A thick dark blue vertical bar runs down the left side of the page. A medium blue arrow points to the right, overlapping the bar, with the date '11/01/2024' written inside it in white.

11/01/2024

Left Behind Before Kindergarten

Several thin, curved lines in dark blue and light grey originate from the bottom left corner and sweep upwards and to the right, creating a sense of movement or growth.

Shelli Roberts
INSIGHTED, LLC

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New Hampshire's preschool special education system is at a breaking point. **More than 2,741 preschool-aged children with disabilities urgently need early intervention, yet over half—about 1,370 children—are left without support each year.** For these children, early intervention is not just an added benefit; it's a critical foundation for learning, social skills, and a chance at a thriving future. The current system, however, cannot meet the growing need, especially in the CMF Kids Partnership Districts, where economic hardship, geographic isolation, and severe staff shortages create insurmountable obstacles.

The early years are the most important for a child's growth. Missing this window can lead to lifelong academic, social, and behavioral challenges. Research shows that children without early support are four times more likely to struggle throughout their education, often requiring more intensive—and costly—services later on. Despite these challenges, pockets of success in partnership districts, such as the inclusive classrooms in Nashua and Newport's community-driven support, demonstrate that change is possible when resources are available.

Key Findings Include:

- **75% of Programs Have Waitlists:** In New Hampshire, three-quarters of preschool programs operate at full capacity, and in the CMF Kids Partnership Districts, 73% of programs have waitlists. For children waiting for these critical services, each day is a missed opportunity for growth.
- **80% of Preschoolers Lack Access to Public Programs:** Across the state, only 20% of preschool-aged children are enrolled in public preschool, with children in rural areas like Northumberland and Milan disproportionately affected by limited access.
- **85% of Programs Lack Full-Day Options:** Full-day services, essential for children who need additional support, are only available in 15% of programs statewide, with restricted options in underserved areas like Lisbon and the White Mountains Regional School District.

These findings call for bold action and a renewed commitment to our youngest learners. Addressing these gaps will require targeted funding, expanded access, and innovative solutions. This report presents a roadmap for New Hampshire to give every child a fair start and a bright future.

Introduction

Every child deserves a fair start, but in New Hampshire, thousands of preschoolers with disabilities are beginning their journey with an uneven footing. Each year, **more than 50%—over 1,370 children**—miss out on the early intervention they need, losing access to the critical support that could set them on a path to success. For these children, the promise of a bright future is dimmed by barriers that feel insurmountable—waitlists, underfunded programs, and the challenges of distance in rural areas. *Left Behind Before Kindergarten* uncovers the realities of a system struggling to meet the needs of its youngest and most vulnerable, underscoring the need for a unified, urgent response.

The CMF Kids Partnership Districts reveal a stark reality: barriers like economic hardship, geographic isolation, and severe staffing shortages have created a system where only a fraction of children receive the services they need. *Left Behind Before Kindergarten* reveals the stark reality of a system struggling to keep pace with the needs of its youngest and most vulnerable, calling for urgent action to ensure no child is left behind before they even begin.

Early intervention is not just beneficial; it's transformative. Research shows that children who receive early support are less likely to experience long-term academic and social challenges. Through an in-depth look at the CMF Kids Partnership Districts, this report sheds light on both the barriers and the potential for meaningful change. Without immediate investment and strategic action, New Hampshire's youngest and most vulnerable children will continue to be underserved, with lasting impacts on their lives and on their communities.

DISPARITIES IN ACCESS, QUALITY, AND FUNDING

An evaluation of New Hampshire's preschool education system reveals significant disparities affecting children based on geographic location, socioeconomic status, and racial and ethnic backgrounds. These inequalities pose substantial barriers to ensuring universal access to high-quality preschool programs. The state's Early Intervention (EI) and Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) services are experiencing notable trends and challenges. A growing number of children are being identified with disabilities, necessitating more comprehensive and inclusive support services. Children from lower-income families and diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds face greater obstacles in accessing necessary services. Additionally, there is a shortage of inclusive educational environments, limiting opportunities for children with disabilities to learn alongside their peers. These disparities profoundly impacted children's developmental and academic outcomes, highlighting the need for targeted interventions and equitable resource allocation. This analysis underscores the critical need to address systemic inequalities to provide equitable access to quality preschool education for all children in New Hampshire.

Enrollment and Service Trends

Increase in Identifications

- **Data:** In 2021, 4.6% of children under three and 7.9% of three- and four-year-olds received EI and ECSE services, respectively. By 2024, these figures increased to around 5% for EI and 8.2% for ECSE.
- **SPED Data:** According to the New Hampshire Department of Education, as of 2020, children with disabilities comprised approximately 13.4% of the preschool population. The most prevalent disabilities among these children are autism, speech or language impairments, and significant developmental delays. Boys are overrepresented in this group, constituting 59.4% of preschool students with disabilities.

- **Rising Diagnoses:** Many districts report an increase in the number of children identified with disabilities, including autism, developmental delays, and speech and language impairments.
- **Variability in Prevalence:** There is significant variation in the prevalence of disabilities across districts, with some reporting over 40% of preschool students having disabilities while others reporting less than 5%.

Notable Trends in Disabilities Among Preschool Students

Increase in Autism Diagnoses

- **High Autism Prevalence:** All districts report high autism rates, aligning with national data.

Developmental Delays

- **Need for Early Intervention:** Consistently noted across districts, indicating a need for early intervention in motor skills, social-emotional development, and cognitive abilities.

Speech and Language Impairments

- **Prevalence:** Prevalence among preschool students, emphasizing the importance of speech therapy and language development programs.

Growing Need for Special Education Services

- **Increasing Diagnoses:** Reflects broader trends in early childhood education and the need for expanding special education resources and services.

Variability in Disability Prevalence

- **Resource Disparities:** There are significant differences across districts, with some reporting over 40% and others less than 5% of preschool students with disabilities. This may reflect differences in diagnostic practices, early intervention access, and community awareness.

Inclusive Settings Limitations

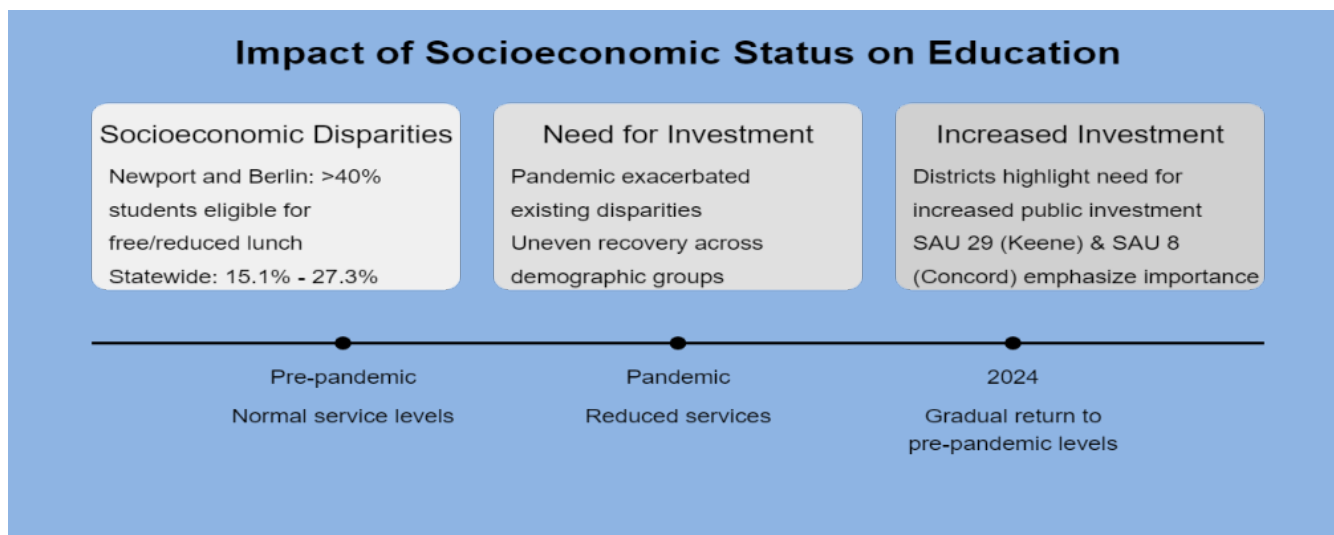
Challenges in Rural and Underserved Areas

- **Limited Availability:** The limited availability of inclusive preschool settings, which integrate special education services within general education classrooms, remains a persistent challenge, especially in rural and underserved areas.
- **Data Example:** The number of inclusive settings has gradually returned to pre-pandemic levels, but the recovery is uneven across different demographic groups and regions.

