CHILDREN'S OPPORTUNITY ALLIANCE

FOUNDATIONAL ACTION PLAN

MONTGOMERY COUNTY
CHILDREN'S OPPORTUNITY ALLIANCE

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE OPPORTUNITY

A vibrant Montgomery County means that young children are put first. Investments in the early years of a child's life can set the foundation for all future health, learning, and well-being. The advantages linked to high-quality early childhood supports extend beyond children, and contribute to building stronger families, a more robust workforce, and a flourishing society. When we ensure that all our youngest children have what they need to develop to their fullest potential, our entire community will benefit for generations to come.

While every child deserves a strong start, we also know every child is not given that chance. Inequities that have been built into our current systems limit access to positive early childhood experiences, particularly for Black, Indigenous, Latine, and other communities of color. Barriers such as hunger, housing issues, and lack of education options continue to prevent children from reaching their full potential. For these reasons, high-quality early childhood experiences have remained out of reach for many children.

Understanding this, the aim of the Children's Opportunity Alliance is to create an environment where every child receives a strong start as the key to a brighter future. This involves a focus on increasing high-quality early childhood opportunities for young children from birth to five years old (and expanding to age eight over time). Serving as a neutral convener and coordinator, the Alliance brings together diverse members from across the early childhood community as a call to action. Our collective mission: to advance a common agenda that eliminates barriers and advocates for an equitable system of early care and education in Montgomery County in which all young children can learn, grow, and thrive.
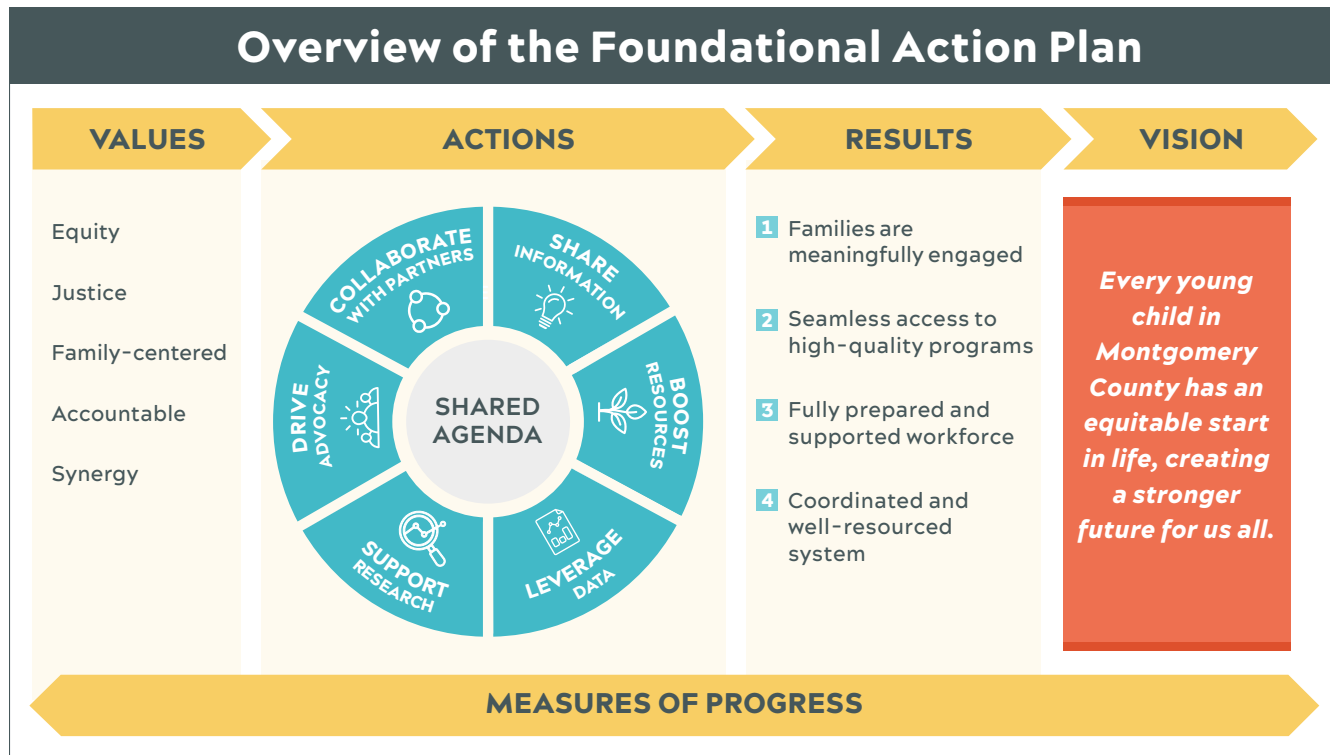
VISION

Every young child in Montgomery County has an equitable start in life, creating a stronger future for us all.

MISSION

The Children's Opportunity Alliance connects our community to build an equitable, accessible, high-quality, and sustainable early childhood system that narrows disparities and puts all young children on a path to reach their greatest potential.

THE ACTION PLAN

The Foundational Action Plan was created as an important tool to guide planning and mobilize action for the Alliance. It was developed by the Alliance Team and Board with vital input along the way from families, providers, local agencies, nonprofits, business leaders, and other key community partners. The plan is driven by a bold theory of change that is grounded in shared values and collective action— all leading to improved conditions to ensure that every young child in Montgomery County has the strongest start possible.

Overview of the Foundational Action Plan

VALUES

- Equity
- Justice
- Family-centered
- Accountable
- Synergy

ACTIONS

COLLABORATE WITH PARTNERS

SHARE INFORMATION

BOOST RESOURCES

LEVERAGE DATA

SUPPORT RESEARCH

DRIVE ADVOCACY

SHARED AGENDA

RESULTS

1. Families are meaningfully engaged
2. Seamless access to high-quality programs
3. Fully prepared and supported workforce
4. Coordinated and well-resourced system

VISION

Every young child in Montgomery County has an equitable start in life, creating a stronger future for us all.

MEASURES OF PROGRESS

MOVING FORWARD

Everyone in Montgomery County has a role to play in making it a place where all children to thrive. Putting this plan into action will take commitment and collective effort from all community partners that are a part of this movement. Together, we can work to increase access, improve quality, and boost coordination and investment in the early childhood opportunities we know make a difference.

The Foundational Action Plan was created to provide a set of clear actions for the Alliance to focus on and organize around. It is meant to **build on the ongoing work and momentum** that exists in order to address the real and big challenges young children and families face every day. It offers a **road map to highlight important next steps for the Alliance** to contribute to creating a stronger and more equitable early childhood system. And it **extends an invitation to join together in the work of transformation**—to see ourselves in the work and impact the early childhood spaces we influence every day.

The hope is that it will lead to lasting change on the journey to making Montgomery County a great place for young children to reach their potential, creating a stronger future for us all.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Every child deserves a strong start in life—but not every child is given that chance.

In the early years lies the potential for each child's life to be shaped by joyful experiences, deep connections to their culture and community, and rich learning. And yet, not all children are afforded that right. Although the first eight years are an incredible window of opportunity, they can also be a time of intense vulnerability for children. Inequities that have been built into our current systems limit access to positive early childhood experiences, particularly for Black, Indigenous, Latine, and other communities of color. Barriers such as hunger, housing issues, and lack of education options continue to prevent children from reaching their full potential. For these reasons, high-quality early childhood experiences have remained out of reach for many children.[1]

But it doesn't have to be this way . . . If we can make sure that every child has what they need to thrive during the early years of life, we can set them up for great success—and have big impacts on their family and community.

WHAT EARLY CHILDHOOD IS LIKE IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY

To better understand what it will take for all young children to be healthy and thriving, it is important to have a clear picture of what early childhood looks like in Montgomery County and what community factors are at play. This requires a hard look not only at families' strengths and assets but also at the significant barriers that fragmented systems and long-standing inequities present.
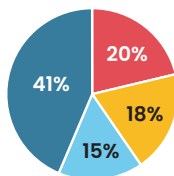
WHAT EARLY CHILDHOOD IS LIKE IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY

YOUNG CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY

Montgomery County is home to a diverse population

- HISPANIC
- BLACK
- ASIAN
- WHITE

20%
18%
15%
41%

Of the total population living in Montgomery County (1,056,910)

→ **7% (74,409)** are children age 5 and under

→ **75%** of children age 5 and under live in households with all parents working

FINANCIAL REALITIES

13,121 families in Montgomery County are living in poverty

6,938 (9%) of children age 5 and under are living below the federal poverty level

8% of children are food insecure

40,711 (56%) of children age 5 and under are living under the self-sufficiency level

A family of three living in Montgomery County **needs to earn at least $116,864 a year** to cover basic expenses, including child care (Self Sufficiency Standard).

