Strategic Plan Update

JULY 30, 2026

2026-29

Board of Directors

PARTNERSHIP FOR CHILDREN OF CUMBERLAND COUNTY, INC.

Executive Summary

For more than three decades, the Partnership for Children of Cumberland County has served as a trusted leader in advancing positive outcomes for young children and families. Through strategic investments, collaborative partnerships, and evidence-based programs, the organization has built a strong reputation for improving school readiness, supporting families, strengthening the early childhood workforce, and connecting communities to critical resources.

This Strategic Plan reflects extensive stakeholder engagement through the SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results) process, which yielded valuable insights from Board members and staff on the organization's current position and future direction.

The planning process revealed significant organizational strengths, including experienced leadership, dedicated staff, strong fiscal stewardship, trusted community relationships, successful program implementation, and a long-standing commitment to children and families. Stakeholders consistently identified the Partnership's credibility, expertise, and collaborative approach as foundational assets that position the organization for continued impact.

The assessment also identified opportunities to expand regional influence, strengthen strategic partnerships, diversify funding sources, enhance workforce development efforts, improve operational systems, and increase access to services for underserved populations. At the same time, stakeholders acknowledged challenges related to funding uncertainty, workforce shortages, organizational silos, communication gaps, increasing service demands, and the need for greater coordination across systems and sectors.

While outcomes for children and families measure the Partnership's impact, achieving those outcomes requires strong internal communication, clear roles, accountability, workforce stability, financial sustainability, and effective collaboration. As a result, this Strategic Plan intentionally balances external community impact with internal organizational capacity.

PFCCC organized the Strategic Plan around five interconnected Strategic Pillars:

1. Sustainable & Adaptive Organization

Strengthen organizational sustainability through leadership development, financial resilience, operational excellence, workforce retention, communication, and continuous improvement.

2. Equitable Access & Early Intervention

Ensure all children and families, particularly those facing barriers, can access high-quality early learning opportunities, developmental supports, and family-centered services.

3. Strong Workforce, Strong Outcomes

Support and strengthen the early childhood workforce through professional development, workforce pipeline development, retention strategies, and knowledge transfer.

4. Authentic Community Voice & Engagement

Create meaningful opportunities for families, providers, and community members to inform decisions, shape services, and strengthen trust within the early childhood system.

5. Connected Systems, Partnerships & Regional Leadership

Advance coordinated systems of care through strategic partnerships, shared solutions, regional collaboration, and collective action to improve outcomes for children and families.

Implementation of this plan will occur over three years. It will focus on building a strong organizational foundation, strengthening internal and external alignment, and positioning the Partnership as a regional leader in early childhood systems development. Progress will be monitored through a comprehensive set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) aligned with each pillar, enabling the Board of Directors and leadership team to evaluate outcomes, guide decision-making, and ensure accountability.

Ultimately, this Strategic Plan reaffirms the Partnership's commitment to being the driving force that engages partners to achieve lasting positive outcomes for all children, beginning at birth. The Partnership will be positioned to meet emerging challenges and create even greater impact for children, families, and communities in the years ahead by strengthening organizational capacity while advancing equitable access, workforce development, community engagement, and systems collaboration.

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Organizational Context and Environmental Scan

Organizational Context

The Partnership for Children of Cumberland County (PFCCC) has served as a trusted leader in advancing positive outcomes for young children and families for more than three decades. Through strategic investments, collaborative partnerships, evidence-based programs, and system-building efforts, the organization has established itself as a central convener and catalyst for improving early childhood outcomes across Cumberland County.

PFCCC's work spans multiple areas of impact, including early care and education, family support, school readiness, child development, professional development, community engagement, and systems coordination. The organization administers and supports a broad portfolio of initiatives to strengthen children, families, educators, and community partners, while ensuring that PFC invests public resources effectively and responsibly.

The Partnership's long-standing strengths include experienced leadership, dedicated and knowledgeable staff, strong fiscal management, established compliance systems, trusted community relationships, and a reputation for collaboration and innovation. Stakeholders consistently recognize the organization as a reliable resource and respected voice within the early childhood landscape. These strengths position PFCCC to continue serving as a leader in addressing emerging challenges and opportunities affecting children and families.