Disparities in Access and Services

Racial and Socioeconomic Disparities

- **Access Disparities:** Disparities persist in access to EI and ECSE services, particularly among children of color and those from low-income families. White children have higher access rates to EI services compared to Hispanic and Asian children, while Hispanic children have higher access rates to ECSE services.
- **Free/Reduced Lunch Eligibility:** The New Hampshire Department of Education reports that 15.1% to 27.3% of public-school students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. This range is slightly lower than some district-specific data, which reports percentages exceeding 40%. Higher eligibility often correlates with a greater need for unique education resources.



Long-Term Impact of Services

Developmental and Educational Outcomes

- **Positive Outcomes:** Children who participate in high-quality EI and ECSE services exhibit marked improvements in their developmental and educational outcomes. These services are crucial for supporting the developmental needs of children with disabilities.
- **Examples of Positive Impact:** Programs like Ready for School Success-NH have significantly improved emotional regulation, positive peer interactions, and engagement in learning activities.
- **Funding Inequities:** Funding disparities significantly impact the quality and availability of special education services, with underserved regions receiving less state and federal funding.

District Demographic Data

Town(s)	District	Free/Reduced Lunch	Total Enrollment	Students with Disabilities	Enrollment in Last 5 Years	Percentage Change	Most Prevalent Disabilities
Berlin	SAU 3	More than 40%	10	More than 40%	No Change	0%	Autism, Developmental Delay
Colebrook	SAU 7	15-20%	15-20	15-20%	Increased		Developmental Delay, Speech or Language Impairment
Concord	SAU 8	More than 40%	More than 50	More than 40%	Increased	10%	Autism, Developmental Delay, Speech or Language Impairment
Dummer/Errol/Milan	SAU 20	10-15%		15-20%	Increased		Autism, Developmental Delay, Speech or Language Impairment
Keene	SAU 29	20-30%	More than 50	More than 40%	Increased	15%	Autism, Developmental Delay, Speech or Language Impairment
Laconia	SAU 30	20-30%	45-50	15-20%	Increased		Autism, Developmental Delay
Lisbon	SAU 35	20-30%	10	Less than 5%	Increased	20%	Autism, Developmental Delay, Orthopedic Impairment, Speech or Language Impairment
Littleton	SAU 84	30-40%	15-20	20-30%	Increased	20%	Autism, Developmental Delay, Speech or Language Impairment
Newport	SAU 43	More than 40%	30-35	More than 40%	No Change	0%	Autism, Developmental Delay, Speech or Language Impairment
Northumberland	SAU 58	30-40%	Less than 10	Less than 5%	No Change	0%	Autism, Developmental Delay
Nottingham	SAU 107	30-40%	30-35	More than 40%	Increased		Autism, Developmental Delay, Speech or Language Impairment
WMRSD	SAU 36	20-30%	40-45	20-30%	Increased		Autism, Developmental Delay, Speech or Language Impairment

- **Keene:** Over 40% of preschool students have disabilities, indicating substantial needs for special education resources.
- **Newport:** Over 40% of students are eligible for free/reduced lunch, indicating significant socioeconomic challenges.
- **Nottingham:** There is a high percentage of students with disabilities, reflecting a substantial need for specialized resources.
- **Berlin:** Over 40% of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch, suggesting a higher need for special education services due to socioeconomic factors.
- **Northumberland and Lisbon:** Less than 5% of preschool students with disabilities, suggesting a lower demand for specialized resources.
- **Across New Hampshire:** Most have reported increased student numbers with disabilities over the past five years, necessitating additional resources to support the growing needs.
- **Across Districts:** Variability in free/reduced lunch eligibility highlights socioeconomic disparities across districts, with some exceeding 40%, which often correlates with higher needs for special education services.

- **Preschool Enrollments:** Vary significantly, ranging from fewer than ten to more than fifty students per district, impacting resource allocation and the ability to provide consistent quality services across regions.

Geographic Disparities

Geographic disparities are pronounced, with rural areas grappling with significant access challenges due to limited program availability and long waiting lists. In contrast, urban areas tend to have better access to preschool programs, indicating a resource distribution disparity favoring more densely populated regions.

Regional Access

Region	Access Issues	Funding	Program Quality	Transportation	Staffing
Greater Monadnock	Limited availability, especially in rural areas	Lower funding compared to urban areas	Variable quality due to inconsistent funding	Challenges in transportation limit access	Shortages of qualified professionals
Greater Sullivan	Limited availability, particularly in remote areas	Lower funding levels affecting program quality	Variable quality due to funding constraints	Transportation issues further limit access	Shortages of qualified professionals
Merrimack Valley	Urban vs. rural divide: better in urban areas, limited in rural	Urban areas receive more funding, rural areas lag behind	Better in urban areas, variable in rural areas	Better in urban areas, poor in rural areas	Better staffing in urban areas, shortages in rural areas
North Country	Severe access issues due to geographic isolation and low population density	Minimal funding affecting the quality and availability	Limited program quality due to low funding	Poor transportation infrastructure	Critical shortages of qualified staff
Seacoast	Generally better access, but pockets of low-income areas face barriers	Higher funding levels overall	Generally high quality, but varies in low-income pockets	Good transportation options overall	Relatively better staffing

Greater Monadnock: Limited program availability, lower funding, high variability in quality, and significant transportation barriers.

Greater Sullivan: Severe access challenges, low funding, variable program quality, poor transportation options.

North Country: Severe access issues due to geographic isolation and low population density, lower funding levels, and significant transportation barriers, which contribute to limited program availability and variable quality.

Seacoast: There is better access and quality, though low-income areas face barriers.

District Access

Town(s)	Region	Access Issues	Funding	Program Quality	Transportation	Staffing
Berlin	North Country	Severe	Low	Limited	Poor	Shortage
Colebrook	North Country	Severe	Low	Limited	Poor	Shortage
Dummer, Errol, Milan	North Country	Severe	Low	Limited	Poor	Shortage
Keene	Monadnock	Good	Moderate	High	Good	Adequate
Laconia	Lakes	Moderate	Moderate	Variable	Moderate	Adequate
Lisbon	North Country	Severe	Low	Limited	Poor	Shortage
Littleton	North Country	Moderate	Moderate	High	Moderate	Adequate
Newport	Greater Sullivan	Moderate	Low	Variable	Poor	Shortage
Northumberland	North Country	Severe	Low	Limited	Poor	Shortage
Nottingham	Southeastern	Good	High	High	Good	Adequate
WMRSD	North Country	Moderate	Low	Variable	Poor	Shortage

District Challenges

The following table presents an overview of data on successful and less successful preschool and special education programs across the various regions and districts in New Hampshire. This data highlights program effectiveness and access disparities, offering insights into the factors contributing to these outcomes. By examining metrics such as enrollment rates, service quality, resource allocation, and student performance, the table provides a clear comparison of the strengths and weaknesses of different programs. This analysis aims to identify best practices and areas needing improvement, ultimately supporting efforts to ensure all children in New Hampshire receive equitable and high-quality preschool and special education services.