ACCESS TO EARLY CHILDHOOD SUPPORTS

Access is limited and uneven

Many families aren't receiving the services they need because of:

- High costs
- Limited availability
- Long wait lists
- Limited funding for programs and services
- Lack of transportation

Child care costs are high

$41,208 › Annual child care costs in Montgomery County

27% of a family's income

Child care is affordable if it costs families **no more than 7% of their income.**

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)

SCHOOL READINESS

44% OF CHILDREN IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY DEMONSTRATE READINESS

READINESS BY DEMOGRAPHICS (2022-23)

- Black **38%**
- White **69%**
- Hispanic **23%**
- Asian **59%**
- Two or more races **63%**
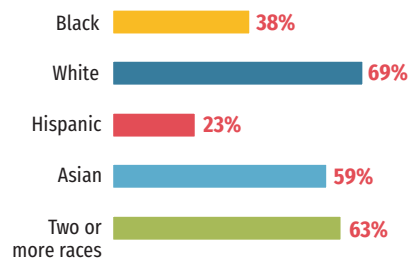
- **15%** Students with disabilities
- **12%** Multilingual learners
- **24%** Economically disadvantaged

Outcomes in the Early Grades

58% 3rd Grade Students Proficient in English Language Arts

54% 3rd Grade Students Proficient in Math

Research tells us if students start behind they are likely to stay behind and face hurdles to success in school and beyond.

SOURCES: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2022; Wellbeing of Young Children in Montgomery County, 2023; Child Care Demographics Montgomery County, 2023; Maryland State Department of Education, 2024; Child Care Demographics Montgomery County, 2024

WHAT CHILDREN NEED TO THRIVE

To advance equitable outcomes, it is essential that children are supported in holistic ways from birth. The full range of conditions, environments, opportunities, and interactions that children experience influence their development, learning, and quality of life. For that reason, the early childhood system consists of multiple sectors, operating within communities to support strong outcomes for children. When we refer to the *early childhood system*, we mean the full range of services that interact with young children and their families, including:

- **Health, Mental Health, and Well-Being** (e.g., health care; oral health; infant and early childhood mental health; prenatal care; nutrition)

- **Family Support** (e.g., home visiting; family resource centers; child welfare; peer networks; training and advocacy support)

- **Early Learning** (e.g., preschool; Head Start; center- and home-based child care; special education; family, friend, and neighbor care)

- **Economic Mobility** (e.g., job training and placement; food assistance; housing support; financial support; tax credits; transportation)

WHAT DOES THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM LOOK LIKE IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY?

HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH, AND WELL-BEING

EARLY LEARNING

CHILDREN

FAMILIES

FAMILY SUPPORT

ECONOMIC MOBILITY

Source: Adapted from the Build Initiative
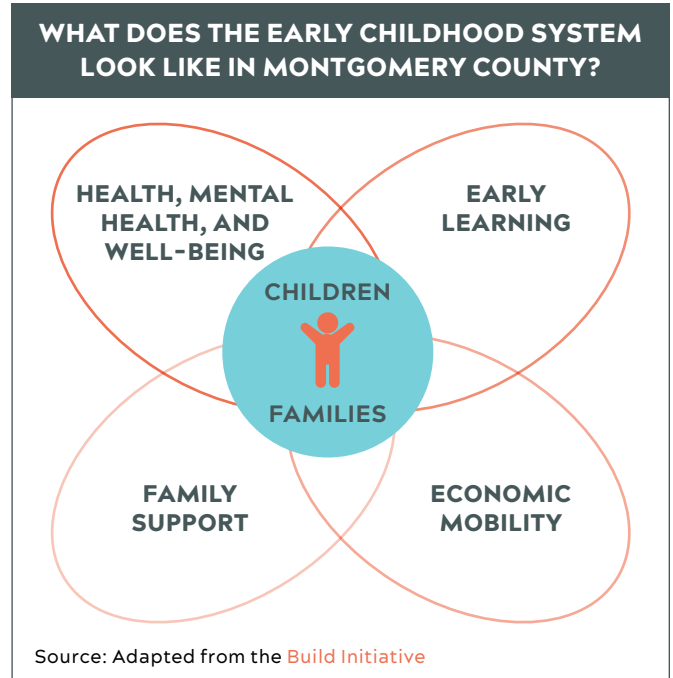
When all the pieces of the system work together, we get the best end result: children and families who are set up to succeed.

OUR COMMITMENT TO CHILDREN

The aim of the Children's Opportunity Alliance is to create the environment in which every child receives a strong start as the key to a brighter future. Investments in the early years of a child's life can set the foundation for all future health, learning, and well-being.[2] The advantages linked to high-quality early childhood supports extend beyond children, and contribute to building stronger families, a more robust workforce, and a flourishing society.[3] When we ensure that all our youngest children have what they need to develop to their fullest potential, our entire community will benefit for generations to come.

Serving as a neutral convener and coordinator, the Alliance brings together diverse members from across the early childhood community with a call to action. Our collective mission: to advance a common agenda that eliminates barriers and advocates for an equitable system of early care and education in Montgomery County in which all young children can grow, learn, and thrive.

VISION

Every young child in Montgomery County has an equitable start in life, creating a stronger future for us all.

MISSION

The Children's Opportunity Alliance connects our community to build an equitable, accessible, high-quality, and sustainable early childhood system that narrows disparities and puts all young children on a path to reach their greatest potential.

WHY THE FIRST EIGHT YEARS?

The Alliance will emphasize efforts impacting children ages 0–5, and expand our focus to children ages 0–8 over time. This approach acknowledges . . .

The early years of a child's life are a time of incredible opportunity and growth. This is a time when a child's brain experiences rapid growth, forming connections that are the foundation for all future learning and development. By focusing on these initial years, the Alliance can maximize the impact of early childhood supports leading to healthier, thriving children.

The transition into kindergarten is particularly important. Smooth and supportive transitions are critical as children and families enter kindergarten. Making sure there is alignment with early childhood spaces focused on the earlier years can help children to adjust to new norms, socialize with different peers, and meet academic expectations as they enter school.

Experiences in the early grades matter. It is important to promote continuity in children's learning and development as they move through the early grades. The experiences children have during this time can help to build more complex skills and knowledge as time goes on, and ultimately predict how successful they will be later in school and throughout life.

Source: New America, Supporting Early Learning in America: Policies for a New Decade

OUR VALUES

To move forward with clear intention, the Alliance has created a set of shared values that will be centered as we live into our collective work. The values represent our core beliefs that are at the foundation of our efforts and must hold true to give our youngest children the best chance for success. All of the work of the Alliance will be guided by the following:

EQUITY

We are dedicated to confronting inequities so that race, place, income, and other social factors are no longer predictors of children's outcomes and future success.

FAMILY-CENTERED

We stand behind the beliefs, practices, and policies that amplify the strengths and address the needs of young children and their families.

JUSTICE

We prioritize the voices of those closest to the issues we aim to address, who have been historically oppressed and kept furthest from opportunity, to realize a more just early childhood system.

ACCOUNTABLE

We are committed to using data and setting measurable benchmarks to inform our decisions, monitor and share our progress, and guide the ways we work to improve.

SYNERGY

We value the many perspectives, expertise, and abilities of early childhood leaders across public and private sectors and recognize our shared responsibility to work together on behalf of the community.

HOW WE CENTER EQUITY AND JUSTICE

Progress toward what we envision for young children means contending with an early childhood system rooted in racism. This systemic failing has significant and disproportionate consequences for young children and their families, particularly affecting Black, Indigenous, Latine, and other communities of color. As a result, the early childhood system as we know it has created deep and complex barriers to the kinds of programming, settings, and experiences that set children on the path to success. The Alliance recognizes that equity in early childhood will take undoing what has been done and rebuilding on a foundation of truth and justice. Our work is anchored in the belief that if we commit our resources, influence, and capacity to pursuing equity, we can advance the early childhood system and improve outcomes for all. In this way, we can build a stronger Montgomery County, where all aspects of children's identities are affirmed and where race, place, and other social factors do not predict their future.

This means that in our efforts we will show particular attention to underrepresented and special populations:

- **Children from racially and ethnically diverse families**
- **Children in low-income families**
- **English language learners**
- **Children with disabilities and/or special needs**

Our commitment to racial equity and pursuit of social justice guides all aspects of our work. To learn more about how it shows up throughout our efforts, read our **Race Equity and Social Justice Statement**.

OUR WORK TOGETHER

Everyone in Montgomery County has a role to play in making it a place where all children can thrive. No individual person, organization, or agency has the resources or capacity to do this alone. It will take collective effort from a range of partners across public and private sectors, including families, early childhood providers, nonprofit and government partners, funders, businesses, researchers, advocates, and other key community members. The success of this work depends on shared accountability and bold commitment on behalf of children and families.

Community members, including families of young children who are closest to the challenges

Nonprofit, government, and education partners who directly serve infants, toddlers, and young children

Health and education professionals who provide evidence-based research and promising practices

Local businesses and philanthropic supporters, both institutional and individuals

Researchers who conduct studies to expand evidence-based practices and innovation

Advocates who create awareness, build support, and work for change

The Foundational Action Plan is an important tool and provides a unifying road map for the Alliance. The plan outlines the why, how, and what behind the Alliance's efforts and offers important guidance to all the community partners contributing to this work. The result of our collective actions will help build a stronger Montgomery County, where young children are able to develop to their fullest potential and lead the way to a brighter tomorrow.

