



**BUILDING A COHERENT,
EXCELLENT EARLY CHILDHOOD
SYSTEM FOR EAST BATON ROUGE
PARISH**

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About This Report

Early learning experiences are critical to children's development and future success. In May 2024, BRAF released *Early Childhood Education: Identifying the Roots of Educational Disparities in Baton Rouge*¹, a report that called attention to the following in EBR:

- Around half the children from low-income households in the parish entered kindergarten far behind their peers, developing achievement gaps likely to persist as they age.
- Although most 4-year-olds in greatest need of care in the parish have access to ECE, the quality of the programs varies across the parish, directly affecting their school readiness levels.
- The best opportunity to close the gaps is to improve the quality of and access to publicly-funded early childhood seats birth through four across the parish.

Following the release of that report, BRAF convened an Early Childhood Education Task Force² of the parish's leadership to consider the following questions:

1. What should a high-quality early childhood education system look like in East Baton Rouge Parish?
2. Where are programs and educators excelling, and what factors contribute to their success?
3. What barriers prevent broader success in achieving high kindergarten readiness rates?
4. What structural changes, policies, resources, and funding mechanisms are needed to achieve our kindergarten readiness goals?

To answer these questions, the Task Force engaged in the following:

- **Five in-person meetings** between September 2024 and February 2025 to dive deeper into each guiding question and discuss the ideal state for EBR.
- **Site visits** to high-quality early childhood providers in a public school and a child care center to better understand positive adult-child interactions.
- **A comprehensive landscape analysis** of the factors influencing the parish's current ECE landscape, such as quality gaps, systemic barriers, and potential opportunities for change.

¹ Link to the full report available [here](#).

² For a full list of ECE Task Force members, see Appendix 1.

- **Two Lunch and Learn sessions** featuring guest speakers from spotlight organizations leading ECE work in Denver, Colorado, and Guilford County, North Carolina.
- **An exploration of national best practices and spotlight localities** such as New Orleans, Tulsa, and Philadelphia.
- **Two rounds of focus groups with parents and ECE providers** between October and December 2024.

The Task Force gathered the key insights from its engagements in this report, which can serve as a roadmap of the opportunities and possible next steps that would move the ECE system in EBR closer to reaching the shared goal of supporting all children in the parish in their path to kindergarten.



Executive Summary

Early childhood education (ECE) is foundational to the success of East Baton Rouge Parish (EBR) and its children. Research shows that 90% of brain development occurs before age five³, making early learning a critical window for cognitive, social, and emotional growth. By supporting working families, driving workforce participation, and fostering kindergarten readiness, investments in high-quality ECE yield lifelong benefits for children, families, and the entire community.

EBR has made significant progress in early childhood education since the East Baton Rouge Parish School System (EBRPSS) began taking on local early childhood coordinating efforts a decade ago:

- Network Coordination:** Through relationships, structures, and other efforts, EBR now has a network of over 180 providers, a count of all children served through public funds by age before kindergarten, and a plan to improve early childhood quality and access in the parish.
- Advancements in Quality:** Providers in the network have achieved noteworthy success on statewide ratings that measure the quality of adult-child interactions, outperforming many neighboring parishes.
- Commitment from Leadership:** EBR's leaders, including the Mayor's office and Superintendent, demonstrate strong commitment to early childhood education.
- Comprehensive Access to PreK:** Through expansion efforts, nearly every 4-year-old from families considered economically disadvantaged can access a subsidized preK spot in EBR, though cost, coverage, and accessibility does vary.

“Early childhood education is one of the most important conversations we can have in the field of education.” - Superintendent LaMont Cole

“When we invest in early childhood education, it puts us on a trajectory of success, supports children and families, and impacts every aspect of our city and community, including our economy.” - Task Force member



³ Sources: [The Bipartisan Policy Center](#), [Delaware Journal of Public Health](#), [The Science of Early Childhood Development](#).