Challenges Overcome

District	Program Overview	Implementation Strategies	Outcomes and Impact	Challenges Overcome	Lessons Learned	Future Directions
Keene	Ready for School Success-NH program with PW-PBIS framework.	Building positive relationships, appropriate curriculum, and behavioral	Improvements in emotional regulation and school readiness.	Managed resource constraints through PW-PBIS.	Structured frameworks like PW-PBIS address needs effectively.	Expand reach and integrate comprehensive support.
Keene	Comprehensive early intervention program for autism and	Collaborative efforts with local health services.	Improved outcomes and school readiness, high parental satisfaction.	Overcame diagnostic barriers through partnerships.	Collaboration with health services is key.	Sustain and expand the program, potentially broaden
Newport	Inclusive education model integrating students with disabilities into	Staff training and parental involvement.	Improved inclusivity and learning environment.	Addressed resistance to inclusion through staff training and engagement.	Continuous development and parental involvement are crucial.	Enhance inclusivity and support for students with disabilities.
Berlin	Comprehensive support system for preschool programs.	Developmental screenings and mental health support.	Improved education quality despite funding constraints.	Managed isolation and funding limits via community collaborations.	Local partnerships mitigate geographic and funding issues.	Expand partnerships and seek funding to enhance programs.
Concord	Preschool program with special education services and MTSS.	Partnerships for professional development.	Improved program quality and educational outcomes.	Overcame resource limits through partnerships and development.	Professional development is critical for quality.	Expand development opportunities and integrate innovative
Dover	Partnership with UNH to enhance early childhood education.	Training for educators and family engagement program.	Improved quality, parent satisfaction, and readiness.	Addressed quality variability through training and engagement.	Research-based practices and family engagement are key.	Innovate and enhance quality through research and partnerships.
Portsmouth	Ready for School Success-NH program with evidence-based	Collaboration with businesses and community organizations.	Significant improvement in kindergarten readiness.	Leveraged funding to implement support	Effective resource use and collaboration lead to	Integrate community resources and expand offerings.

Implementation Challenges

Region	Program Overview	Implementation Challenges	Limited Outcomes	Contributing Factors	Lessons Learned	Future Considerations
Greater Monadnock Region	Access and quality issues in rural areas due to funding	High demand and limited transportation.	Struggles with standards and inclusivity.	Lower funding and professional shortages.	Need increased funding and better transportation.	Targeted funding and initiatives for staff retention.
Greater Sullivan Region	Difficulties in remote areas for service and funding access.	Enrollment limits and poor infrastructure.	Variable quality and slow inclusivity progress.	Lower funding, workforce issues, and job stress.	Targeted grants and educator support are essential.	Strategic partnerships and more funding for quality and
North Country Region	Barriers from severe isolation and low density.	Long waiting lists and staff shortages.	Limited quality and comprehensive services.	Minimal funding and recruitment challenges.	Address funding inequities and infrastructure.	Expand partnerships and funding to overcome geographic challenges.
Merrimack Valley Region	Service access disparity between urban and rural areas.	Access and funding gaps in rural regions.	Variable quality with rural areas lagging.	Higher urban funding and rural transportation barriers.	Equitable funds distribution and improved transportation needed.	Bridge urban-rural divide in service access and quality.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON EI AND ECSE

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on EI and ECSE services in New Hampshire has been profound and complex. This section provides a comprehensive overview of the pandemic's effects, including service declines, recovery efforts, and long-term implications for the preschool education system.

Service Declines

From Fall 2019 to Fall 2020, the number of children receiving EI services nationally fell by 63,000, and those receiving ECSE services fell by 77,000. In New Hampshire, similar trends were observed, with a significant reduction in the number of children accessing critical EI and ECSE services. This decline was attributed to pandemic-related closures, social distancing measures, and disruptions in service delivery.

Recovery Efforts

By 2022, the number of children receiving EI and ECSE services gradually recovered. However, the increase was uneven across different demographic groups. As of 2024, EI services for White children had recovered slightly but remained 10% below 2019 levels. For Black children, ECSE services were still down by 12%. Efforts to restore services included local initiatives and state-funded projects to address these gaps, but progress could have been faster.

Long-Term Implications

The prolonged reduction in services has led to increased developmental delays and unmet needs among young children. The mental health and well-being of children and families have been adversely affected, with increased stress and reduced support systems. Long-term educational outcomes for children are at risk, emphasizing the need for comprehensive recovery and support strategies.

The limited availability of inclusive preschool settings, which integrate special education services within general education classrooms, persisted as a significant challenge, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Efforts to increase inclusive settings have been slow, with only minor improvements in accessibility observed by 2024.

Addressing the Impact of COVID-19

The report recommends targeted recovery support, including resources to help programs recover from COVID-19 impacts and address learning loss and mental health needs. It also calls for flexible funding to ensure financial stability and responsiveness to future crises. Increased funding, targeted support for disadvantaged groups, workforce development, inclusive education, and data-driven approaches are proposed as essential components of a recovery and support strategy. In contrast, the recovery process is ongoing, and a concerted effort is required to mitigate the pandemic's setbacks and enhance the system's resilience in the future.

CHALLENGES FACING PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

The preschool education system in New Hampshire is confronted with a series of interconnected challenges that undermine its capacity to deliver high-quality, inclusive education to all children. These challenges are deeply rooted in the system's infrastructure and require concerted efforts to overcome.

Workforce Shortages

The shortage of qualified early childhood educators is a critical issue that varies across districts. For instance, districts like Colebrook and Concord have reported needing help retaining staff due to funding constraints and the demanding nature of special education positions. High turnover rates in districts such as Laconia and Newport exacerbate the issue, leading to higher staff-child ratios and reduced program quality.

- **Shortage of Qualified Staff:** A nationwide shortage of qualified special education teachers and related service providers affects New Hampshire's ability to provide adequate support and services to students with disabilities.
- **Training and Professional Development:** Continuous training and professional development are essential but often hindered by budget constraints and time limitations.
- **High Turnover Rates:** The demanding nature of special education positions and insufficient support result in high turnover rates, impacting the continuity of student services.
- **Diverse Student Needs:** The increasing diversity of student needs, including a rise in autism diagnoses, mental health needs, and other developmental disabilities, requires specialized knowledge and skills, complicating workforce challenges.
- **Enrollment Issues:** Workforce shortages have restricted enrollment capacities in public preschool programs, forcing many to maintain waiting lists, particularly in underserved regions like Greater Monadnock and Greater Sullivan.
- **Quality of Education:** Low staff-child ratios due to workforce shortages negatively affect the education and care provided to preschool-aged children.

Transportation Barriers

Access to preschool education is significantly affected by transportation barriers, particularly acute in rural districts. In regions like Greater Monadnock and Greater Sullivan, limited transportation options make it challenging for families to access preschool programs, perpetuating disparities in educational opportunities. Districts like Nottingham, Berlin, and others have identified transportation as a critical barrier to enrollment, highlighting the need for innovative solutions to improve access.

Funding Inequities

Funding disparities are a fundamental challenge that affects the quality and availability of preschool programs across districts. Due to funding shortfalls, districts with higher percentages of low-income families, such as Laconia and Newport, face more significant challenges in providing equitable access to services. These funding disparities particularly impact special education services, which require additional resources and specialized support. The report underscores the need for an equitable distribution of funds and targeted grants to address the unique needs of financially constrained districts like SAU 20 and Lisbon.

Quality of Education

The quality of preschool programs varies, with current support deemed inadequate. State preschool programs are underfunded, necessitating better funding to enhance quality. Improving program quality requires evidence-based curricula and well-trained staff. Programs like Ready for School Success-NH are high-quality models needing broader implementation and support. Economic benefits of early childhood education include increased earnings, reduced need for special education services, and lower social service costs.

The interplay of these challenges creates a varied landscape that requires a district-specific approach. Increased public investment in early childhood education, strategic resource allocation tailored to district needs, and innovative solutions to improve transportation and workforce development are essential to creating a more robust and inclusive preschool education system. By addressing these systemic issues, New Hampshire can work towards ensuring that every child, regardless of their district, can thrive in a high-quality early learning environment.

PROGRAM QUALITY ASSURANCE IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

Ensuring quality in special education in New Hampshire involves adopting tailored teaching approaches and creating adaptive learning environments to meet the diverse needs of children with disabilities. Here is a detailed breakdown of the quality assurance measures implemented to maintain high standards in preschool programs. By integrating these comprehensive measures, New Hampshire ensures that its special education programs provide high-quality, inclusive, and equitable education for all children with disabilities.

Compliance with IDEA Standards

Adherence to IDEA Standards

- **Individualized Education Programs (IEPs):** These programs are tailored to each student's unique needs, ensuring personalized educational goals and support.

- **Least Restrictive Environment (LRE):** Educating children with disabilities alongside their typically developing peers to the maximum extent appropriate.
- **Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE):** Ensuring all children with disabilities receive an education tailored to their needs at no cost to the family.
- **Procedural Safeguards:** Protecting the rights of children with disabilities and their families, including due process and the right to participate in decision-making.