THE FOUNDATIONAL ACTION PLAN

This Foundational Action Plan guides planning and mobilizes action for the Alliance. The plan was developed by the Alliance Team and Board with vital input from families, providers, state agencies, nonprofits, business leaders, and other early childhood partners across Montgomery County.

HOW WE GOT HERE: A COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PLANNING PROCESS

Over the past year, the process to develop the Foundational Action Plan has brought together members of the early childhood community to create a framework for the Alliance and identify the action needed to bring that framework to life.

To do so, the Alliance partnered with **School Readiness Consulting** (SRC) to lead an intentional and community-driven planning process to design the plan. That process involved:

LANDSCAPE SCAN

Document review to highlight the progress made, gaps that exist, and opportunities for the Alliance to build on to improve Montgomery County's early childhood system. For the Alliance to be successful, it needed to build on all the strong early childhood work that has already taken place. A landscape scan was conducted to form a more nuanced understanding of Montgomery County's early childhood history, describing the significant progress that has been made, as well as highlighting gaps and needs to continue building a strong early childhood system. A scan of more than 40 early childhood–related documents resulted in a memo that shared key themes and emerging directions for action for the Alliance. *To learn more: Key Themes and Emerging Directions from Initial Analysis of the Early Childhood Landscape in Montgomery County*

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Ongoing opportunities to gather insights from families, providers, and other key community members to learn what matters most to them and understand their thoughts about the role of the Alliance. Central to the Alliance's planning process was a commitment to community engagement. This included opportunities to hear from a range of voices, roles, and perspectives across Montgomery County through a series of in-person community conversations and an online survey. We listened and learned to understand the areas of greatest need and ideas for improving the early childhood system, as well as to hear about the potential role of the Alliance in creating solutions.
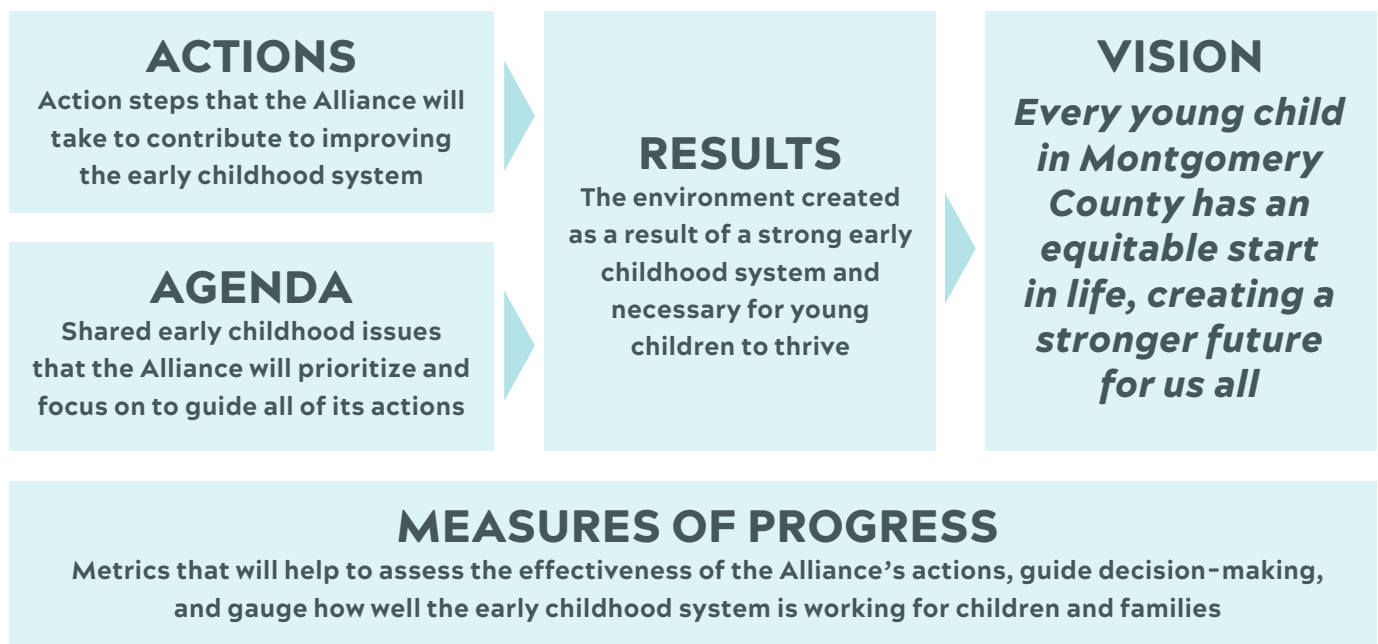
ALLIANCE PARTNERSHIP

Support and leadership from the Alliance Team and Board in order to co-create the Foundational Action Plan. Alongside the Alliance Team, a Board made up of dedicated early childhood community leaders brought a variety of perspectives, expertise, and experience. The process to design the Action Plan advanced with the Alliance Team and Board working together to iterate, share thinking, and make decisions. The collective group met at key junctures to offer timely ideas, feedback, and guidance throughout the entire planning effort.

As a result of this planning process, the Foundational Action Plan was built on the progress that came before, while also acknowledging the perspectives, experiences, and needs of today. The intent is that all the actions and efforts that will result from this plan will ultimately lead to an early childhood system that truly honors, values, and supports every child, family, and community in Montgomery County.

THE FOUNDATIONAL ACTION PLAN

The following **Foundational Action Plan** offers a road map to inform the ongoing work of the Alliance. It includes clear steps that can be taken to build a stronger early childhood system that is ready to give Montgomery County's children the strongest start possible. It is a dynamic tool that offers an overarching framework to (1) guide the **actions** of the Alliance, (2) create a common **agenda** to set early childhood priorities, (3) contribute to systems change that creates the **results** needed for children to thrive, and (4) identify **measures** to track progress and hold the system accountable—all leading to a shared vision for our youngest children.

ACTIONS
Action steps that the Alliance will take to contribute to improving the early childhood system

AGENDA
Shared early childhood issues that the Alliance will prioritize and focus on to guide all of its actions

RESULTS
The environment created as a result of a strong early childhood system and necessary for young children to thrive

VISION
Every young child in Montgomery County has an equitable start in life, creating a stronger future for us all

MEASURES OF PROGRESS
Metrics that will help to assess the effectiveness of the Alliance's actions, guide decision-making, and gauge how well the early childhood system is working for children and families

↗ To see the full Foundational Action Plan all in one place, check out the appendix.

RESULTS

Young children develop best when in secure, nurturing relationships surrounded by supported caregivers in well-resourced, connected environments. When this happens, research tells us that children are more likely to experience good physical and mental health, academic achievement, career success, and other benefits later in life.[4] This evidence supports our fundamental belief that the people and systems surrounding children directly influence their development and are inextricably linked. Because of that, a core part of the Alliance's work is focused on **results** that create the environment necessary for young children to thrive. This means:

1. Families are meaningfully engaged

2. Seamless access to high-quality programs

3. Fully prepared and supported workforce

4. Coordinated and well-resourced system

Making progress in each of these areas will be essential to strengthen Montgomery County's early childhood system and achieve the ultimate vision of a stronger future for all young children, their families, and the communities in which they live.

1 FAMILIES ARE MEANINGFULLY ENGAGED

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE: Families are valued and supported as their child's first teacher and strongest advocate.

The well-being of children is rooted in the well-being of their families. Research shows the importance of supporting families to foster early learning and development as their child's first and most important teacher.[5] Montgomery County's current family engagement efforts are largely focused on improving access to information and building the capacity of parents and caregivers to support their children's learning. However, more could be done to ensure that families of all configurations have what they need to be stable and supported in their role as caregivers. This might include addressing the broader community conditions and needs that impact overall family well-being, such as supports for stable housing, food access, and employment services. In addition, families can benefit from family supports that can help them in their role as caregivers for young children—services such as home visiting, peer support for new and expecting parents, and training that offers tools and resources to help families advocate for their children. This lens is a vital part of the Alliance's strategy to more fully support and partner with families in Montgomery County.

> "The conversation needs to be data driven and inclusive of all families. The focus needs to be on the system because it is not working for most."
>
> **COMMUNITY LEADER**

2 SEAMLESS ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY PROGRAMS

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE: Young children and their families access a network of high-quality early childhood services that provide holistic support, mitigate disparities, and lead to lifelong benefits.

