serve 20 families with approximately 27 known teen births per the Department of Public Health data. The parents range in age between 15 and 20 years old. 63% are Hispanic families; the rest are white or black. The organization implements the Ages and Stages Parent Questionnaire (ASQ) and the ASQ SE at every interval until the child ages out of program at age three. Children are referred to early intervention predominantly for communication and problem solving, which is similar to the ECAF/CFCE/PCHP ASQ results. The Healthy Families also uses the ASQ tool, like the CFCE, for family education and to inform home visit family plan.

The Framingham Public Library (FPL) has extensive, free programs for all ages. The FPL has a strategic plan that highlights early literacy and includes ECAF, clearly understanding the importance of early education and literacy for our youngest learners. Since 2010 to the present, the data from the children's department shows a wide array of programs serving many ages (Baby Lapsit, Storycrafts, after school and vacation programs, special events and summer reading programs). The librarians also go off-site to visit early childhood providers, preschools, and elementary schools. The library partners with the MetroWest YMCA camps and FPS parent groups. More recently, in 2017 ECAF was provided a designated space to offer weekly playgroup and family education programs. The children's department received a *Mind in the Making* grant to enhance the open play space area, providing materials and equipment to

encourage intentional interactive play and indirect family education. These new additions and renovations to the main branch, and the building of a new branch library, have created many more non-traditional library activities bringing in more families, youth, and seniors. Finally, the library also is home to Literacy Unlimited, an Adult ESL program that is free and offers a flexible schedule to new immigrants. This program is a nice alternative to the other adult ESL programs offered by Framingham Public Schools, SMOC, and the colleges. The library's current fundraising initiative to reinstitute the old favorite Book Mobile also will increase accessibility to isolated residents.

### ***Overview of Comprehensive Services and Supports***

Framingham is fortunate to be the home to many large human service organizations and health care agencies. Outside of the CFCE direct services are community resources that address some of the demographic data points required by this needs assessment: mental health, substance abuse, special needs/disabilities, teen pregnancy, crime, etc. Advocates Inc., Wayside, Sage House, SMOC Behavioral Health, Bethany Hill, and Serenity House are a few of the agencies that provide services to individuals struggling with substance abuse and addiction with housing alternatives (68% alcohol, 43% heroin). The Framingham Police and Fire Departments work together to keep the community safe. Framingham has large medical facilities and health care providers that offer accessible medical homes for individuals and families. The MetroWest Medical Center is a full service hospital with an emergency room. The Pediatric Clinic is also conveniently located at the hospital. The Edward M. Kennedy Community Health Center offers a full range of wellness services from primary and specialty care, dental, vision, and social services and has a diverse staff speaking many languages. There is the Free Medical Center and the Latino Health Insurance Program assisting families with insurance education, mammography screenings, and asthma relief. Framingham health care providers test for lead poisoning and according to the Massachusetts Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program data, Framingham was not on the high risk community list for lead poisoning.

South Middlesex Opportunity Council (SMOC) is the umbrella agency that operates housing assistance, career planning, ESL classes, WIC, Head Start, and behavioral health services. There are two early intervention programs, Criterion Child Enrichment and South Bay Community Services mentioned earlier, both serving the MetroWest area and with offices located in Framingham. Criterion also administers the Healthy Families program, mentioned previously, that provides intensive home visiting services to the population of parents 20 and under population (27 known births from 2015 published data). There is the Callahan Senior Center and several assisted living facilities. The library also offers a very well attended Life Long Learning program, in collaboration with Framingham State University. The Department of Child and Families coordinates with the Framingham Coalition and Family Resource Center to respond to the high needs of the children and families by providing support services and resources. The Department of Transitional Assistance is located next door to DCF, SMOC, and South Bay Early Intervention to coordinate services. The United Way Tri-County is located down the street with basic need support, Mass 211 resource and referral line, food pantry, and the Ready the Read Program.