Regular Audits and Monitoring

- **Internal Audits:** Regular internal audits ensure compliance with IDEA standards and identify areas for improvement.
- **External Reviews:** Engaging external reviewers to assess compliance and provide recommendations for enhancements.

Staff Training and Professional Development

Ongoing Professional Development

- **Workshops and Seminars:** Offering workshops and seminars on the latest developments in early childhood education and special education practices.
- **Specialized Training:** Special training on inclusive education, behavior management, and individualized instruction techniques.
- **Certification Programs:** Encouraging staff to pursue advanced certifications and degrees in early childhood and special education.

Collaboration with Experts

- **Partnerships with Universities:** Collaborating with local universities to access the latest research and best practices.
- **Mentorship Programs:** Implementing mentorship programs where experienced educators mentor new or less experienced staff.

Assessment and Feedback

- **Regular Assessments:** Regularly assessing staff performance to ensure they meet educational standards and implement best practices.
- **Feedback Mechanisms:** Establishing feedback mechanisms where staff can receive constructive feedback and guidance for improvement.

Parental Involvement and Engagement

Active Parental Involvement

- **IEP Meetings:** Parents should be involved in developing and reviewing their child's IEP to ensure that educational goals and support align with the child's needs and family expectations.
- **Parent Workshops:** Offering workshops to educate parents on how to support their children's learning and development at home.

Communication and Collaboration

- **Regular Updates:** Providing parents with regular updates on their child's progress and any changes in their educational program.
- **Open Communication Channels:** Maintaining open lines of communication between parents and educators to promptly address any concerns or questions.

Support and Resources for Families

- **Resource Centers:** Establishing resource centers where parents can access information, materials, and support for their child's education.
- **Family Support Programs:** Implementing programs that provide emotional and practical support to families, such as counseling services and support groups.

Inclusive Education Practices

Implementation of Inclusive Practices

- **Inclusive Classrooms:** Creating inclusive classrooms where children with and without disabilities learn together.
- **Adaptive Materials and Technology:** Using adaptive materials and assistive technology to support the learning needs of children with disabilities.

Support Services

- **Specialized Therapies:** Providing access to specialized speech, occupational, physical, and behavioral therapies.
- **Behavioral Supports:** Implementing behavioral supports and interventions to help children manage their behavior and succeed in the classroom.

Best Practices and Innovations

Evidence-Based Curricula: Adopting research-backed teaching methods that cater to diverse learning needs to enhance educational outcomes.

Consistent Assessments: Regular evaluations monitor progress, identify areas for improvement, and tailor teaching strategies to better meet students' needs.

Learning from Successful Districts: Replicating successful models and strategies from districts with exemplary inclusive education programs to improve program quality and inclusivity.

Continuous Improvement and Innovation

Research and Development

- **Continuous Research:** Investing in ongoing research to identify emerging best practices and innovative approaches in special education.
- **Pilot Programs:** Implementing pilot programs to test new strategies and curricula, focusing on scalability and effectiveness.

Data-Driven Decision Making

- **Data Collection and Analysis:** Collect and analyze data on student outcomes, program effectiveness, and staff performance to inform decision-making.
- **Adaptive Strategies:** Utilizing data insights to adapt and refine teaching methods, support services, and program structures.

Community and Stakeholder Engagement

Community Partnerships

- **Collaborative Networks:** Building partnerships with local organizations, businesses, and community groups to support special education initiatives.
- **Resource Sharing:** Encouraging resource sharing and collaboration among schools, community centers, and local agencies to enhance service delivery.

Stakeholder Involvement

- **Advisory Committees:** Establishing advisory committees that include parents, educators, and community members to provide input and guidance on special education programs.
- **Public Forums:** Holding public forums and town hall meetings to gather feedback and foster community engagement.

Technological Integration

Digital Learning Tools

- **Assistive Technologies:** Integrating assistive technologies to support students with disabilities, such as speech-to-text software, adaptive communication devices, and educational apps.
- **Virtual Learning Platforms:** Virtual learning platforms provide flexible and accessible education options, particularly for students in remote or underserved areas.

Technology Training

- **Staff Training Programs:** Training programs are offered so that staff can effectively use new technologies in the classroom.
- **Parent Workshops:** Workshops for parents to help them understand and support their children's use of technology for learning.

Addressing Equity and Inclusion

Equity Initiatives

- **Targeted Support:** Implementing targeted support initiatives to address disparities in access to special education services for children from low-income families and minorities.
- **Cultural Competency Training:** Providing cultural competency training for educators to understand better and meet the needs of diverse student populations.

Inclusive Policies

- **Policy Advocacy:** Advocating for policies that promote equity and inclusion in special education at the local, state, and federal levels.
- **Resource Allocation:** Ensuring equitable allocation of resources to schools and programs serving high-need populations.

Success Stories and Case Studies

Highlighting Achievements

- **Student Success Stories:** Sharing success stories of students who have thrived in special education programs to illustrate the impact and importance of high-quality services.
- **Program Case Studies:** Documenting and disseminating case studies of successful programs and interventions to provide models for replication.

Recognition and Awards

- **Awards for Excellence:** Recognizing and awarding schools, educators, and programs demonstrating exceptional commitment to quality and innovation in special education.

Early Childhood Education Outcomes

- **Improved School Readiness:** Longitudinal studies show that children participating in high-quality preschool programs exhibit marked improvements in school readiness, demonstrating enhanced cognitive, social, and emotional skills.
- **Long-Term Benefits:** Participation in early childhood education programs is associated with better academic performance, higher graduation rates, and lower rates of juvenile delinquency.
- **Inclusive Education Impact:** Inclusive preschool programs benefit children with disabilities significantly. These children have better academic and social outcomes than those in segregated settings. They are also likelier to graduate from high school and pursue higher education or employment.

DATA COLLECTION AND REPORTING

Effective data collection and reporting are essential for understanding the impact of preschool programs, making necessary adjustments to support all children, including those with special needs, and guiding policy decisions. This section outlines the tools and methods used for tracking progress, identifying areas for improvement, and informing policy recommendations. By linking data collection and reporting with policy recommendations, New Hampshire can ensure that its preschool programs are continuously improved based on evidence, addressing the needs of all children and supporting their development and success.

Tools and Methods for Data Collection

Preschool Outcome Measurement System (POMS)

- **Tracking Progress:** POMS tracks children's social-emotional development, cognitive skills, language acquisition, and motor skills.
- **Standardized Assessments:** Employ standardized assessments to ensure consistency and reliability in measuring outcomes across different programs.

Early Childhood Outcomes (ECO) Framework

- **Developmental Benchmarks:** Utilize the ECO framework to assess children's progress against established developmental benchmarks.
- **Holistic Evaluation:** Focus on multiple domains of child development to comprehensively evaluate early childhood outcomes.

Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)

- **Personalized Goals:** Develop IEPs for children with special needs to set personalized educational goals and track progress.
- **Ongoing Review:** Regularly review and update IEPs to reflect children's evolving needs and achievements.

Demographic Data Collection

- **Disaggregated Data:** Collect detailed demographic data, disaggregated by race, income, and geography, to identify and address disparities in access and outcomes.
- **Early Identification:** Use demographic data to identify barriers to accessing services and ensure equitable support for all children.

Longitudinal Tracking Systems

- **Child Development Tracking:** Implement systems that track individual children's development over several years to understand long-term impacts and outcomes.
- **Program Impact Analysis:** Use longitudinal data to analyze the long-term impact of preschool programs on academic performance and social-emotional development.

Observational Assessments

- **Classroom Observations:** Conduct regular observational assessments to evaluate the quality of classroom interactions, teaching practices, and learning environments.
- **Behavioral Observations:** Use observational data to monitor children's behavior, social interactions, and engagement in learning activities.

Parent and Teacher Surveys

- **Feedback Surveys:** Distribute surveys to parents and teachers to gather qualitative data on program satisfaction, perceived effectiveness, and areas needing improvement.
- **Needs Assessments:** Conduct needs assessments to identify gaps in services and resources from the perspectives of parents and educators.

Health and Wellness Metrics

- **Physical Health Data:** Collect data on children's physical health, including nutrition, physical activity, and access to healthcare services.
- **Mental Health Assessments:** Monitor mental health indicators to address social-emotional or behavioral concerns early.