Although Montgomery County is considered relatively well resourced, there are still significant gaps in adequately serving young children and families. There are currently limited options for families because of long wait lists, inconsistent availability or "uneven access," geographic barriers and limited transportation, lack of options for families who work nontraditional hours, and limited availability for infants and toddlers.[6,7] The cost of care—which is already high—also continues to increase, placing access outside the reach of many families in Montgomery County.[8]

Along with issues related to access, there remains a real need to improve the quality of programs and services available for young children and their families. While defining program quality can be complex, most families want to find a program that provides a safe and nurturing environment, has qualified staff and open communication, affirms their language and culture, and is ultimately supportive of their child's needs. However, more resources and systems must be in place in order to advance quality to adequately serve the County's diverse population.

As part of the Alliance's vision for a comprehensive system of care, there is great opportunity to increase access to high-quality programs and services throughout Montgomery County. This includes all systems that offer holistic support and can impact overall well-being, such as those that focus on physical health care, mental health, and early learning. All must be considered as part of the network of high-quality early childhood services that young children and their families need to know about and access for a thriving and successful future.

> "We need a plan. How can Montgomery County expand the quality and quantity and affordability of early care and education? Full stop. And underneath that, what policies do we have to enact? What strategic financial investments should we be making?"
>
> **COMMUNITY LEADER**

> "There is a great deal of demand and need for quality, affordable care. This may be the strongest resource for change—families who need the care, not only for the development of their children, but for their own ability to work and be part of the economy."
>
> **COMMUNITY LEADER**

> "if you don't see people that look like you . . . you don't want to go there . . . reflect diversity. Think about how equitable are we and how are we serving the community."
>
> **FAMILY MEMBER**

> "[A program] that really understands what your child needs. So, it can't always be anybody because they don't understand what the child needs."
>
> **FAMILY MEMBER**

3 FULLY PREPARED AND SUPPORTED WORKFORCE

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE: The early childhood workforce is prepared, retained, and equitably compensated in order to offer high-quality experiences across all the settings linked to child and family well-being.

The value of the early childhood workforce cannot be overestimated—not only do they support children's learning and development, but they allow for families to go to work, supporting the economic vitality of Montgomery County. Unfortunately, low wages, a lack of comprehensive benefits, and limited opportunities for professional development pose significant barriers for the workforce.[9] These factors can deter those wanting to enter the early childhood field and cause high turnover rates. As a result, programs often struggle to find and retain staff to serve families in need of care. Studies show that these barriers disproportionally impact Black and Latine early childhood professionals, who make up the majority of providers in Montgomery County (as well as across the nation), highlighting the real and urgent need to address these inequities.[10] These issues point to the importance of fully supporting a robust workforce for the early childhood system. This support includes providing access to the resources professionals need to do their work well, compensation that honors their value to society, and working conditions that allow them to remain and grow within the early childhood field.

> "We need to start building a pipeline of a qualified workforce and that they can have meaningful careers and afford to live in the county. Many teachers don't live in the county and have very far commutes. Work-life balance and the stress levels that we are putting on the educators . . . [Focus on] strategies that would be attractive [to join the workforce]."

EARLY CHILDHOOD PROVIDER

> ". . . Sharing a seat at the table so that early childhood educators can have a voice when it comes to matters related to them."

BOARD MEMBER

> "Valuing the workforce as essential—not only do they support children's learning and development, but they allow for families to go to work."

BOARD MEMBER

4 COORDINATED AND WELL-RESOURCED SYSTEM

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE: A robust early childhood system where all elements are connected, aligned, and sustained to meet the needs of the early childhood community—now and in the future.

Historically, early childhood systems have been built on siloed structures and with limited funding. As a result, early childhood programs have developed independently from one another, making for a patchwork quilt of programs that all have different standards, requirements, and funding sources. This lack of alignment continues to impede and limit the effectiveness of services and supports in many states and localities across the nation.[11] These same systemic issues also affect the current early childhood system in Montgomery County, which is complex and often disjointed, making it difficult for children and families to access services and for the early childhood workforce to best serve communities. While multiple entities across the county focus on supporting young children and their families, more strategic coordination would help to reduce overlap, redundancies, and inefficiencies.

A primary goal of the Alliance is to build a stronger and more cohesive system. This work could take different shapes, including efforts to strengthen partnerships between public and private sectors, to maximize resources and identify new funding sources, or to focus on community-informed solutions that promote better alignment and raise awareness about the needs of the early childhood sector. Regardless of the approach, a vital part of our work will be to collaboratively determine what alignment might look like and how best to achieve it. This will ideally lead to building an early childhood system that is responsive, supportive, and fully resourced to meet the needs of young children and their families across Montgomery County.

> "The biggest thing that I feel needs to be addressed is accessibility and communication between agencies. I know there's so many opportunities for support in this area."
>
> **COMMUNITY LEADER**

> "There are so many aspects: health care, access to child care, mental health, parenting tools, career/job skills, financial counseling—all of these factor into how children are raised and if they reach their full potential."
>
> **COMMUNITY LEADER**

> "COA [the Alliance] is not necessarily the owner of doing that work, they are supposed to bring everyone together to organize—align mental models and bring partners to action, mobilize to transformation, in order to identify inequities within the early care system to dismantle and mitigate them."
>
> **BOARD MEMBER**

> "Convening is the biggest priority to connect . . . convening and connecting families and providers."
>
> **BOARD MEMBER**

ACTIONS

So that the Alliance will move forward as a collective force for change, the **actions** lay out how members can join in the work of transformation. Transformation of the early childhood system will not come as a single decision or sweeping policy change. Instead, it will be the cumulative result of many choices of early childhood leaders to affirm the right of all young children to thrive and to take strategic action to challenge a system that was built for inequity. The following actions were developed to:

1. **Provide specific steps to live into the strategic way the Alliance will do the work and to guide progress over time.** Naming each opportunity to act offers a clear and powerful framework to inform what happens now and what is up next.

2. **Lift up areas in which the Alliance is best positioned to contribute to improving the early childhood system.** The actions are designed to build on what is currently working, complement and align ongoing efforts, and identify opportunities where the Alliance may play a unique role to create meaningful change for our youngest children.

3. **Be anchored and connected to one another.** The actions influence and inform one another—so you can imagine them almost functioning as a web to collectively strengthen the early childhood system and drive toward results that will set all children on a path to success.

4. **Drive toward the results needed for young children to thrive.** The actions highlight specific ways that the Alliance can contribute to driving systems change and creating the environment that young children need to grow, learn, and achieve their greatest potential.

ACTIONS OF THE ALLIANCE

COLLABORATE WITH PARTNERS
We build strong relationships and coordinate with community members to work toward a shared vision for early childhood.

LEVERAGE DATA
We expand the availability, use, and power of data to advance equitable outcomes for young children and families.

SHARE INFORMATION
We share clear information about early childhood and co-create spaces for learning and connection.

SUPPORT RESEARCH
We support research to learn about recent trends, reinforce what works, and promote innovation to generate new thinking and ideas.

BOOST RESOURCES
We lead efforts to maximize current funding and expand the public and private investments that support the early childhood system.

DRIVE ADVOCACY
We amplify community voice and advocate for practices and policies that put children and families first.

COLLABORATE WITH PARTNERS

We build strong relationships and coordinate with community members to work toward a shared vision for early childhood.

One of the most important roles of the Alliance is to be a neutral connector and coordinator. The strength of the early childhood system lies in the diversity of the Montgomery County community. This includes families, providers, nonprofit and government partners, funders, businesses, researchers, advocates, and other key community members. It is also greatly shaped by all the different races, ethnicities, languages, cultures, and abilities represented by its members. So, the main focus of our work is to build **synergy** by creating connections among all these many roles, perspectives, lived experiences, and efforts. By coordinating the ideas and activities of many, we are able to produce a joint impact that is greater than any one person or individual act. Together, the Alliance will be able to set bold and shared goals as a road map to strengthen the early childhood system so that every child has what they need to thrive.

To **collaborate with partners**, the Alliance will:

WHAT'S FIRST (2024–2025)	WHAT'S UP NEXT (2026–2029)
PARTNER WITH THE COMMUNITY ↗ **Establish community feedback loops** to reach, convene, and gather input from a broad range of diverse community members to inform and drive progress of the early childhood system ↗ **Participate at other "tables"** for aligned early childhood initiatives to build relationships and support further collective action **BUILD INTERNAL CAPACITY** ↗ **Expand internal opportunities for collaborative learning and sharing expertise** to build capacity of the Alliance Team and Board **MOBILIZE A SHARED AGENDA** ↗ **Develop a common early childhood agenda** that highlights shared priorities for expanding and improving the early childhood system in Montgomery County ↗ **Create working groups, advisory bodies, and/or networks** to collaborate with key partners and guide the ongoing work of the Alliance	**EXPAND MEMBERSHIP** ↗ **Develop a clear membership structure** to formally engage partners and help to sustain the Alliance's efforts ↗ **Put in place strategies that build and retain members** to continue increasing the capacity and diversity of the Alliance's membership base

💡 SHARE INFORMATION

We share clear information about early childhood and co-create spaces for learning and connection.