### ***Meeting the Needs: Assets and Gaps***

As indicated in the information provided, the city of Framingham has a notable amount of comprehensive supportive services, which is clearly an asset. Many of these services are outside of the CFCE expertise; however, the CFCE collaborates with these partners for outreach, referrals, training, information, and in-kind support. Many of these entities have representatives that sit on the ECAF Leadership Council. The CFCE collaborates with these partners as appropriate, and makes referrals as needed. Additionally, Framingham Community Partners, a long standing community-wide forum, brings together all these service providers quarterly to network and learn about the resources offered by the various agencies. In addition, information is shared for the public and among these agencies, as many offer a resource listing,

whether in hard copy or online. For example, Head Start has a resource guide for families in their program. ECAF/CFCE has the *Resource Guide for Early Childhood*, as described above as a comprehensive listing of resources and roadmap to help families navigate and prepare for entering an early childhood program and kindergarten.

Needs surfacing from the demographic data and inventory of comprehensive services and supports is informative. Those who meet eligibility have options for seeking support. One gap that impacts family stability and children's ability to learn stands out is the demand for affordable housing as families are living in temporary housing and experiencing homelessness, evident with full shelters and limited, substandard scattered site housing. There seems to be many families in transition and transient based on SMOG Housing waitlists and ECAF anecdotal accounts from staff, partners, and families. Displaced individuals and families are not able to find, secure, or afford housing. There is a lack of permanent, safe housing solutions at this time. However, the city through the Community Development Department is undergoing an evaluation of housing needs and ways to address the challenges.

Another gap in services is for those families not meeting the eligibility requirements for programs and services and falling through the cracks. These families with young children cannot access early education programs such as Head Start or meet Child Care Financial Assistance requirements due to income and/or work status. How can a parent go to work without securing an affordable, high quality child care option? According to the December 2017 Child Care Resources waitlist data, there are 319 Framingham children, 152 are birth to age 2, 59 are age 3-5, and 99 are 5-8 years old.

### ***Addressing the Gaps***

The City of Framingham Community Development Department (CDD) works on housing issues and ways to improve housing conditions. The CDD is finding new ways to communicate with the public and community partners through newsletters, sharing resources, city happenings, and significant events. The CDD recently performed a community needs assessment and provided data to support this CFCE needs assessment. The CDD has reached out to partners to learn about programs and inquire about supporting and collaborating with other organization's efforts to improve housing conditions in Framingham.

The CFCEs across the state are addressing the gap for those families not eligible for certain supportive services and early education programs. The Framingham CFCE fills this gap to some degree by offering a menu of high quality early learning experiences for families while they are looking for affordable options, getting off of a waitlist, or entering the public schools and kindergarten. It is important for ECAF to sustain and expand its Leadership Council and continue to come up with creative solutions to meet the needs of these families. ECAF must continue to review and refine its own marketing and outreach strategies to reach all families.

The ECAF Leadership Council, along with its partners who focus on advocacy and private scholarships, like the Taly Foundation, are attempting to prevent and address the achievement gap. This large group continues to advocate for "early education for all" and are deliberating realistic solutions. In addition, the ECAF Leadership Council continues to educate our city, local, and state representatives about the need and the importance of early education, its impact on brain development and early identification of special needs, and ultimately the return on investment in early education.

### ***ECAF/CFCE Specific:***

#### ***Summaries from Internal Assessment Tool Findings***

Through the auspices of EEC, all CFCE grantees are required to complete the Strengthening Families Assessment tool. This assessment is completed annually and updated by the CFCE grant program staff.

The CFCE coordinator inquires with other early childhood providers who use the tool to learn from their results. In addition, the CFCE's have other assessments and documentation along with the Strengthening Families Assessment that include: Ages and Stages Parent Questionnaire; Parent Child Home Program (PCHP) Child Behavior Trait (CBT), Parent and Child Together (PACT) and demographics from the PCHP Intake Form; Early Literacy and Family Satisfaction surveys; and database information from ECAF's Attendance Record, Registration Form, Resource and Referral Log; meeting minutes; and, anecdotal records. The ECAF program also makes every effort to align with the EEC and Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) Learning Standards guidelines. All of these factors influence decision making as well as inform curriculum and program planning.