Methods for Data Reporting

Regular Progress Reports

- **Parent Communication:** Provide regular progress reports to parents detailing their child's development and any adjustments to their educational program.
- **Stakeholder Updates:** Share progress updates with stakeholders, including educators, administrators, and policymakers, to inform them of program outcomes.

Annual Reports

- **Comprehensive Analysis:** Compile annual reports that provide a comprehensive analysis of program effectiveness, including successes, challenges, and areas for improvement.
- **Public Transparency:** Make annual reports publicly available to ensure transparency and accountability.

Dashboards and Visualizations

- **Interactive Dashboards:** Interactive dashboards visualize data and track key performance indicators in real-time.
- **Accessible Formats:** Present data in accessible formats to facilitate understanding and decision-making by diverse audiences.

Real-Time Data Reporting Systems

- **Live Dashboards:** Implement real-time data reporting systems that provide program performance and child outcomes information.
- **Mobile Access:** Ensure data reporting tools are accessible via mobile devices to facilitate easy access for educators and parents.

Data Visualization Tools

- **Infographics:** Create infographics summarizing key data points in an engaging and easily understandable format.
- **Heat Maps:** Use heat maps to highlight geographic disparities in access to services and program outcomes.

Community Reports

- **Community Briefings:** Provide regular briefings and reports tailored to specific communities to inform them about local program impacts and outcomes.
- **Localized Data:** Present data at the community level to highlight specific needs and successes within different regions.

Identifying Areas for Improvement

Gap Analysis

- **Data-driven insights:** Conduct a gap analysis to identify areas where program outcomes fall short of expectations.
- **Targeted Interventions:** Design targeted interventions to address identified gaps and improve program effectiveness.

Feedback Mechanisms

- **Parental Feedback:** Gather feedback from parents through surveys, focus groups, and interviews to understand their experiences and identify areas for improvement.
- **Staff Input:** Encourage staff to provide input on program effectiveness and suggest improvements based on their experiences and observations.

Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation

- **Ongoing Assessment:** Continuously monitor program outcomes to ensure they meet quality standards and achieve desired results.
- **Evaluation Frameworks:** Implement evaluation frameworks to assess the impact of interventions and make data-driven adjustments.

Comparative Analysis

- **Benchmarking:** Compare program outcomes against state and national benchmarks to identify areas where programs excel or need improvement.
- **Peer Comparisons:** Conduct peer comparisons with similar programs in other regions to identify best practices and areas for development.

Root Cause Analysis

- **Problem Identification:** Use root cause analysis techniques to identify underlying issues contributing to gaps in program effectiveness.
- **Solution Development:** Develop targeted solutions based on the root causes identified to address specific challenges.

Guiding Policy Decisions

Informed Policymaking

- **Data Analysis:** Data analysis informs policy decisions and effectively allocates resources to support all children.
- **Evidence-Based Recommendations:** Develop policy recommendations to address disparities and enhance program quality.

Policy Recommendations

- **Increased Public Investment:** Advocate for increased state and federal funding based on data demonstrating the need for expanded access and improved quality.
- **Inclusive Policies:** Promote policies that support inclusive education practices and ensure equitable access to high-quality preschool programs.
- **Workforce Development:** Recommend policies addressing workforce shortages and improving early childhood educators' compensation and professional development.

Predictive Analytics

- **Forecasting Needs:** Use predictive analytics to forecast future needs and trends in early childhood education, allowing for proactive policy planning.
- **Impact Projections:** Project the potential impact of proposed policies and interventions to make data-driven decisions.

Equity Audits

- **Equity Analysis:** Conduct equity audits to assess the fairness and inclusiveness of programs and policies.
- **Disparity Identification:** Identify and address disparities in access, quality, and outcomes to promote equity across all demographic groups.

LINKING TO POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The proposed policy recommendations aim to create a more equitable and effective educational system. By focusing on these critical areas, policymakers can ensure that all students have the opportunity to succeed and that the education workforce is supported and valued.

Introduction to Policy Recommendations

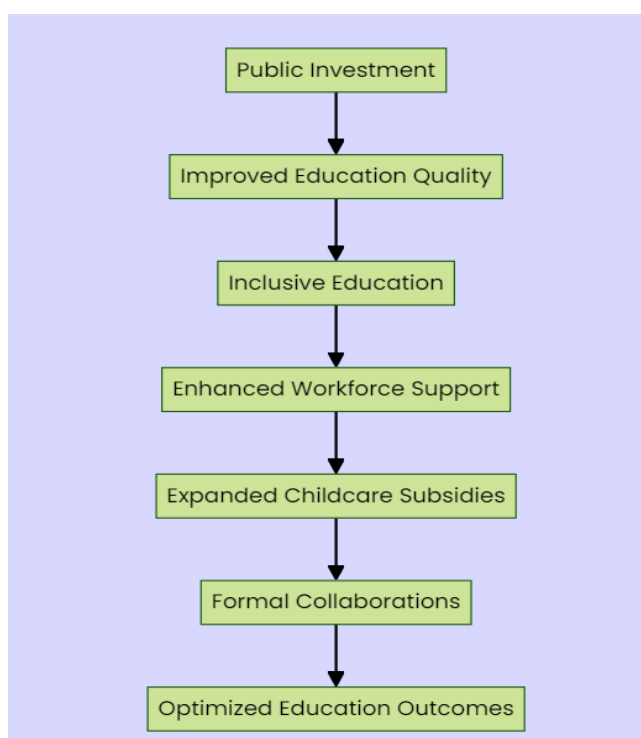
Education is a critical area for policy intervention. The following points outline key areas where policy recommendations can significantly impact the educational landscape.

- ~ **Data Collection:** Essential for informed decision-making.
- ~ **Public Investment:** Addressing disparities and expanding access.
- ~ **Inclusive Education:** Promoting settings that benefit all students.
- ~ **Workforce Support:** Addressing shortages and improving conditions.
- ~ **Childcare Subsidies:** Reducing financial barriers for families.
- ~ **Formal Collaborations:** Leveraging partnerships for resource sharing.

Enhancing Education through Strategic Policies

- ✓ **Data Collection** is crucial for understanding the current state of education and making informed decisions.

- ✓ **Public Investment** should be increased to support the education system's unmet needs, improve program quality, and expand access.
- ✓ **Inclusive Education** must be promoted to ensure that all students, regardless of background, have access to quality education.
- ✓ **Workforce Support** is necessary to address the high turnover rates and workforce shortages by improving compensation and professional growth opportunities.
- ✓ **Childcare Subsidies** can help low-income families overcome financial barriers, allowing more children to access quality education.
- ✓ **Formal Collaboration** between schools, communities, and other stakeholders can lead to better resource-sharing and educational outcomes.



EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

Effective preschool programming and instruction in New Hampshire demand a holistic, multi-faceted approach to address the diverse needs of all children, particularly those with disabilities. High-quality preschool programs implement evidence-based curricula to support children's social, emotional, physical, cognitive, and language development. Critical effective practices include:

- ❖ **Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)**
 - **Framework Utilization:** Providing universal, targeted, and intensive services to all children, including those with disabilities.
 - **Social-Emotional Competency:** Ensuring individualized supports are available to foster social-emotional skills.
- ❖ **Inclusive Education**

- **Least Restrictive Environment:** Educating children with disabilities alongside their typically developing peers.
- **Supplemental Aids and Services:** Providing adaptive materials, assistive technology, and necessary services to meet diverse needs.
- **Best Practices**
 - Inclusive Classrooms: Creating inclusive classrooms where children with and without disabilities learn together.
 - Adaptive Materials and Technology: Adaptive materials and assistive technology support the learning needs of children with disabilities.
 - Professional Development: Providing training for educators on inclusive education practices.

Case Studies

Portsmouth School District:

- Program: Ready for School Success-NH
- Focus: Inclusive education using the PW-PBIS framework
- Outcome: Improved kindergarten readiness

Concord School District:

- Program: Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS)
- Focus: Inclusive education within general education settings
- Approach: Continuous professional development for educators
- Partnerships: Collaboration with local universities

❖ Individualized Instruction

- **Individualized Education Programs (IEPs):** Developing and implementing IEPs tailored to specific needs, strengths, and goals.
- **Differentiated Instruction:** Adjusting content, process, product, and learning environment to meet diverse student needs.
- **Targeted Interventions:** Designing interventions to address specific learning needs and challenges.