Information is powerful. Clear access to information is necessary to be able to weigh all options, solve challenges, and make effective decisions. In contrast, lack of information is bound up with inequities and can be the gatekeeper to knowledge, opportunities, and experiences. This is true for our early childhood system, where families, providers, and the broader community face real and significant challenges in receiving timely, accessible information. This has impacted their ability to get connected to the many resources, relationships, and settings that support children's healthy growth and development. The aim of the Alliance is to break down barriers that exist and widely share information within communities. This includes providing updates about the latest early childhood issues, linking families and the workforce to available resources, and creating spaces for shared learning and connection. In this way, the Alliance will work to become a trusted source of information and conveyor of ideas, insights, and wisdom by and for the early childhood community.

To **share information**, the Alliance will:

WHAT'S FIRST (2024–2025)	WHAT'S UP NEXT (2026–2029)
PROVIDE UPDATES	**SUPPORT CONNECTIONS**
↗ **Build relationships with leaders and institutions** throughout Montgomery County so we can be seen as a trusted resource	↗ **Partner with trusted leaders, navigators, and institutions** to expand access to information through local networks so that families are able to support their children's development and get linked to available early childhood programs
↗ **Share timely, relevant early childhood news and updates** in ways that meet people where they are and reflect the diversity, culture, and languages of communities	↗ **Expand reach of existing workforce supports** to amplify opportunities and increase connections with early childhood providers (e.g., preparation programs; training, coaching, and professional development; mental health and well-being support)
↗ **Lead a public awareness campaign** to engage and educate the wider community about the importance of early childhood and highlight opportunities to get involved	↗ **Support local initiatives and other cross-sector efforts that improve coordination and alignment** so families are able to easily identify, navigate, and receive early childhood services
IDENTIFY RESOURCES	↗ **Share successes and lessons learned about local systems building** to connect with and inform state and national efforts in the broader early childhood field
↗ **Create a resource map** of early childhood programs, services, and resources that currently exist to understand the complex system that interconnects them, as well as to identify gaps and inequities in access for various groups across Montgomery County	

🌱 BOOST RESOURCES

We lead efforts to maximize current funding and expand the public and private investments that support the early childhood system.

The root cause of many of the barriers that exist is an underfunded system. The early childhood system relies on multiple funding sources that must be pulled together in order to make ends meet. Even so, the cost of providing high-quality programming often remains out of reach. Understanding this, the Alliance will take a two-pronged approach to boosting these important resources. The work can focus on both directly administering funds to support more efforts that will improve the system **and** finding solutions for maximizing current resources and increasing overall investment in the system. The ultimate goal is to find a pathway forward that will lead to more funding, equitably distribute resources, and solve long-standing issues that have prevented young children from accessing the high-quality early childhood experiences they deserve.

To **boost resources**, the Alliance will:

WHAT'S FIRST (2024–2025)	WHAT'S UP NEXT (2026–2029)
FUND SYSTEMS BUILDING ↗ **Secure private-sector funding** for the Alliance to be effective and sustainable, and facilitate increased philanthropic investment to support the early childhood system ↗ **Administer private and allocated public funding to support systems change**, such as research, pilot innovations, and other efforts that strengthen the early childhood system **MAXIMIZE EXISTING RESOURCES** ↗ **Conduct fiscal mapping** to understand the current level of investment in the early childhood system and identify existing inequities in how resources are distributed ↗ **Analyze, propose, and advocate for strategies to maximize existing resources** by leveraging available funding and offering solutions to create more equitable access to current resources	**STRATEGIZE FOR THE FUTURE** ↗ **Track trends with federal, state, local, and philanthropic investments in the early childhood system over time** to identify inequities and create solutions for how resources are appropriated and accessed ↗ **Develop recommendations for what it will take to fully fund a high-quality, equitable early childhood system**, including considerations for a dedicated funding stream, ways of drawing on multiple funding sources to increase overall funding levels, and the establishment of accountability measures

LEVERAGE DATA

We expand the availability, use, and power of data to advance equitable outcomes for young children and families.

Data includes many types and forms of information, including numbers and statistics, as well as recorded discussions, stories, photographs, and more. Often approaches to collecting data and making sense of this information have notoriously failed to be inclusive of historically oppressed racial, linguistic, and cultural groups. This has been the case in terms of overall representation, in the use of appropriate methods, and in the ways data is presented. If used more equitably, data can be one of the most powerful tools for change. There is so much possibility in gathering, sharing, and acting on more complete information. For this reason, the Alliance will focus on increasing the availability of trusted, reliable data that we can use to track progress, make better decisions, and hold the system accountable for creating a more equitable future for young children.

To **leverage data**, the Alliance will:

WHAT'S FIRST (2024–2025)	WHAT'S UP NEXT (2026–2029)
TRACK PROGRESS	**PROMOTE EFFECTIVENESS**
↗ **Analyze the current early childhood data landscape** to increase understanding of what information is currently available and what data is needed	↗ **Develop recommendations to expand data**, including identifying additional data points needed to provide more information about the status of the early childhood system and create more consistent and accurate ways to measure progress
↗ **Create a dashboard** to visualize and easily share data with the community and to show progress toward systems change and improved child outcomes	↗ **Support the use of an integrated data system** to centralize and/or coordinate data across the early childhood system and foster more effective use of data in decision-making
USE DATA TO ADVANCE EQUITY	↗ **Leverage capacity in communities** to inform how data is collected, analyzed, and used to support delivery of more effective early childhood services
↗ **Support the ongoing collection and use of disaggregated data** (e.g., by race/ethnicity, language, age, income, geography, disability) to further identify existing disparities and determine the need for additional capacity across the full range of early childhood programs	
↗ **Partner with local agencies, community partners, and other owners of data to promote strategic data collection and sharing** to drive cross-system collaboration, continuous quality improvement, and more equitable outcomes	
↗ **Annually report on the status of efforts to improve the early childhood system**, reduce gaps and inequities, and expand access to high-quality care across Montgomery County	

SUPPORT RESEARCH

We support research to learn about recent trends, reinforce what works, and promote innovation to generate new thinking and ideas.

Research designed and implemented with communities at the center has the potential to drive progress. However, research too often has fallen short. Even when the focus is on children, families, and others closest to caring for young children, they are rarely consulted about what kinds of research are most important and relevant to them. There is opportunity to approach this all differently. The Alliance seeks to build partnerships as a way to advance research and bring about meaningful changes in programs, practices, and policies. Through these connections, the Alliance will focus on making the most of current research, understanding the strengths and needs for early childhood, and finding ways to co-design and expand research that reflects the values, interests, and prevailing wisdom of the community.

To **support research**, the Alliance will:

WHAT'S FIRST (2024–2025)	WHAT'S UP NEXT (2026–2029)
LEVERAGE CURRENT RESEARCH ↗ **Stay up-to-date on the latest early childhood research** to keep abreast of evidence-based practices that could be applicable and address common challenges ↗ **Disseminate research within the community** in a way that is clear, digestible, and accessible for a broad audience to learn from and use ↗ **Use available research to support Alliance efforts** to inform the common agenda, influence actions, and drive advocacy to improve the early childhood system **UNPACK COMMUNITY STRENGTHS AND NEEDS** ↗ **Work with partners to conduct a county-wide assessment** to review literature, analyze data, and collect community input to elevate assets and identify unmet needs for early childhood services and supports ↗ **Report findings from the needs assessment** to strengthen early childhood practices and policies that better meet the needs of young children, families, and communities	**EXPAND RESEARCH** ↗ **Set a community-informed agenda to expand local research** that would answer big questions, set research priorities, and encourage collaboration among practitioners, researchers, and policymakers ↗ **Partner to expand the reach and impact of existing high-impact research** that informs advancement of local strategies to improve the early childhood system in Montgomery County ↗ **Facilitate research about innovative service models and strategies** that will lead to more community-driven solutions and promote equitable outcomes for young children and families

☼ DRIVE ADVOCACY

We amplify community voice and advocate for practices and policies that put children and families first.

There is great power in using our collective voice for change. We believe that young children, families, the early childhood workforce, and the broader community all possess many rights. Children have the right to grow, to be healthy, to learn, and to lead joyful lives. Families have the right to quality care for both themselves and their loved ones. The early childhood workforce has the right to fair compensation and overall well-being. The community has the right to all the benefits that come with uplifting the foundation of a child's life. By engaging in advocacy, the Alliance can help affirm and actualize these rights. The Alliance will work to amplify the voices and stories of those most impacted as the basis of building a more just early childhood system. The Alliance will lead a clear call to action to align our voices, foster strong champions, and build public support—all in service of creating a better future for our youngest children.