Despite significant progress in expanding access to quality ECE, significant challenges still remain:

- **Kindergarten Readiness Disparities:** The Baton Rouge Area Foundation's (BRAAF) Opportunity Data Project Briefing document elevated that despite accessing a subsidized preK seat, only half of children in EBR from low-income families show up to kindergarten ready. Of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, around 1 in 3 scored an absolute zero on the first sound fluency section of the DIBELS kindergarten readiness assessment, and two-thirds of those children went on to not reading on grade level in 3rd grade.⁴
- **Systemic Silos:** ECE in EBR is fragmented across numerous organizations and funding sources, making the system challenging for decision-makers to know how to improve.
- **Access Gaps:** Although EBR excels in serving 4-year-olds in preK, it faces a significant shortfall in ECE spots, particularly for infants and toddlers.
- **Family Barriers:** Families often encounter barriers in a complex system that is difficult to understand, navigate, and afford - and to find the resources their child needs.

“In EBR, ECE funding is siloed and not enough. How can we make the system as efficient as possible?”

“We are in triage right now.”

“In the current system, it’s hard to figure out where the money is and where communication lies. If we had an overarching, streamlined process, it would make it easier.”

- Task Force members

⁴ Link to the full report available [here](#).

Opportunities for System Transformation

Baton Rouge's Early Childhood Education Task Force convened to explore these challenges and discuss systems-level solutions to ensure all children in EBR have access to high-quality early learning experiences that prepare them for kindergarten. The Task Force identified the following priorities for future efforts within EBR's ECE system:

1. **Foster coherent system-level decision-making** by promoting shared information, a collective understanding of successes and gaps, and aligned efforts across the entire ECE ecosystem
2. **Establish funding structures and partnerships** that maximize the impact of every public dollar to serve as many children as possible, incorporating sliding scale models that include family cost-sharing where appropriate
3. **Develop a coherent strategy for quality improvement**, including support for the ECE workforce, across funding streams and site types and leverage all resources toward the most impactful solutions
4. **Create a family-friendly early childhood system** that builds meaningful partnerships with families, engages them in their child's care, and provides care and education solutions that meet family and community needs



The Task Force strongly recommends that EBR leaders integrate these four priorities into its future early childhood education strategic planning to ensure meaningful and effective outcomes for all children in the parish.

When examining other localities tackling similar priorities, an emerging enabling condition was a **backbone organization**, distinct from providers of care and education, that focused exclusively on building and executing the community-wide plan in partnership with schools, centers, family child care providers, Head Start, higher education agencies, government partners, and other nonprofits in their communities. For EBR to fully address the opportunities identified above, one possible solution may be for the parish to establish a distinct organization to support the efforts in accomplishing the community's broader early childhood goals.

The EBR Context

Overview of the ECE System in EBR

East Baton Rouge Parish's early care and education system is a complex network of funding sources, providers, and organizations working to support young children and their families. As the parish with the largest number of early childhood providers in Louisiana, EBR's ECE system has four major organizations playing a substantial and unique role in serving children and/or supporting providers and families: East Baton Rouge Parish School System (EBRPSS), City of Baton Rouge/Mayor's Office, YWCA, and Volunteers of America⁵.

The East Baton Rouge Parish School System (EBRPSS)

EBPSS plays three critical roles in the local early childhood education system:

- **Lead Agency** for the Early Childhood Network: As the lead agency appointed by the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE), EBRPSS manages the coordination of all birth to 4-year-old early childhood programs that receive public funding across the parish, including:
 - Coordinating the completion of over 600 classroom observations each semester.
 - Conducting a coordinated enrollment process and reviewing applications for eligibility.
 - Monitoring the completion of state-required child assessments.
- **Leader of the Ready Start Network:** EBRPSS also serves as the LDOE-appointed Ready Start Network, a designation that tasks them with driving faster rates of improvement in access to high-quality early childhood education.
 - In this role, they also serve as fiscal agent and administrators for innovative state funding opportunities, including CCAP B-3 seats and state matching funds from the Early Childhood Education Fund.
 - EBRPSS also runs the innovative microcenter model through partnerships with high-quality Type III centers to serve more children under 4 on school campuses.
- **Administrators of Local Education Agency (LEA) early childhood functions**, including state-funded LA 4 preschool, district-funded preschool, and Early Childhood Special Education, particularly Child Find, which identifies children beginning at age 3 who are suspected of having an educational disability and may be eligible for services.