At the same time, the organization operates in an increasingly complex environment marked by evolving community needs, workforce shortages, funding uncertainty, shifting public policy priorities, and growing expectations for measurable outcomes and accountability. *Maintaining operational excellence while remaining adaptable to changing conditions has become increasingly important*.

The organization is also navigating a period of transition marked by the conclusion of several federal funding streams, increasing pressure on administrative resources, workforce recruitment and retention challenges, and ongoing discussions regarding regional collaboration opportunities. These factors underscore the importance of organizational sustainability, strategic planning, and proactive leadership.

As PFCCC looks toward the future, it remains committed to its mission of serving as the driving force that engages partners to achieve lasting positive outcomes for all children, beginning at birth. The Strategic Plan provides a roadmap for strengthening organizational capacity while expanding impact for children, families, providers, and communities.

Environmental Scan

Early Childhood Landscape

The early childhood sector continues to face significant challenges that directly impact children, families, providers, employers, and communities. Access to affordable, high-quality child care remains a persistent concern, particularly for working families, low-income households, military-connected families, and families living in underserved areas.

In May of 2026, there were 267 licensed child care in Cumberland County, compared to 315 in February 2019, a decline of 16.8%. While the number of child care providers hit a low of 1,425 in 2024, and has risen to 1,537 by May 2026, child care providers continue to experience workforce shortages, rising operating costs, recruitment and retention difficulties, and increasing regulatory requirements. Further, 75% of child care sites accepted subsidy vouchers in 2020, compared to the more current 62%, making it difficult for those needing childcare who have financial support to find a child care site to accept their voucher. These challenges contribute to reduced capacity, classroom closures, and limited availability of care, particularly for infants and toddlers.

Total child care enrollment declined 14.4% in the same period. Current data show that fewer than 1 in 11 babies, and 1 in 6 one-year-olds have an available child care slot. At the same time, communities are experiencing increased awareness of the importance of early childhood to development, school readiness, family well-being, and early intervention services. This growing recognition presents opportunities for investment, advocacy, and collaboration across sectors.

Family and Community Needs

Families continue to navigate a variety of challenges that affect child and family well-being, including:

- Rising housing and living costs.
- Limited access to affordable child care.
- Transportation barriers.
- Behavioral and developmental health concerns.
- Workforce and employment instability.
- Access to health and mental health services.
- Language and cultural barriers.
- Complex service systems that can be difficult to navigate.

Many families remain unaware of available supports or face barriers to accessing services. Stakeholders emphasized the importance of strengthening family engagement, improving communication, and ensuring services are accessible, responsive, and culturally relevant.

There is also growing recognition that the family voice must play a larger role in shaping programs, policies, and community solutions.

Workforce Environment

The early childhood workforce remains one of the most significant challenges facing the sector, despite being an economic driver supporting the community's employment.

Providers continue to report difficulties recruiting and retaining qualified staff due to compensation disparities, workforce competition from other industries, burnout, and limited career advancement opportunities. Workforce instability affects service availability and quality, ultimately impacting children and families. While PFCCC successfully initiated recent programs to address workforce shortages through wraparound supportive training, many barriers remain to increasing the teacher pipeline.

The organization also faces internal workforce considerations, including succession planning, preservation of institutional knowledge, leadership development, employee engagement, and workforce sustainability. Stakeholders identified these areas as essential to maintaining organizational effectiveness and ensuring long-term success.

As a result, workforce development must be viewed both as a community-wide priority and an internal organizational strategy.

Funding and Financial Environment

The funding environment for nonprofit organizations and early childhood systems continues to evolve.

Organizations are experiencing increased competition for grant funding, heightened expectations for measurable outcomes, and uncertainty regarding public funding levels. Administrative funding continues to face pressure, requiring organizations to operate more efficiently while maintaining high levels of accountability and service quality.