To **drive advocacy**, the Alliance will:

WHAT'S FIRST (2024–2025)	WHAT'S UP NEXT (2026–2029)
AMPLIFY COMMUNITY VOICE ↗ **Facilitate connections to available training on advocacy strategies and public policy testimony** for the early childhood community, with a focus on actively engaging families, practitioners, and others closest to caring for young children ↗ **Leverage storytelling as a catalyst for change** by creating opportunities to share stories directly from the community, elevate the voices closest to the work, and center those most impacted by the early childhood system **FOSTER CHAMPIONS** ↗ **Strengthen relationships with elected officials** to build political will about the importance of the early years and garner support for key early childhood issues **ADVOCATE FOR YOUNG CHILDREN** ↗ **Lead advocacy activities at the local, state, and federal level** to highlight the need for improved implementation, updated policies, and increased investments to support young children and families in Montgomery County	**ADVANCE COMMUNITY ORGANIZING** ↗ **Craft shared messaging** and use aligned communications approaches to bring a collective and consistent voice when lifting up early childhood issues ↗ **Establish annual policy priorities** informed by the common early childhood agenda and other guidance to promote collective action and grassroots mobilization **BUILD PUBLIC SUPPORT** ↗ **Expand use of media to increase public support** and expand the reach of advocacy efforts (e.g., social media, newsletters, blog posts, letters to the editor, opinion pieces, local media coverage)

AGENDA

Systems change is complex. It involves shifts in programs, practices, and policies in order to collectively work to meet the needs of children, families, and communities. It includes adjusting (and sometimes breaking apart and redoing) the foundational components, processes, and structures that uphold the early childhood system. It requires addressing root causes of inequities rather than just addressing the symptoms. It's hard work, and doing it effectively takes everyone rolling up their sleeves to collectively act.

As the Alliance moves forward with collective actions driving toward our vision for young children, a common agenda provides important direction. The **common early childhood agenda** (a key part of the Alliance's role to "collaborate with partners") highlights shared priorities for expanding and improving the early childhood system in Montgomery County. If the actions are **how** the Alliance will work, the agenda is **what** the Alliance will work on. The agenda will outline the shared issues to focus on for our collective work to create the systems change we hope to see for young children.

In taking next steps to create the Agenda, the Alliance will:

1. ASSESS WHO IS "AT THE TABLE"

This will involve taking a close look at who is being invited to help create the shared early childhood agenda. This can include examining the makeup of community partners "at the table" to ensure there is diverse representation across the following:

- **Sector:** As the Alliance has adopted a comprehensive definition of the early childhood system, are there voices in the room that represent health, mental health, well-being, early learning, family support, and economic mobility?

- **Identity:** Do the partners represent a range of perspectives—across role, race/ethnicity, language, income, gender, ability?

- **Knowledge and lived experience:** Have we created space to hear from those who offer a range of knowledge, expertise, and lived experience?

- **Equity:** Are we connecting with partners who are closest to the issues we are working to solve and those who are not often heard from?

In this way, the Alliance can commit to creating an agenda that is truly community-driven and inclusive of the perspectives and priorities of young children, families, and communities in Montgomery County.

2. USE DATA AND INFORMATION

It is critical for this process to be data-driven. Much is already known about the assets and barriers in the early childhood system. This is a key opportunity to check assumptions and confirm what the strengths and unmet needs are in accessing high-quality early childhood services and supports. It is also an important opportunity to highlight new trends, insights, and understandings that will be vital to consider. To do so, the Alliance will use data to do the following:

- Analyze a mix of quantitative data (numbers and statistics) and qualitative data (community narratives, quotes, and stories) to gain a fuller picture of the early childhood system

- Link information from multiple sources to help verify findings and gain a deeper understanding of experiences with programs and services

- Unpack disaggregated data to uncover where disparities might exist when race/ethnicity, language, income, disability, or other social factors are taken into account

- Be clear about where there are gaps in information and what is not known—particularly to help highlight where we need to learn more and flag potential unintended consequences of future actions

This process will help to highlight the recent experiences of children, families, and early childhood professionals as they navigate the early childhood system. It allows us to examine current assets and needs in order to identify the systemic challenges that would be most impactful to address and center in the agenda.

3. SET THE COMMON AGENDA (AND REVISIT IT)

Grounded in the collective expertise of partners and data-driven learnings, the agenda will be developed. This will involve coming to consensus on the shared priorities that will be important to elevate and focus on in the coming year(s). These priorities can be driven by a number of different factors:

DRIVEN BY SERVICE DELIVERY

such as access to health care screenings and visits, home visiting, early learning, and transitions to kindergarten

DRIVEN BY PRIORITY POPULATIONS

such as infants and toddlers, children with disabilities, multilingual learners, and the early childhood workforce

DRIVEN BY MAJOR INITIATIVES AND POLICY

such as the Blueprint for Maryland's Future and projects of the Early Care and Education Initiative

Ultimately, the priorities would:

- provide a clear set of shared issues that would be woven through and guide all the actions of the Alliance,

- build on the ongoing efforts of partners (and other strategic initiatives) to contribute to improving the early childhood system, and

- drive toward the results as important outcomes and create the environment needed for all young children to thrive.

As the Alliance's work progresses and the early childhood landscape evolves, the agenda will remain nimble and responsive to these changes. It can be revisited periodically to ensure that the Alliance's efforts take into account the latest information and that the needs of young children, families, and communities are being well served.
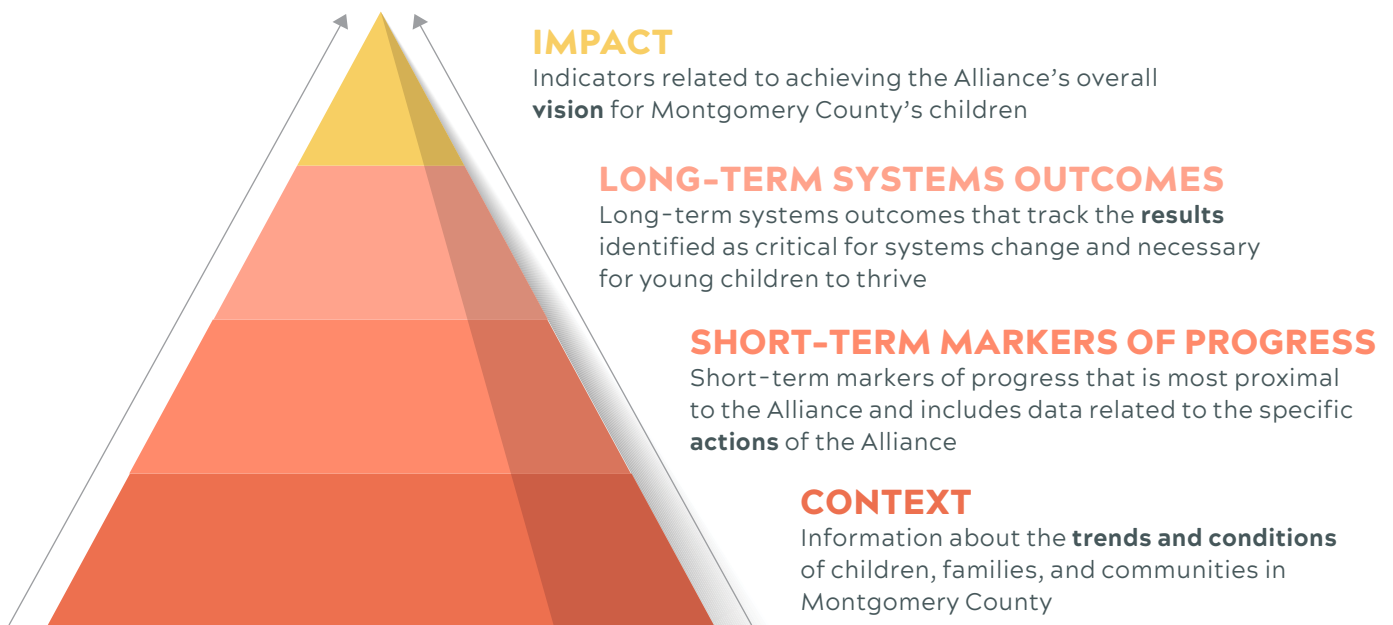
MEASURES OF PROGRESS

As the Foundational Action Plan moves forward, it will be important to understand where progress is being made. The Alliance will use the following framework to:

- Gauge how well the early childhood system is working for children and families

- Assess the effectiveness of the Alliance's actions to change the system

- Guide decision-making and course correction, if needed

- Consider the broader context in Montgomery County to continually inform the Alliance's work

Each component of the framework monitors different levels of progress for children and families. Taken together, they can provide a full picture of what changes are being experienced in Montgomery County, how the Alliance played a role in contributing to those changes, and where gaps remain.