YWCA of Greater Baton Rouge: Early Head Start Services (0-3 years old)

The YWCA of Greater Baton Rouge is the grantee organization for federally-funded Early Head Start seats in East Baton Rouge Parish. The YWCA manages and delivers services through two sites and a newly opened microcenter, supporting 170 children and families⁶.

⁵ For a brief summary of the major ECE organizations in EBR, see Appendix 2.

⁶ In October, 2023

City of Baton Rouge: Head Start Services (3 and 4 year olds)

The City of Baton Rouge: Division of Human Development and Services is the grantee organization for federally-funded Head Start seats in East Baton Rouge Parish, with the mayor's office managing the operations and implementation. The mayor's office recently proposed entering into a partnership with LaForce⁷ to support the management and delivery of services through six sites, serving 585 children.

Volunteers of America (VOA) Greater Baton Rouge: Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) Agency

Volunteers of America (VOA) Greater Baton Rouge serves as the LDOE-contracted Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) Agency for EBR, which includes:

- Connecting families to child care
- Improving provider quality
- Providing professional development and capacity building
- Receiving and administering School Readiness Tax Credit (SRTC) contributions that go towards improving the quality of child care



Key ECE Funding Streams

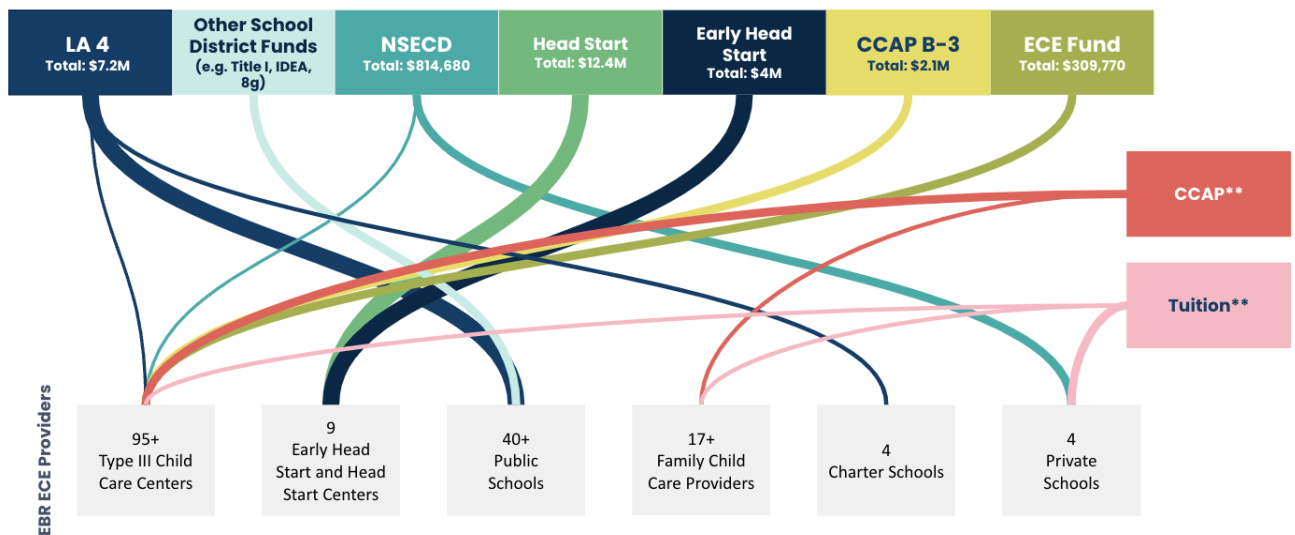
As with localities nationwide, subsidized early childhood education in EBR Parish is funded through a patchwork of federal, state, and local funding sources in a mixed delivery system. Birth through 4-year-old children in the parish are served in public schools, charter schools, private schools, Head Starts, Early Head Starts, child care centers, and home-based family child care providers. The various federal, state, and local public funding sources serving children each hold different requirements and regulations:

- **LA 4:** State-funded preK seats awarded by the Louisiana Department of Education, primarily served in traditional public schools and overseen by EBRPSS

⁷ <https://www.brla.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=1439>

- **Non-Public Schools of Early Childhood Development (NSECD):** State-funded preK seats awarded by the Louisiana Department of Education and placed in private schools or Type III child care centers
- **Head Start:** Federally-funded 3- and 4-year-old seats, awarded to and managed by the City of Baton Rouge
- **Early Head Start:** Federally-funded birth to 2-year-old seats, awarded to and managed by the YWCA
- **Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP):** Federally-funded seats managed by the Louisiana Department of Education and paid directly to providers for qualifying families
- **CCAP B-3:** Federally-funded birth to 3-year-old seats awarded to EBRPSS by the Louisiana Department of Education and paid directly to providers (who much participated in the state's quality rating system) for qualifying families
- **Early Childhood Education Fund:** State funding awarded to EBRPSS as a 1:1 match for local funds raised for birth to 3-year-olds seats
- **Other school district funds (e.g., Title I, IDEA, 8g):** Flexible LEA funding that EBRPSS chooses to allocate towards early childhood education seats, primarily 4-year-olds

These funding streams reach children and families through EBR's network of providers, which function as a mixed-delivery portfolio model:



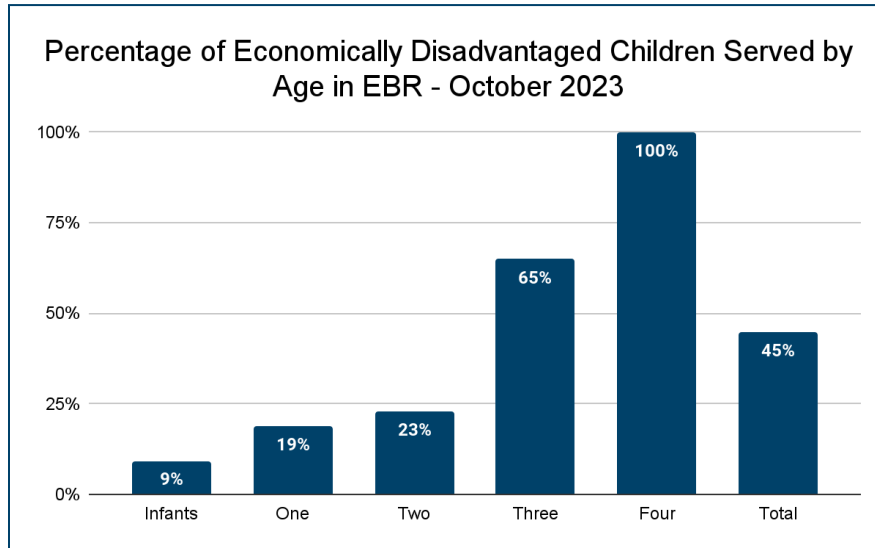
*ECE Fund information reflects the 2024-2025 fiscal year. All other funding amounts reflect the 2023-2024 fiscal year.

**Seat-based funding, not allocated by program.

Please see Appendix 3, which provides a more detailed overview of these funding sources, including a description of each funding source, eligibility criteria, funding flow, and where families can access these services.

Access Information

While data indicates that close to 100% of 4-year-old children most in need⁸ are being served, only 63% of 3-year-olds in the same demographic had access to care in the fall of 2023⁹. This percentage becomes even lower for children aged birth to 2, making it extremely difficult for families to find affordable care and highlighting the need to continue exploring ways to increase access to ECE services for EBR’s youngest children.