Case Studies

Newport School District:

- Partnership: CMF Kids Foundation
- Focus: Specialized training for educators
- Outcome: Improved academic outcomes and increased satisfaction among parents and educators

Littleton School District:

- Partnership: Coos Coalition for Young Children and Families
- Focus: Improving children's developmental milestones and school readiness
- Outcome: Significant improvement in developmental milestones and school readiness

❖ Family Engagement

- **Collaborative Partnerships:** Recognizing families as the child's first and most important teachers and involving them in educational decision-making processes.

- **Best Practices**

- Parent Workshops: Offering workshops to educate parents on how to support their children's learning and development at home.
- Regular Updates: Providing parents with regular updates on their child's progress and any changes in their educational program.
- Family Resource Centers: Establishing centers where parents can access information, materials, and support.

Case Studies

Exeter School District:

- Partnership: Seacoast Early Learning Alliance (SELA)
- Focus: Family engagement initiative, workshops, and resources
- Outcome: Increased student engagement and improved educational outcomes

Hinsdale School District:

- Partnership: Monadnock United Way
- Focus: Enhanced family engagement, scholarships, and transportation options
- Outcome: Higher enrollment rates and improved program quality

❖ Play-Based Learning

- **Hands-On Activities:** Engaging children in meaningful activities that promote cognitive, social, and motor skills.
- **Multisensory Experiences:** Offering activities that engage multiple senses (e.g., tactile, auditory, visual) to support diverse learning styles.
- **Best Practices**
 - Hands-On Activities: Engaging children in meaningful activities that promote cognitive, social, and motor skills.
 - Multisensory Experiences: Offering activities that engage multiple senses to support diverse learning styles.
 - Integrated Play: Using play as a central curriculum component to foster a love of learning and exploration.

Case Studies

Keene School District:

- Program: Ready for School Success-NH
- Focus: Integrated play-based learning
- Outcome: Increased student engagement and improved developmental outcomes

Hooksett School District:

- Focus: Play-based learning in early childhood education
- Outcome: Improved social skills, emotional regulation, and overall school readiness

❖ Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

- **Skill Development:** Implementing programs and processes that promote empathy, self-regulation, and positive peer interactions.

- **Best Practices**

- **Skill Development:** Implementing programs and processes that promote empathy, self-regulation, and positive peer interactions.
- **Behavioral Supports:** Positive behavioral interventions create a safe and nurturing learning environment.
- **Collaborative Learning:** Encouraging cooperative activities that build social and emotional skills.

Case Studies

Dover School District:

- **Partnership:** University of New Hampshire
- **Focus:** Strong SEL program implementation
- **Outcome:** Improved emotional regulation, positive peer interactions, and overall school readiness

Claremont School District:

- **Partnerships:** Local healthcare providers, New Hampshire Charitable Foundation
- **Focus:** SEL integration with mental health support and regular activities
- **Outcome:** Improved student behavior and reduced stress levels

White Mountains Regional School District:

- **Focus:** SEL development integrated into the curriculum
- **Support:** Teachers and paraprofessionals receive support for SEL practices and programs

❖ **Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)**

- **Behavioral Support:** Creating a safe and nurturing learning environment through positive behavioral interventions.

❖ **Sensory Play**

- **Cognitive and Motor Skills:** Sensory exploration enhances cognitive, fine motor, and critical thinking skills.
- **Social and Emotional Skills:** Developing cooperation, communication, and self-confidence.

❖ **Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness**

- **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy:** Incorporating children's cultural backgrounds and experiences into the curriculum and instruction.
- **Language Support:** Supporting dual language learners and promoting language development.

❖ **Assessment and Progress Monitoring**

- **Ongoing Assessment:** Using formative and summative assessments to monitor progress and inform instruction.
- **Data-Driven Decision Making:** Analyzing assessment data to identify areas of need and adjust instructional strategies accordingly.

❖ Health and Wellness Support

- **Nutritional and Physical Activity Programs:** Ensuring access to nutritious meals and opportunities for physical activity.
- **Mental Health Services:** Providing access to mental health services and support for children and families.

PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS

Partnerships are crucial in enhancing the quality and accessibility of preschool education in New Hampshire. Collaborations with healthcare providers, local businesses, educational institutions, and community organizations provide essential resources, support, and expertise to improve early childhood education programs. These partnerships bridge gaps in service provision and create an integrated support system for children and families. Strengthening these partnerships plays a critical role in promoting the development and success of New Hampshire's youngest learners, ensuring that every child can thrive.

Educational Institutions and Universities

- Partnerships: Provide educators with the latest research, best practices, and professional development opportunities.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Access to cutting-edge knowledge and practices; enhanced educator effectiveness.
- Collaborative Research: Evaluate the effectiveness of early childhood education programs and identify areas for innovation.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Evidence-based improvements; continuous innovation.

Healthcare Providers

- Integrated Services: Form partnerships to include developmental screenings and mental health support.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Comprehensive support for children's development, early identification, mental well-being, and intervention.
- Holistic Programs: Develop joint programs that address children's physical, emotional, and cognitive needs.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Well-rounded development; improved long-term outcomes.

Community Organizations

- Family Engagement: Work with community organizations to provide resources and support for parents and caregivers.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Stronger family involvement; enhanced support networks.
- Local Initiatives: Collaborate on initiatives that address local challenges and promote early childhood education within the community.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Tailored solutions for local needs; increased community investment in education.

Local Businesses

- **Support and Resources:** Engage local businesses in supporting early childhood education through funding, resources, and volunteer programs.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Additional funding and resources; stronger community-business relationships.
- **Work-Based Learning:** Develop programs that provide work-based learning opportunities for early childhood educators and internships for students.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Real-world experience for educators and students; enhanced practical skills.

Policymakers and Government Agencies

- **Policy Advocacy:** Collaborate with policymakers and government agencies to support early childhood education, increase funding, and address systemic barriers.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Greater political support; more effective policy implementation.
- **Policy Development:** Ensure that the needs of children and families are represented in the policy development process.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Policies that reflect the needs and priorities of stakeholders; more relevant and effective regulations.

Public-Private Partnerships

- **Community Collaborations:** Partner with local businesses, non-profits, and organizations to expand program reach and impact.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Increased resources and support; broader community engagement.
- **Leverage Federal Programs:** Utilize federal funding opportunities like IDEA and Early Head Start programs.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Additional funding and resources; expanded program capabilities.
- **Formal Agreements:** Develop clear agreements outlining roles, responsibilities, and resources each partner will contribute.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Clear expectations and commitments; stronger partnerships.
- **Collaborative Initiatives:** Develop joint initiatives to address common challenges and promote resource sharing.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Synergistic solutions; increased efficiency and effectiveness.

Examples of Successful Partnerships

Seacoast Early Learning Alliance (SELA)

Description: An alliance of early childhood education providers collaborating to share resources, training, and best practices.

Impact: Shared services support professional development for educators and enhance program quality. Efficient resource use ensures consistent, high-quality education across member programs.

Coos Coalition for Young Children and Families

Description: A coalition focused on improving early childhood outcomes in rural Coos County by fostering collaboration among early childhood providers, healthcare professionals, and community organizations.

Impact: Professional development, family engagement activities, and initiatives to improve early literacy and school readiness. Collaborative efforts lead to better resource utilization and support for young children and their families.

Ready for School Success-NH

Description: A program utilizing a comprehensive, multi-tiered system of support, collaborating with families, educators, and community organizations.

Impact: Children's social skills, emotional regulation, and overall school readiness are significantly improved through integrated support and family involvement—high satisfaction among parents due to comprehensive support systems.

Belknap-Merrimack Head Start

Description: A program collaborating with local mental health services and community organizations to provide tailored interventions for children displaying challenging behaviors.

Impact: Daily behavior tracking and social-emotional development monitoring have noticeably improved children's behavior and overall growth. Effective partnerships enhance program quality and family support.

COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGIES FOR REFORM

Early childhood education is a cornerstone for developing a robust, equitable, and inclusive education system. In New Hampshire, strategic advocacy and policy reforms are essential to ensure that all children, particularly those with disabilities and from underserved communities, receive high-quality education. This comprehensive approach encompasses increased funding, enhanced teacher training, improved access and equity, and strengthened early intervention services. By leveraging data-driven decision-making, fostering public-private partnerships, and addressing the long-term impacts of COVID-19, New Hampshire can create a resilient and effective early childhood education system. These strategic recommendations aim to provide actionable steps to enhance program quality, ensure equitable access, and drive sustainable improvements for the future.

Recommendations

Increase Funding and Resources

- **Expand Early Childhood Funding:** Allocate more state and federal funds to boost preschool and special education services.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Improved infrastructure, resources, and support for all children, leading to a more inclusive education system; potential for long-term cost savings by reducing the need for remedial education.
- **Target Grants for Underserved Areas:** Provide grants to underserved regions to reduce service disparities.

- *Potential Impacts:* Increased access to high-quality programs in underserved areas; reduction in regional education inequalities.
- **Advocate for Public Investment:** Push for increased public investment to sustain high-quality programs.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Sustainable funding for early childhood programs; enhanced program stability and long-term planning.
- **Allocate Funds Based on Needs:** Ensure funding addresses the specific needs of underserved regions and populations.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Targeted support for areas with the greatest needs; more efficient use of resources.
- **Expand Subsidies:** Increase childcare subsidies to make preschool programs more affordable and accessible.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Increased enrollment in preschool programs; improved affordability for low-income families.

Promote Inclusive Education

- **Develop and Enforce Policies:** Promote the inclusion of children with disabilities in general education settings.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Enhanced social integration and development for children with disabilities; enriched learning environments for all students.
- **Provide Educator Training:** Focus on best practices for inclusive education, behavioral interventions, and developmental support.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Better-prepared educators; improved educational outcomes for students with special needs.
- **Allocate Resources for Inclusion:** Create and sustain inclusive classroom environments with necessary support personnel and adaptive technologies.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Higher quality and more equitable education for children with disabilities; increased school capacity to support diverse learners.

Enhance Teacher Training and Support

- **Professional Development:** Invest in continuous training for early childhood and special education teachers.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Improved teaching quality; greater educator satisfaction and retention.
- **Advocate for Better Compensation:** Higher wages and better benefits for early childhood educators.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Increased attraction and retention of qualified educators; enhanced job satisfaction.
- **Support Networks and Mentorship:** Establish support networks and mentorship programs for educators.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Enhanced professional growth and collaboration among educators; reduced burnout and turnover.
- **Joint Training Programs:** Collaborative training initiatives enhance the skills of educators and support staff, ensuring preparedness to meet diverse student needs.

- *Potential Impacts:* Consistent quality of education across districts; shared best practices.

Improve Access and Equity

- **Universal Preschool:** Implement policies for universal access to preschool, prioritizing low-income families and children with special needs.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Increased early learning opportunities for all children; reduction in educational disparities.
- **Equitable Access Policies:** Ensure all children access high-quality education services regardless of background.
 - *Potential Impacts:* More equitable education system; improved outcomes for marginalized groups.
- **Improve Transportation:** Enhance transportation options to improve accessibility to high-quality preschool programs.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Greater access for rural and low-income families; increased preschool enrollment.
- **Address Disparities:** Increase outreach and support for children of color and those from low-income families to bridge access gaps.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Reduced achievement gaps; more inclusive education system.

Strengthen Early Intervention Services

- **Timely Assessments:** Ensure children receive timely developmental assessments.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Early identification and support for developmental issues; improved long-term outcomes.
- **Integrated Services:** Develop models that combine education, health, and social services for holistic child development.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Comprehensive support for children's development; improved coordination of services.
- **Access to Specialized Supports:** Ensure partnerships provide access to specialized supports such as speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, and behavioral interventions.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Enhanced support for children with special needs; improved developmental outcomes.

Family Engagement and Support

- **Parent Education Programs:** Offer programs to support parents, especially those with special needs children, in navigating the education system.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Empowered parents; stronger home-school connections.
- **Accessible Information:** Make information on services widely available and easily understood, especially for non-English-speaking families.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Increased family engagement; improved access to services.
- **Community Engagement Initiatives:** Involve families and the broader community in supporting early childhood education through events, awareness campaigns, and informational sessions.

- *Potential Impacts:* Stronger community support for early education; increased public awareness and involvement.

Data Collection and Monitoring

- **Statewide Data Systems:** Implement robust systems to collect data on access and outcomes disaggregated by race, income, and geography.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Enhanced understanding of where gaps exist, enabling targeted interventions and policy adjustments.
- **Regular Evaluations:** Conduct evaluations to identify improvements and ensure accountability.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Continuous program improvement, accountability, and transparency.
- **Data-Driven Approaches:** Utilize comprehensive data collection and analysis to inform decision-making, identify service gaps, and track partnership effectiveness.
 - *Potential Impacts:* More effective resource allocation; evidence-based program enhancements.

Legislative Actions

- **Supportive Legislation:** Advocate for laws that support the expansion and improvement of early education services.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Legal backing for reforms; greater policy alignment.
- **Policy Alignment:** Align state policies with federal guidelines for consistency and compliance.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Streamlined regulations; increased compliance and effectiveness.

Stakeholder Engagement and Leadership

- **Leadership Teams:** Form teams of educators, administrators, parents, and community members to guide policy development and implementation.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Diverse perspectives; more inclusive decision-making.
- **Formal Collaborations:** Foster collaborations with community partners for resource sharing and coordinated efforts.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Enhanced resource efficiency; stronger community ties.
- **Community Involvement:** Engage stakeholders through regular meetings, forums, and surveys to gather input and build consensus.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Broader support and buy-in; more informed policy decisions.

Cross-District Programming

- **Resource Sharing:** Leverage shared resources and expertise to boost program quality across districts.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Successful districts can mentor others, spreading effective practices.
- **Joint Training Programs:** Collaborative training initiatives enhance the skills of educators and support staff, ensuring preparedness to meet diverse student needs.

- *Potential Impacts:* Consistent quality of education across districts; shared best practices.
- **Integrated Services:** Coordinated efforts across districts can provide comprehensive support, such as pooled speech and language therapy resources, ensuring wider availability of essential services.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Streamlined support and maximizing resource efficiency.

Sharing Staff Using Outside Agencies

- **Addressing Shortages:** Share staff across districts to mitigate workforce shortages.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Ensuring access to qualified educators, particularly in rural areas.
- **Improved Quality:** Outside agencies can bring specialized training and support, enhancing program quality by providing expertise in special education and other areas.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Ensuring that all programs meet high standards.
- **Cost Efficiency:** Shared staffing arrangements can be cost-effective, allowing districts to access high-quality services without the entire financial burden of hiring and training specialized staff.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Helping districts manage their budgets more effectively while maintaining high service quality.

INVESTING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Investing in early childhood education yields substantial economic benefits both in the short and long term. These benefits extend beyond individual gains to positively impact society and the economy. In the short term, expanding preschool programs creates jobs for educators, support staff, and administrative personnel, providing employment opportunities and stimulating local economies through increased spending by employed individuals. Access to affordable, high-quality preschool allows more parents, particularly mothers, to enter or remain in the workforce, contributing to higher household incomes and economic stability. In the long term, high-quality early education improves school readiness, leading to better academic performance, higher graduation rates, and increased likelihood of pursuing higher education or work. This results in a more skilled and educated workforce, driving economic growth and innovation. Additionally, early intervention and quality preschool programs reduce the need for special education, grade repetition, and remedial education, thereby lowering public spending on these services. Children who attend quality preschool are less likely to engage in criminal activities, resulting in savings on criminal justice and social welfare costs. Studies, such as those from the RAND Corporation, indicate that for every dollar invested in high-quality early childhood education, there is a return of approximately \$2 to \$4 in economic benefits. This return comes from improved educational outcomes, increased earnings, and reduced social costs.

Addressing Challenges

Identified challenges such as high costs, workforce shortages, and access disparities require immediate and coordinated action.

Direct Funding and Support

- Provide financial resources to preschool programs to improve quality and accessibility.