IMPACT
Indicators related to achieving the Alliance's overall **vision** for Montgomery County's children

LONG-TERM SYSTEMS OUTCOMES
Long-term systems outcomes that track the **results** identified as critical for systems change and necessary for young children to thrive

SHORT-TERM MARKERS OF PROGRESS
Short-term markers of progress that is most proximal to the Alliance and includes data related to the specific **actions** of the Alliance

CONTEXT
Information about the **trends and conditions** of children, families, and communities in Montgomery County

Source: Adapted from First 5 LA's Impact Framework

IMPACT FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Existing sources sharing child outcome data in Montgomery County can be leveraged to help track progress toward the Alliance's vision. For example, potential indicators for child well-being might include the number of families with young children living in poverty, experiencing food insecurity, or with one or more adverse childhood experiences. Similarly, indicators for school readiness and success might include the percentage of kindergarten students demonstrating readiness through Kindergarten Readiness Assessment data or third graders scoring proficient in English language arts and math. **These types of data points can help the Alliance understand the progress being made toward achieving its vision and creating a more equitable future for young children in Montgomery County.**

LONG-TERM SYSTEMS OUTCOMES

The Alliance will also observe impacts to Montgomery County's overall early childhood system and measures those changes over time. As described earlier in the plan, the Alliance has named the following four necessary results to improve the early childhood system in Montgomery County:

1. **FAMILIES ARE MEANINGFULLY ENGAGED:** Families are valued and supported as their child's first teacher and strongest advocate.

2. **SEAMLESS ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY PROGRAMS:** Young children and their families access a network of high-quality early childhood services that provide holistic support, mitigate disparities, and lead to lifelong benefits.

3. **FULLY PREPARED AND SUPPORTED WORKFORCE:** The early childhood workforce is prepared, retained, and equitably compensated in order to offer high-quality experiences across all the settings linked to child and family well-being.

4. **COORDINATED AND WELL-RESOURCED SYSTEM:** A robust early childhood system where all elements are connected, aligned, and sustained to meet the needs of the early childhood community—now and in the future.

Please see the next page for potential indicators that could be used to monitor changes for children and families in terms of these four results. (Additional indicators can always be added to this list as they are identified or become available.) **These types of data points can help the Alliance to gauge the changes made to Montgomery County's early childhood system over time and how well it is working to serve children and families.**

LONG-TERM OUTCOME INDICATORS BY RESULTS

RESULTS	POTENTIAL INDICATORS
FAMILIES ARE MEANINGFULLY ENGAGED	• **Home visiting** (e.g., number of families receiving home visiting services) • **Family supports** (e.g., number of families experiencing peer support programming, served by family resource centers) • **Child welfare services** (e.g., number of families receiving services through the child welfare system) • **Economic stability** (e.g., number of families with young children enrolled in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children [WIC], Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF], Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP]) • **Housing supports** (e.g., number of families with young children receiving rental or utility assistance)
SEAMLESS ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY PROGRAMS	• **Health care access** (e.g., number or percentage served by prenatal care, well-visit appointments, Medicaid, Care for Kids, nutrition supports) • **Mental health and well-being services** (e.g., number or percentage served by early intervention, infant and early childhood mental health consultation services) • **Early learning support** (e.g., supply and demand data for programs serving children 0–5) • **Affordability of services** (e.g., average weekly costs of full-time child care by program setting) • **Quality of care** (e.g., number of licensed programs or programs participating in Maryland EXCELS)
FULLY PREPARED AND SUPPORTED WORKFORCE	• **Qualifications and workforce development** (e.g., trends of degree attainment and qualifications for early childhood professionals, participation in preparation programs, percentage of workforce participation in ongoing training) • **Compensation and retention** (e.g., median salary for early childhood professionals, average years in role/position, percentage of professionals given paid planning or preparation time) • **Workforce well-being** (e.g., percentage of early childhood professionals with access to supports for health and well-being, enrolled in financial assistance programs)
COORDINATED AND WELL-RESOURCED SYSTEM	• **Coordination** (e.g., memorandum of understanding [MOU] guiding alignment, coordination, and communication among agencies and other partners) • **Funding** (e.g., amount of federal, state, and local funding maximized/leveraged for the early childhood system; amount invested from private foundations and businesses)

SHORT-TERM MARKERS OF PROGRESS

To understand how the Alliance is specifically contributing to change in Montgomery County, it will be important to measure the progress made with the Alliance's specific actions. **Tracking these markers will hold the Alliance accountable for what we are committed to do and what we hope to see as the more immediate impact of our work.** Short-term markers of progress will also help to inform our decision-making and make strategic shifts in our approach based on what is learned. Please see below for potential indicators that can be used to track short-term markers of progress for the Alliance.

SHORT-TERM MARKERS OF PROGRESS FOR ALLIANCE ACTIONS

ACTIONS	POTENTIAL INDICATORS
COLLABORATE WITH PARTNERS	• Increase in partners engaged in early childhood systems improvement efforts • Increase in private providers and percentage of public seats engaged in early childhood systems improvement efforts • Increase in diversity of Alliance partnerships and members • Increase in strategic tables Alliance staff or Board members actively participated in and contributed to
SHARE INFORMATION	• Increase of materials about early childhood issues and available services that are distributed and consumed (*measured by downloads, page views, social media clicks, etc.*) • Increase in early childhood community members reached with Alliance-led events or outreach efforts (*with focus on examining diversity across role, race/ethnicity, language, etc.*) • Increase in awareness of early childhood services by families and program supports and resources by providers measured by surveys • Increase in connections made between community providers • Increase in community members reached with the public awareness campaign and engaged in a call to action
BOOST RESOURCES	• Progress/wins toward increased and more sustainable funding for the early childhood system • Increase in private funding secured by the Alliance • Increase in connections with funders not in child care spaces • Stories of impact related to increased resources in the early childhood system

ACTIONS	POTENTIAL INDICATORS
LEVERAGE DATA	• Progress/wins with timely, reliable early childhood data available for use • Increase in available data points • Increase in data points that can be disaggregated • Increase in partners or communities engaged in data-driven efforts
SUPPORT RESEARCH	• Increase in partners engaged in early childhood research specific to Montgomery County • Increase in research focused on community-driven solutions and equitable practices
DRIVE ADVOCACY	• Progress/wins with policy, regulatory, and budgetary priorities • Increase in advocacy activities conducted at federal, state, and local levels • Stories of families and providers leading systems change

CONTEXT

Our work does not occur in a vacuum, so it is important to understand the context that the Alliance will be operating within. To respond to shifts and trends with children, families, and communities, the Alliance will collect and track information on conditions throughout Montgomery County, such as trends in demographics (e.g., number of young children and families, race/ethnicity, languages spoken) and other community characteristics (e.g., population and housing, social and economic data). These contextual indicators can lend insight into the children and families in Montgomery County, as well as information we can use to inform our efforts.

REGULAR REVIEW

To maximize the benefits of this framework, the Alliance will plan to regularly review the data collected. Indicators related to short-term changes or where we would expect to see more immediate impact will be reviewed more frequently. This will allow us to inform our decision-making and continuously improve how we do our work. In contrast, with indicators related to long-term systems change, it may take more time to show and track results, so there could be more time between review cycles. This could look like the following:

TYPE OF REVIEW	COMPONENTS FOR REVIEW	FREQUENCY
Review of all available data to inform and shape the Alliance's **actions** and **agenda**	• Short-term markers of progress • Contextual indicators	Annually
Review of the indicator data for **results** and progress toward the **vision**	• Long-term systems outcomes • Impact for young children	Every 2–3 years

As the work of the Alliance continues to evolve (and the kinds of available data improve and shift), we will continually revisit the indicators to determine whether they need to be revised or expanded. We will also work to establish ways to measure our internal operations and our effectiveness as an organization. By being responsive and committed to measuring the progress of our work, we will continue to learn more about the best and most effective ways to support young children and families in Montgomery County.

MOVING FORWARD

Everyone in Montgomery County has a role to play in making it a place where all children to thrive. Putting this plan into action will take commitment and collective effort from all community partners that are a part of this movement. Together, we can work to increase access, improve quality, and boost coordination and investment in the early childhood opportunities we know make a difference.

The Foundational Action Plan was created to provide a set of clear actions for the Alliance to focus on and organize around. It is meant to build on the ongoing work and momentum that exists in order to address the real and big challenges young children and families face every day. It offers a road map to highlight important next steps for the Alliance to contribute to creating a stronger and more equitable early childhood system. And it extends an invitation to join together in the work of transformation—to see ourselves in the work and impact the early childhood spaces we influence every day.

The hope is that it will lead to lasting change on the journey to making Montgomery County a great place for young children to reach their potential, creating a stronger future for us all.

APPENDIX

THE FOUNDATIONAL ACTION PLAN

MISSION — The Children's Opportunity Alliance connects our community to build an accessible, high-quality, and sustainable early childhood system that narrows disparities and puts all young children on a path to reach their greatest potential.

VALUES

EQUITY
We are dedicated to confronting inequities so that race, place, income, and other social factors are no longer predictors of children's outcomes and future success.

JUSTICE
We prioritize the voices of those closest to the issues we aim to address, who have been historically oppressed and kept furthest from opportunity, to realize a more just early childhood system.

FAMILY-CENTERED
We stand behind the beliefs, practices, and policies that amplify the strengths and address the needs of young children and their families.

SYNERGY
We value the many perspectives, expertise, and abilities of early childhood leaders across public and private sectors and recognize our shared responsibility to work together on behalf of the community.

ACCOUNTABLE
We are committed to using data and setting measurable benchmarks to inform our decisions, monitor and share our progress, and guide the ways we work to improve.