The conclusion of certain federal funding opportunities and the potential for future shifts in state and federal priorities add to the uncertainty. These conditions highlight the importance of:

- Diversifying revenue sources.
- Strengthening philanthropic support.
- Pursuing strategic partnerships.
- Exploring innovative funding opportunities.
- Maintaining strong financial stewardship.

Long-term sustainability will require balancing fiscal responsibility with continued investment in people, programs, technology, and infrastructure.

Community Partnerships and Systems Collaboration

No single organization can address the complex needs of children and families alone.

PFCCC operates within a network of public agencies, educational institutions, health systems, nonprofit organizations, businesses, faith communities, child care providers, and local governments. Stakeholders identified collaboration as one of the organization's greatest strengths and opportunities for future growth.

Regional partnerships, coordinated service delivery, shared data, referral systems, and collective advocacy efforts offer opportunities to maximize resources and improve outcomes. Stakeholders also noted the importance of maintaining local responsiveness, preserving community trust, and ensuring that community voices remain central to decision-making processes.

As systems become increasingly interconnected, PFCCC remains well-positioned to serve as a convener, facilitator, and strategic leader.

Strategic Implications

The environmental scan demonstrates that the future success of PFCCC will depend on its ability to:

- Maintain organizational sustainability and adaptability.
- Expand equitable access to services and supports.
- Strengthen the early childhood workforce.
- Build authentic community engagement and trust.
- Advance coordinated systems and strategic partnerships.

These priorities form the basis of the Strategic Pillars and provide the framework for guiding decision-making, resource allocation, partnership development, and performance measurement over the next three years.

Together, the Organizational Context and Environmental Scan affirm that while challenges exist, PFCCC's unique position in the community enables it to leverage its strengths, relationships, expertise, and community trust to create lasting positive outcomes for children and families throughout Cumberland County and the broader region.

Strategic Pillar 1: Sustainable & Adaptive Organization

Goal Statement

Ensure long-term organizational stability and adaptability through strong leadership, diversified funding, and efficient systems that support mission impact.

Strategic Objectives

1. Strengthen leadership continuity through succession planning and cross-training.
2. Diversify revenue streams to reduce reliance on government funding.
3. Improve staff retention and satisfaction through competitive compensation and development.
4. Modernize systems and processes to increase efficiency and reduce administrative burden.
5. Build internal fundraising, communications, and public awareness capacity.

Strategic Pillar 2: Equitable Access & Early Intervention

Goal Statement

Ensure all children and families—especially those most underserved—can access high-quality early learning and early intervention supports.

Strategic Objectives

1. Expand access to NC Pre-K and other early learning opportunities.
2. Improve early identification and referral for developmental, behavioral, and learning needs.
3. Strengthen family navigation of child care, education, and support systems.
4. Increase awareness of available resources among non-traditional and underserved families.

Strategic Pillar 3: Strong Workforce, Strong Outcomes

Goal Statement

Strengthen the early childhood workforce to improve program quality, access, and outcomes for children and families.

Strategic Objectives

1. Increase workforce retention through compensation, recognition, and support strategies.
2. Expand professional development and credentialing opportunities.
3. Build workforce pipelines through higher education, apprenticeship, and partner institutions.
4. Support provider sustainability and reduce provider closures related to staffing shortages.

Strategic Pillar 4: Authentic Community Voice & Engagement

Goal Statement

Create inclusive, accessible opportunities for families, providers, and communities to actively shape early childhood systems and decisions.

Strategic Objectives

1. Reduce barriers to family participation in engagement and governance activities.
2. Elevate parent voice, particularly among families receiving services.
3. Strengthen community-building through digital and in-person engagement.
4. Improve feedback mechanisms without overburdening families or staff.

Strategic Pillar 5: Connected Systems & Strategic Partnerships

Goal Statement

Strengthen cross-sector collaboration to reduce silos, maximize resources, and improve outcomes for children and families.

Strategic Objectives

1. Expand and deepen strategic partnerships across education, health, faith, business, nonprofit, and local government sectors.
2. Improve coordination and referral pathways among community partners.
3. Leverage partnerships to increase funding, workforce capacity, and service reach.
4. Align partners around shared goals and measurable outcomes.