**AGES & STAGES QUESTIONNAIRE:** Over 30 ASQs have been completed in FY 18 to families in PCHP and with playgroup families. Results of the ASQs show that communication and self-regulation are the areas of concern, which is consistent with PCHP, Early Intervention, and Health Families data. The findings from the ASQ have been utilized to inform planning and family education programming.

**STRENGTHENING FAMILIES (SF) SELF-ASSESSMENT:** The five protective factors (parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, concrete support in times of need, and social and emotional competence of children) are embedded in this CFCE. ECAF is strengthening families and providing **concrete support** by leading and participating in the following programs: providing Happy Birthday Baskets to high need families, recruiting emergency donations when a family is in crisis, and referring a family to a community partner, like Home2Home, the United Way, local food pantry, or sending an electronic community blast to family, friends, neighbors, and other community partners. ECAF is addressing **child development knowledge** of strengthening families through CFCE family education and playgroup activities.

Staff development and parent leadership were areas to further develop according to the SF self-assessment. Ongoing trainings for both council members and staff provided a good time to introduce, refresh, and revisit program priorities and new topics that strengthen programs in supporting families. Another area identified is to increase parental involvement in the following areas: Family Action Team, program planning and events, Leadership Council, and advocacy at the state level as opportunities arise (Advocacy Day, PCHP, CFCE, and Brain Building in Progress legislative breakfasts, etc.).

Further considerations surfaced from discussion after the SF self-assessment. They were as follows:

- 1) invite past parents to connect with newer program parents; have parents co-lead groups, parent cafes, and workshops; involve parents in local initiatives for children and families, and bringing parents and children to state house for advocacy.
- 2) continue discussions at team meetings and provide training addressing cultural sensitivity, racism, stress, trauma, mental health, abuse and neglect.

Finally, another ECAF promising practice is working with our partners, such as the FPS Community Development Office and early childhood programs, to review their family engagement activities. The CFCE is always looking at new ways to strengthen families that recognize and build on the strength and resilience in parents and children.

**PCHP DATA FROM CHILD BEHAVIOR TRAIT (CBT), PARENT AND CHILD TOGETHER (PACT), DEMOGRAPHICS FROM INTAKE FORM:** PCHP serves 23 families and 49 children. From the pre-post CBT and PACT assessments used by the program, the following changes are noted:

Child Behavior Trait:

- Program 1- families focused on language and play skills

- Program 2- independence and self-regulation.

Parent and Child Together: Program 1 and Program 2 data are similar:

- Parents are giving firmer, consistent directions; verbalizing expectations; teaching child to perform age appropriate skills; and expressing approval.

Other PCHP Information:

- Direct parent feedback provided from mid- year reviews were 100% positive.
- Videotapes from home visits confirm the program staff are demonstrating implementation of best practices. The families state they enjoy their home visitors, like books, children prefer the educational toy visits, and are learning ways to interact with their child instead of just letting them play on their own. They are now seeing new ways to expand lessons with books and toys through the modeling of home visitors and the guide sheets filled with ideas for learning.

**EARLY LITERACY AND FAMILY SATISFACTION EVALUATIONS:** 100% of 50 respondents express positive feedback. Early Literacy Surveys completed in the beginning of the year indicate families are reading to their children regularly and have materials, but the quality is limited to the child is turning pages and the parent is reading to the child versus asking questions and using more prompts.

**DATABASE INFORMATION FROM ATTENDANCE RECORDS AND REGISTRATION FORM:** The most popular groups indicated from the records are the Play, Learn and Grow Together groups for all ages. This information agrees with the Family Needs Assessment Survey findings where families express a need for a place where they can bring a child who is either younger or older to a group if there is more than one child at home and not in another program. By being able to bring multiple children, it seems the program addresses a barrier for families. In addition, the responses to the survey inform us that we are serving the target population. Based on the data and observation, trends in group participation are somewhat seasonal, higher in the fall and spring.