- *Potential Impacts:* Increased program quality; expanded access to high-quality education.
- Expand subsidies and increase public investment to address funding shortfalls, particularly in underserved regions.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Reduced financial barriers; more equitable access to education.
- Ensure adequate funding for special education services to meet additional costs and support needs.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Improved support for children with special needs; enhanced educational outcomes.

Advocacy for Policy Reforms

- Push for systemic policy changes that ensure lasting improvements in early childhood education.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Sustainable improvements in education quality and accessibility; enhanced long-term outcomes.

Increasing Public Awareness

A key focus will be raising public awareness about the critical importance of early childhood education and the benefits of inclusive settings for children with disabilities. The foundation plans to:

Launch Awareness Campaigns

- Educate the public and policymakers about the need for increased investment and support.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Greater public and political support; increased funding and resources.

Community Engagement Initiatives

- Involve the community in understanding and supporting early childhood education efforts.
 - *Potential Impacts:* Stronger community involvement and support; increased public awareness.

Data-Driven Approaches

- Prioritizing data-driven approaches ensures that implemented programs are effective and resources are used efficiently.
 - *Potential Impacts:* More effective resource allocation; evidence-based program enhancements.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CMF KIDS

CMF Kids has the potential to significantly improve the preschool sector, particularly for students with disabilities, through strategic partnerships and the effective use of its resources. Cultivating and exploring future partnerships within New Hampshire's early childhood education system is crucial for addressing service gaps, enhancing program quality, and ensuring

comprehensive support for all children, especially those with disabilities, encouraging the state to create a more integrated and supportive early education system by establishing formal collaborations, enhancing workforce training, and employing data-driven strategies. These partnerships will be essential in promoting the development and success of New Hampshire's youngest learners. CMF Kids can lead this effort by providing resources, professional development, and advocacy to ensure inclusive and effective preschool programs, thereby improving outcomes for all children.

To address the challenges and barriers identified in the report, the following strategic goals and initiatives are recommended for CMF Kids.

Strategic Goals

- ✓ **Enhance Access to High-Quality Preschool Programs**
 - Objective: Increase the number of children enrolled in high-quality preschool programs, especially in underserved regions.
 - Initiatives:
 - Expand Scholarships: Provide scholarships for low-income families to improve access to quality preschool education.
 - Transportation Solutions: Implement transportation initiatives such as community bus programs to address access barriers.
- ✓ **Support for Early Intervention (EI) and Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) Services**
 - Objective: Ensure that children with special needs receive timely and effective early intervention and special education services.
 - Initiatives:
 - Professional Development: Offer specialized training for educators to improve the quality of EI and ECSE services.
 - Inclusive Education: Promote the integration of special education services within general education classrooms to increase the availability of inclusive preschool settings.
- ✓ **Address Funding Inequities**
 - Objective: Advocate for equitable state and federal funds distribution to support preschool programs, particularly in underserved areas.
 - Initiatives:
 - Policy Advocacy: Work with policymakers to revise funding formulas to consider the unique needs of low-income, rural areas, and special education programs.
 - Targeted Grants: To reduce funding disparities, provide targeted grants to underserved regions.
- ✓ **Promote Comprehensive Data Collection and Reporting**
 - Objective: Implement robust data collection systems to monitor preschool program access, quality, and outcomes.
 - Initiatives:

- Data Systems: Develop comprehensive data systems to track children's progress and identify areas for improvement.
- Regular Reporting: Ensure transparency and accountability through regular progress reports and public annual reports.

Strategic Initiatives

✓ **Innovative Program Development**

- Mobile Classrooms: Explore the feasibility of mobile classrooms to reach children in remote and underserved areas.
- Technology Integration: Invest in technology to enhance learning and provide virtual support.

✓ **Enhanced Family Engagement**

- Parent Education Programs: Offer programs to support parents, especially those with special needs children, in navigating the education system.
- Resource Centers: Establish family resource centers to provide information, materials, and support for early childhood education.

✓ **Sustainable Funding and Resources**

- Long-Term Funding: Advocate for consistent and sustainable funding sources to support ongoing improvements in preschool education.
- Economic Justifications: Highlight the long-term financial benefits of investing in early childhood education to secure broader support from policymakers and the community.

Strategic Implementation

✓ **Leadership and Stakeholder Engagement:**

- Form Leadership Teams: Establish teams of educators, administrators, parents, and community members to guide policy development and implementation.
- Regular Meetings and Forums: Engage stakeholders through regular meetings, forums, and surveys to gather input and build consensus.

✓ **Monitoring and Evaluation:**

- Continuous Improvement: Implement evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of programs and make necessary adjustments.
- Feedback Mechanisms: Establish feedback mechanisms for parents and educators to provide insights and suggest improvements.

Conclusion: Advancing Equitable Preschool Education

New Hampshire's youngest learners are at a critical crossroads. The barriers revealed in this report—ranging from geographic isolation to severe staffing shortages—are not just logistical challenges; they represent lost opportunities for children who deserve an equal start. In

particular, the CMF Kids Partnership Districts highlight the deep disparities facing low-income and rural communities, where access to early intervention is far from guaranteed. For children with disabilities, every missed day of early support translates to delayed development and a steeper path to success.

Addressing these gaps is more than a policy recommendation—it is a commitment to equity, opportunity, and community well-being. By investing in early childhood education, expanding program capacity, and supporting a skilled workforce, New Hampshire can transform its early education landscape. This will require the dedication of local and state leaders, strengthened community partnerships, and a shared vision that values the potential of every child. Together, we can ensure that no child is left behind before they even begin. Now is the time to act boldly and decisively, creating a future where every child has the chance to thrive, and every community benefits from a foundation of strong, inclusive early education.

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Accessibility: The design of products, devices, services, or environments to ensure that all people, including those with disabilities, can fully participate and benefit.

Cultural Competency: The ability of educators and organizations to understand, appreciate, and interact with people from cultures or belief systems different from their own.

COVID-19 Pandemic: The global outbreak of the novel coronavirus began in late 2019 and has significantly impacted health, economies, and education systems worldwide.

Developmental Delay: A condition where a child does not reach developmental milestones at the expected times. It can affect a child's physical, cognitive, communication, social, emotional, or adaptive development.

Disparity: A significant difference or inequality in access, quality, educational outcomes, or other services.

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a period of learning that typically takes place from birth to eight years old and focuses on the child's holistic development.

Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE): Educational programs and services specifically tailored for preschool-aged children (three to five years old) with identified disabilities.

Early Intervention (EI): Programs and services designed to identify and address developmental delays and disabilities in young children from birth to age three.

Early Literacy: The development of reading and writing skills in young children before they enter formal schooling.

Equity: The quality of being fair and impartial, ensuring all individuals have access to the same opportunities and resources.

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE): Special education and related services provided at public expense under public supervision and without charge, tailored to the child's individual needs.

IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act): A federal law ensuring services to children with disabilities nationwide, guaranteeing special education and related services to eligible children.

Inclusive Education: An educational approach where children with and without disabilities learn together in the same classrooms and schools.

Inclusive Settings: Educational environments where children with and without disabilities learn together, supported by necessary accommodations and modifications.

Inclusion: Educating children with disabilities alongside their non-disabled peers in general education classrooms.

Individualized Education Program (IEP): A legally binding document outlining the special education and related services specifically designed to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): The setting that allows children with disabilities to be educated alongside their non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate.

Longitudinal Data: Data collected over a long period to track changes and developments in the studied subject.

Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS): A framework that provides varying levels of support based on student needs, encompassing universal, targeted, and intensive interventions.

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS): A proactive approach to establishing the behavioral supports needed for students to achieve social, emotional, and academic success.

Professional Development: Ongoing training and education for teachers and staff to improve their skills and knowledge.

Public Investment: Government spending on public services and infrastructure, including education, health, and transportation.

Socioeconomic Status (SES): The social standing or class of an individual or group, often measured as a combination of education, income, and occupation.

Special Education Services: Programs and services designed to meet the needs of students with disabilities, ensuring they receive an appropriate education tailored to their individual needs.

Special Needs: Refers to children who require additional or specialized services due to physical, developmental, behavioral, or emotional conditions.

Stakeholders are individuals or groups interested in or concerned about something, especially a business or organization, such as parents, teachers, administrators, and educational policymakers.

Universal Preschool: A policy or program that aims to make preschool education available to all children regardless of socioeconomic status.

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