ACTIONS

COLLABORATE WITH PARTNERS
We build strong relationships and coordinate with community members to work toward a shared vision for early childhood.

SHARE INFORMATION
We share clear information about early childhood and co-create spaces for learning and connection.

BOOST RESOURCES
We lead efforts to maximize current funding and expand the public and private investments that support the early childhood system.

LEVERAGE DATA
We expand the availability, use, and power of data to advance equitable outcomes for young children and families.

SUPPORT RESEARCH
We support research to learn about recent trends, reinforce what works, and promote innovation to generate new thinking and ideas.

DRIVE ADVOCACY
We amplify community voice and advocate for practices and policies that put children and families first.

RESULTS

1 Families are meaningfully engaged

Families are valued and supported as their child's first teacher and strongest advocate.

2 Seamless access to high-quality programs

Young children and their families access a network of high-quality early childhood services that provide holistic support, mitigate disparities, and lead to lifelong benefits.

3 Fully prepared and supported workforce

The early childhood workforce is prepared, retained, and equitably compensated in order to offer high-quality experiences across all the settings linked to child and family well-being.

4 Coordinated and well-resourced system

A robust early childhood system where all elements are connected, aligned, and sustained to meet the needs of the early childhood community—now and in the future.

VISION

Every young child in Montgomery County has an equitable start in life, creating a stronger future for us all.

MEASURES OF PROGRESS

OVERVIEW OF THE ACTIONS FOR THE ALLIANCE

	WHAT'S FIRST (2024–2025)	WHAT'S UP NEXT (2026–2029)
COLLABORATE WITH PARTNERS We build strong relationships and coordinate with community members to work toward a shared vision for early childhood.	**PARTNER WITH THE COMMUNITY** • **Establish community feedback loops** to reach, convene, and gather input from a broad range of diverse community members to inform and drive progress of the early childhood system • **Participate at other "tables"** for aligned early childhood initiatives to build relationships and support further collective action **BUILD INTERNAL CAPACITY** • **Expand internal opportunities for collaborative learning and sharing expertise** to build capacity of the Alliance Team and Board **MOBILIZE A SHARED AGENDA** • **Develop a common early childhood agenda** that highlights shared priorities for expanding and improving the early childhood system in Montgomery County • **Create working groups, advisory bodies, and/or networks** to collaborate with key partners and guide the ongoing work of the Alliance	**EXPAND MEMBERSHIP** • **Develop a clear membership structure** to formally engage partners and help to sustain the Alliance's efforts • **Put in place strategies that build and retain members** to continue increasing the capacity and diversity of the Alliance's membership base
SHARE INFORMATION We share clear information about early childhood and co-create spaces for learning and connection.	**PROVIDE UPDATES** • **Build relationships with leaders and institutions** throughout Montgomery County so we can be seen as a trusted resource • **Share timely, relevant early childhood news and updates** in ways that meet people where they are and reflect the diversity, culture, and languages of communities • **Lead a public awareness campaign** to engage and educate the wider community about the importance of early childhood and highlight opportunities to get involved	**SUPPORT CONNECTIONS** • **Partner with trusted leaders, navigators, and institutions** to expand access to information through local networks so that families are able to support their children's development and get linked to available early childhood programs • **Expand reach of existing workforce supports** to amplify opportunities and increase connections with early childhood providers (e.g., preparation programs; training, coaching, and professional development; mental health and well-being support)

	WHAT'S FIRST (2024–2025)	WHAT'S UP NEXT (2026–2029)
	IDENTIFY RESOURCES • **Create a resource map** of early childhood programs, services, and resources that currently exist to understand the complex system that interconnects them, as well as to identify gaps and inequities in access for various groups across Montgomery County	• **Support local initiatives and other cross-sector efforts that improve coordination and alignment** so families are able to easily identify, navigate, and receive early childhood services • **Share successes and lessons learned about local systems building** to connect with and inform state and national efforts in the broader early childhood field
BOOST RESOURCES We lead efforts to maximize current funding and expand the public and private investments that support the early childhood system.	**FUND SYSTEMS BUILDING** • **Secure private-sector funding** for the Alliance to be effective and sustainable, and facilitate increased philanthropic investment to support the early childhood system • **Administer private and allocated public funding to support systems change,** such as research, pilot innovations, and other efforts that strengthen the early childhood system **MAXIMIZE EXISTING RESOURCES** • **Conduct fiscal mapping** to understand the current level of investment in the early childhood system and identify existing inequities in how resources are distributed • **Analyze, propose, and advocate for strategies to maximize existing resources** by leveraging available funding and offering solutions to create more equitable access to current resources	**STRATEGIZE FOR THE FUTURE** • **Track trends with federal, state, local, and philanthropic investments in the early childhood system over time** to identify inequities and create solutions for how resources are appropriated and accessed • **Develop recommendations for what it will take to fully fund a high-quality, equitable early childhood system,** including considerations for a dedicated funding stream, ways of drawing on multiple funding sources to increase overall funding levels, and the establishment of accountability measures
LEVERAGE DATA We expand the availability, use, and power of data to advance equitable outcomes for young children and families.	**TRACK PROGRESS** • **Analyze the current early childhood data landscape** to increase understanding of what information is currently available and what data is needed • **Create a dashboard** to visualize and easily share data with the community and to show progress toward systems change and improved child outcomes	**PROMOTE EFFECTIVENESS** • **Develop recommendations to expand data,** including identifying additional data points needed to provide more information about the status of the early childhood system and create more consistent and accurate ways to measure progress

	WHAT'S FIRST (2024–2025)	WHAT'S UP NEXT (2026–2029)
	USE DATA TO ADVANCE EQUITY • **Support the ongoing collection and use of disaggregated data** (e.g., by race/ethnicity, language, age, income, geography, disability) to further identify existing disparities and determine the need for additional capacity across the full range of early childhood programs • **Partner with local agencies, community partners, and other owners of data to promote strategic data collection and sharing** to drive cross-system collaboration, continuous quality improvement, and more equitable outcomes • **Annually report on the status of efforts to improve the early childhood system,** reduce gaps and inequities, and expand access to high-quality care across Montgomery County	• **Support the use of an integrated data system** to centralize and/or coordinate data across the early childhood system and foster more effective use of data in decision-making • **Leverage capacity in communities** to inform how data is collected, analyzed, and used to support delivery of more effective early childhood services
SUPPORT RESEARCH We support research to learn about recent trends, reinforce what works, and promote innovation to generate new thinking and ideas.	**LEVERAGE CURRENT RESEARCH** • **Stay up-to-date on the latest early childhood research** to keep abreast of evidence-based practices that could be applicable and address common challenges • **Disseminate research within the community** in a way that is clear, digestible, and accessible for a broad audience to learn from and use • **Use available research to support Alliance efforts** to inform the common agenda, influence actions, and drive advocacy to improve the early childhood system **UNPACK COMMUNITY STRENGTHS AND NEEDS** • **Work with partners to conduct a county-wide assessment** to review literature, analyze data, and collect community input to elevate assets and identify unmet needs for early childhood services and supports • **Report findings from the needs assessment** to strengthen early childhood practices and policies that better meet the needs of young children, families, and communities	**EXPAND RESEARCH** • **Set a community-informed agenda to expand local research** that would answer big questions, set research priorities, and encourage collaboration among practitioners, researchers, and policymakers • **Partner to expand the reach and impact of existing high-impact research** that informs advancement of local strategies to improve the early childhood system in Montgomery County • **Facilitate research about innovative service models and strategies** that will lead to more community-driven solutions and promote equitable outcomes for young children and families

	WHAT'S FIRST (2024–2025)	WHAT'S UP NEXT (2026–2029)
DRIVE ADVOCACY We amplify community voice and advocate for practices and policies that put children and families first.	**AMPLIFY COMMUNITY VOICE** • **Facilitate connections to available training on advocacy strategies and public policy testimony** for the early childhood community, with a focus on actively engaging families, practitioners, and others closest to caring for young children • **Leverage storytelling as a catalyst for change** by creating opportunities to share stories directly from the community, elevate the voices closest to the work, and center those most impacted by the early childhood system **FOSTER CHAMPIONS** • **Strengthen relationships with elected officials** to build political will about the importance of the early years and garner support for key early childhood issues **ADVOCATE FOR YOUNG CHILDREN** • **Lead advocacy activities at the local, state, and federal level** to highlight the need for improved implementation, updated policies, and increased investments to support young children and families in Montgomery County	**ADVANCE COMMUNITY ORGANIZING** • **Craft shared messaging** and use aligned communications approaches to bring a collective and consistent voice when lifting up early childhood issues • **Establish annual policy priorities** informed by the common early childhood agenda and other guidance to promote collective action and grassroots mobilization **BUILD PUBLIC SUPPORT** • **Expand use of media to increase public support** and expand the reach of advocacy efforts (e.g., social media, newsletters, blog posts, letters to the editor, opinion pieces, local media coverage)

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