**RESOURCE AND REFERRAL LOG:** Over 120 referrals to date, over 70% are family referrals, and majority is looking for groups, resource materials, PCHP, and child care.

**OTHER:** ECAF/CFCE is housed in central locations easily accessible to the entire community and has additional satellite sites such as the occasional use of the Housing Development Community Center, Early Intervention programs, WIC, and shelter spaces to offer the ECAF menu of services.

- Daily Play, Learn and Grow Together groups – intentional curriculum aligned with MA Standards and District goals. Family education is integrated into all classes with tips, handouts, and facilitated. Attendance records from sign in sheets are recorded on electronic spreadsheet indicates over 400 families participated in groups to date. (see attendance trends chart)
- Parent-Child Home Visitation Program
- PJ Family Story Time – the Family Action Team conducts this event 2x per year in the evening
- Family Education - (Baby Talk 6-8 families with infants - 10 week program and Let's Go to Kindergarten – year round with spring 10 week intensive – average enrollment 8 per class – 2 classes per week)
- Ages and Stages Parent Questionnaire
- Resource Guide for Early Childhood – distributed over 200 copies in English, Spanish, and Portuguese and available electronically and on the ECAF website
- Resource and Referral - Happy Birthday Baby Basket Program (delivering over 50 baskets per year in Framingham)
- Access to Brain Building Book Bags (14 concepts)
- Access to computer (on-site use for registration and completing survey- hard copies also available in English, Spanish and Portuguese)

- Annual Brain Building in Progress Event

Other statewide early education initiatives that are supported at the local level by the CFCE are the Boston Children’s Museum School Readiness Project, and the Brain Building in Progress Initiative. The CFCE coordinator takes a lead on both of these activities. For the Boston Children’s Museum the CFCE Coordinator assumes the role as the MetroWest Hub Leader. This keeps our MetroWest area aware of current activities that promote common goals of early literacy, sustaining skills over summer, and STEM. The ECAF signature annual Framingham Family Fair: Celebration of Young Children and the Importance of Early Education event is this community’s activity to support the key statewide initiative that promotes the Brain Building in Progress (BBIP) campaign. This event with our partners culminates our BBIP programming emphasized throughout the year as required by the CFCE grant. Not only do the community partners join together to provide an event for the whole family but the collaboration highlights best practices in the field of early education.

***Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Analysis:***

The SWOT analysis was one of the processes for gathering and summarizing community and family input. In October 2017, the Leadership Council undertook the SWOT analysis as a group activity for gathering community input. The five CFCE priorities were used to assist us in how we organized and summarized the data for this needs assessment report. The steering committee sorted the data by categorizing its findings from the various tools and methods that were stated earlier into these five CFCE priorities. In addition, the Strengthening Families Assessment was used to provide additional insights for family and community engagement. The SWOT analysis structure also helped the group synthesize an abundant amount of data for this report. Below are the SWOT analysis findings, as reported by the participants in the Early Childhood Needs Assessment.

***1. Universal and Targeted Outreach Strategies***

***Identified ECAF Strengths:***

- Significant number of community partner connections through ECAF, providing avenues to broadcast programs and activities
- Location of the program is accessible and satellite locations increase outreach opportunities
- Shelter and affordable housing specialists continually open to collaboration with community organizations including ECAF, Early Intervention, American Consumer Credit Counseling
- Partnership with the Taly Foundation to secure early education funding

***Identified ECAF Weaknesses:***

- Improve visibility by broadening our outreach and clarifying ECAF identity
- Continue to increase our public presence as a group that understands and advocates for all young families, sometimes program is stereotyped for high need families only
- Improve marketing of program
- Staff at ECAF and collaborating agencies are stretched too thin, due to scarce resources, and this impacts communication between member organizations as well as their active participation
- At times, tension exists between partners due to competition for limited funding
- Ability to share waitlists
- Need for public translation and interpreter services

***Identified ECAF Opportunities:***

- Citywide Bulletin Boards
- Community media such as Access TV opportunities
- Facebook Live, ACCESS Local TV, uncovering small churches, revisit other libraries, Hoops and Homework, Interfaith clergy group, new Family Resource Center, new baby hospital packet,

getting birth certificate information or internal school resources, participate in new FPS family conference

- Renewed energy and interest in the importance of providing all young families the benefit of a good beginning. Federal, state and local policy makers are engaged in new discussions about the importance of early education and care, which we hope will mean increased support for programs and services.
- Engage new and diverse funding sources in developing a comprehensive response to the needs of our young families
- Funders are interested in outcome and quality measurement. ECAF is well positioned to be a coordinated data source for community-level evaluation to ensure quality programs and services. Shifts in education, including the move for universal pre-school, and in health care, including the move to the medical home model, create opportunities for greater community collaboration among Alliance members
- Explore feasibility of offering ECAF sponsored ESL parent-child groups for families who are on waitlists for ESL classes
- School to library program collaborations
- Healthy eating could be promoted in food pantries, preschools, and schools
- Recruiting volunteers from a diverse community
- Collaborating with Family Resource Center

***Identified ECAF Threats:***

- Limited funding, which translates into limited staff time and multiple competing priorities
- Some community members are still not reached, particularly undocumented immigrants, non-English speakers, and disadvantaged families
- Families continue to need support to get benefits/services
- Some programs could learn to collaborate instead of competing

## **2. Linkages to Comprehensive Services**

***Identified ECAF Strengths:***

- ECAF has a comprehensive resource guide, email distribution lists, online presence, and social media outlets (Facebook and Twitter)
- Annual Brain Building in Progress Event
- Community is “good at collaborating”
- Connections across diverse populations
- Kindergarten Expo, Directors Collaborative, Early Intervention Transition Night
- Access to Child Care Resource Waitlist and incoming Kindergarten registration lists

***Identified ECAF Weaknesses:***

- Getting information delivered too hard to reach disconnected families
- Families continue to need support to get benefits/services
- Social media needs to be continued consistently and expanded in participation and reach
- Lack of streamlining multiple outlets
- Data shows families do not access Mass 211 – highest inquiry based on the United Way Tri-County call center data is for child care
- Lack human capital to respond to all on waitlist
- Few child psychiatrists
- Access to special education screening from any community member

***Identified ECAF Opportunities:***

- Citywide Community Bulletin Board/Calendar and clearinghouse for resources
- Increase Mass 211 visibility



- Access to Child Care Resource Inc. waitlist
- Access to screening through BLOCKS, ECAF/CFCE and other sites

**Identified ECAF Threats:**

- Competing venues to access information due to social media boom taking away the concept for “One Stop Shop” for information
- Human capital to respond to waitlist families
- Families not aware of screening hubs (early intervention and BLOCKs)

**3. Family Education**

**Identified ECAF Strengths:**

- In kind community partner support/collaborations
- In house and outside expertise
- Strong ESL education presence in Framingham
- Times and days of programs vary morning, afternoon, occasional evening and weekends
- Securing on and off site locations
- Parent-Child Home Program and its assessments
- ASQ use across early education system
- Library programs that include all families
- Capacity to support various language needs
- Acceptance of diversity
- Cultural intentionality
- Outdoor RX
- Shelter and affordable housing specialists continually open to collaboration with community organizations including ECAF, Early Intervention, American Consumer Credit Counseling
- Post activities and resources in centralized city location (social media outlets, websites)

**Identified ECAF Weaknesses:**

- Human capital/staffing
- Limited funding for transportation
- Sharing calendars of activities
- Language capacity
- Developing an annual schedule/calendar
- Seen as a “high need program”
- High need families don’t access even when services are brought to community
- Offering more time on evenings and weekends
- Duplication of efforts - ASQ offered at multiple early education programs
- Work to integrate ASQ into program in a meaningful way and to guarantee completion as families may not always return if not done on site
- Expand programs to meet scheduling needs of families with weekend and evening opportunities, with transportation and child care if possible; opportunities to support needs of children 3-5 who are not able to attend preschool or Head Start
- Continue to elicit topics of interest for parent training
- Due to no child care resources, ECAF ties family education to playgroups

**Identified ECAF Opportunities:**

- Securing on and off site locations
- Reviewing program offerings and schedules
- Joint program activities where commonalities are found

- Untapped resources for outreach – food pantries, Daniel’s Table, Interfaith Clergy (faith based and non-traditional organizations), Hoops and Homework, new Family Resource Center, Parks and Recreation.
- Communicating about the offering of ASQ to families across partners to decrease duplication of efforts (note: some programs require ASQ and more voluntary) and overwhelming families
- WIC and Cooking Matters offer education and cooking classes on healthy eating, which could be expanded to food pantries, preschools, and schools

***Identified ECAF Threats:***

- Multiple offerings by partners in community with competing times and populations
- Working in silos
- Multiple postings on social media that competing communication and are not part of the network
- Seen as a “high need program”
- Transient high need families due to affordable housing, temporary living situations, and complex needs
- Offering evening and weekend times that consider staff safety and supervision

**4. Transition Support**

***Identified ECAF Strengths:***

- Resource Guide for Early Education
- ECAF Transition Action Team to improve cross communication with partners and enhance family education to navigate systems, i.e. postnatal education, home to workforce, Early Intervention to Special Education, preschool to Kindergarten
- Mental Health Consultation Grant
- Parent Information Center
- Contacts for families through the ECAF office

***Identified ECAF Weaknesses:***

- Improve cross communication with partners
- Enhance family education to navigate systems, i.e. postnatal education, home to workforce, Early Intervention to Special Education, preschool to Kindergarten
- Evaluate needs for mental health supports around families with young children- who needs? Where to access? How to connect?
- Educate families more broadly on parent/student rights. Parents need more support in knowing their rights, what is available, and how to advocate. How can ECAF support parent training and support (FCSN, Parent’s Rights trainings)
- Families can benefit from understanding the importance of play and playful parenting (Positive Solutions Family training)
- More parent information and parenting information at the library
- Parent Information Center at capacity

***Identified ECAF Opportunities:***

- Assign to Leadership Council Birth to Kindergarten Transition Action Team
- Encourage EEC/ESE/DPH/EI/SPED to develop a visible seamless navigation system for families (a roadmap or chart)
- Collaborate with Framingham Special Education Parent Advisory Council

***Identified ECAF Threats:***

- Time and commitment of key stakeholders at the state and local level

## **5. Building Community Capacity**

### **Identified ECAF Strengths:**

- In kind support from partners
- Sustainable council since 2010
- ECAF members are able to articulate value of early childhood education and care and speak for the early childhood community in Framingham
- School to library program collaborations
- Multi-lingual staff in many agencies and programs as well as many multi-lingual staff making efforts to communicate with families
- Materials are translated into the dominate languages of Portuguese and Spanish
- ECAF is a central source
- ECAF members bring energy and are enthusiastic about supporting families with young children
- Broad representation from the community, as well as individual and agency expertise in early childhood development, education and care and family support
- Encompasses a diversity of perspectives reflective of multiple segments of the community

### **Identified ECAF Weaknesses:**

- Going back to working in silos
- Increasing demands with limited resources
- Continue to expand full representation of the diverse community of Framingham that seeks greater gender, cultural, age and language diversity as well as inclusion of community members and families with special needs.

### **Identified ECAF Opportunities:**

- Joint grant opportunities
- Educating new government officials and school administration on the mission of the ECAF/CFCE, new alliances within the city to bring early education to all families (universal pre-K)
- Senior Centers
- Advocacy by the Taly Foundation to secure early education opportunities

### **Identified ECAF Threats:**

- Competing for funding
- Staff overcommitted
- Working in silos versus public transparency
- Need for more public access to translation and interpreter services

### **Information for FY 19 Planning:**

These are the areas that will inform planning for FY19 and beyond.

- Noted gap in services for those not meeting eligibility for programs and services such as Head Start or Child Care Financial Assistance and the cost of an early childhood program is too high.
- Family education and support, groups, and resources needed most at 3 transition points
  - 1) after the birth of a baby,
  - 2) at the 2 to 3 year when moving from either from EI to SPED or to preschool,
  - 3) those children with no prior early education before entering Kindergarten
- Linkages to comprehensive resources and communication across community need to be condensed to possibly a community clearinghouse bulletin board. We have many levels of social media outlets and folks are posting in several places. Our findings show families and community desire a one stop cyber community board that shares activities and resources categorized by age or population.
- Enhance marketing of ECAF/CFCE with outside expertise now that we have two accessible and centralized homes.

- Seek ways to improve registration/sign up that ensures family commitment to program offerings on a consistent basis without creating barriers
- Integrate ASQ in more ways that are meaningful to families and inform program and curriculum planning. Many partners use the ASQ and should look at how best to prevent duplication of this activity.
- Continue to focus on communication and self-regulation skills in groups and PCHP as the evidence from the ASQ and PCHP assessments indicates these are the primary areas of concern.
- Sustain and expand the strong community capacity as witnessed by 8 years of community partnerships with demonstrated participation on Leadership Council and a significant amount of in kind support from permanent space at the Framingham Public Schools and the Framingham Public Library to the occasional space offered at the housing authority developments, WIC, and early intervention programs. An enormous cost savings! Work continues with the Leadership Council to strengthen ties, support collaboration and communication, develop sustainability through creating a donor base, and build family engagement activities through a strongly led Family Action Team. Look at models that prevent partners returning to silos.
- Ongoing training as leadership, staff, and family profiles change.

**Reflection:**

Overall, the process of this needs assessment worked well. The challenge was most definitely time given that ECAF was not able to enlist a consultant for this activity. On a positive note, we were fortunate enough to have gone through this process with a consultant back in 2010. Being able to reflect back and compare where we are today versus where we were then was gratifying as much progress has been made. The outcome allowed the partners to once again see where we were, where we are, and where we are going as we move forward.

The most interesting and unexpected finding was that in 2010 the community faced a different yet similar challenge on how to connect, and expressed that the community lacked a “One Stop Shop” for families with young children. Today we live in an age of technological advances where cyber communication is desired by families and community partners as revealed through our needs assessment, something not anticipated eight years ago. This variable has informed us on how we can better engage families and community. The larger need that was highlighted throughout the process was that community and families are still looking for a clearinghouse of resources and activities specific to Framingham at the city level, perhaps something like a community board.

Since 2010, ECAF has remained an entity with strong partnerships who are energetic individuals ready to unite to serve a diverse community of families through comprehensive resource and referral networks including access to materials in various languages and translation through multilingual staff. ECAF members understand collaboration and exhibit this through cultural intentionality, acceptance of diversity and efforts to continue to have all families with young children have a voice in getting their needs met in the Framingham area. ECAF has supported families to this end by offering varied programming in conjunction with community providers. ECAF has assisted families in navigating access to family education opportunities, intentional school readiness and early literacy activities, transportation, information, and child care financial assistance. Families and caregivers in the community have access to opportunities for socialization and learning together.

The need is apparent from the data. The CFCE program menu meets the five priorities outlined by the CFCE, yet additional needs remain unmet or underfunded in order to fully address all the challenges in the community. What we do know is families and community partners have embraced the opportunities that they otherwise would not have been exposed to without the EEC grant support. It was loudly

expressed through the surveys and interviews that we still need to fine tune our communication highway, build upon the strong partnerships, and further develop new collaborations to ensure communication across the ECAF that will benefit all families seeking education, support, and resources. When the ECAF comes together it is strong, however, the danger of returning to silos remain. Through ECAF, young families have easily accessible places in the community to gather, their children have a safe environment to play together, parents have a place to talk together and offer peer to peer support, as well as access to information to strengthen parenting skills. ECAF works!