Many families without access to subsidized sources (or who are ineligible) pay tuition for child care and education, including those with incomes above what is considered “economically disadvantaged” but below the cost of living.¹⁰ As indicated by focus groups, families in EBR continue to struggle with high costs of care and other systemic barriers, particularly in underserved areas, while providers face funding gaps, staffing challenges, and a lack of adequate resources and support for early learning and family engagement¹¹.

ECE Site and Classroom Quality

Louisiana uses the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS[®]) tool to measure classroom quality based on adult-child interactions across three main domains:

1. Emotional Support - Creating a warm and respectful environment.
2. Classroom Organization - Keeping activities well-structured and engaging.

⁸ Total number of children estimated by using the economically disadvantaged kindergarten cohort in EBR from October 2023. More information available [here](#).

⁹ Source: [LDOE data](#)

¹⁰ Also defined as Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) households.

¹¹ For more insights, see a [summary of round 1 and round 2 focus groups](#).

3. Instructional Support - Helping children think critically, develop language skills, and explore new ideas.

CLASS® scores¹² in the Emotional Support domain demonstrate that EBR has made great strides over the last several years in creating warm and respectful environments in which children can grow and thrive. Additionally, the parish's overall score for the 2023-2024 school year was 5.6 out of 7, considered "high proficient" and outperforming many peer and neighboring networks. Despite recent growth, however, EBR's overall score for the Instructional Support domain, which measures interactions that support language acquisition and concept development, remains lower than the other two domains.¹³ This is due to the wide range of scores from sites across the parish. The latest network score for Instructional Support was 4.49 out of 7; while still below proficient, the parish is still outperforming the state average of 4.28.

To support ECE classroom quality, the Louisiana Department of Education provides both funding and guidance related to:

- Professional development and job-embedded coaching for teachers
- Curriculum expansion, using a curated list of high-quality curricula for children aged 0-4
- TS GOLD assessments in every site that serves publicly-funded children

Additionally, the LDOE supports EBR's ECE workforce by funding scholarships for ECE teachers pursuing degrees and credentials and connecting ECE providers with TIKES Mental Health, an intervention team that focuses on improving the social, emotional, and behavioral health of young children.

Like the rest of the state, the early childhood education workforce varies across EBR Parish. Credentialing requirements differ by different funding streams, and that ranges from requiring a teacher to achieve a Child Development Associate (CDA) within two years of starting as a lead teacher to having a bachelor's degree prior to beginning. 2023-2024 performance profiles indicated that 50% of the early childhood teachers in EBR do not hold a degree.¹⁴ Varying credentials, compensation, and professional development needs complicate the coordinated workforce strategy for classroom quality, recruitment, and retention of ECE teachers.

Challenges in the ECE System

The combined efforts of EBRPSS, YWCA, City of Baton Rouge, VOA Greater Baton Rouge, and other community partners demonstrate EBR Parish's commitment to preparing young children for kindergarten and lifelong success. However, the sheer scale and diversity of the system create challenges

¹² See Appendix 4 EBR 2017-2023 Performance scores by year and domain.

¹³ See Appendix 5 EBR 2017-2023 Instructional Support scores.

¹⁴ [2023-2024 EBR & City of Baker Network Performance Profile](#)

in alignment, resource allocation, and consistency. Despite progress, there is significant room for improvement to streamline coordination and better meet the needs of children and families.

Because early childhood education is funded through many sources, each with unique eligibility requirements and service structures, there is a high level of complexity for system leaders to administer. While the mixed delivery system provides a variety of options for families to choose what best meets their needs, the current state of the ECE system in EBR places a significant burden on providers, who must navigate various regulations for each funding source they receive and on families, who face a disjointed, cumbersome system when seeking care for their children. While these challenges are not unique to EBR, EBR is well-poised to address them.

Current Innovative Efforts

EBR has implemented several innovative efforts to address gaps in its early childhood education system, particularly in terms of de-siloing funding structures and building partnerships with providers to meet family needs. One EBR innovation is the “microcenter” model, where Type III child care centers partner with EBRPSS to operate early learning classrooms in vacant spaces on elementary school campuses. This approach expands access to ECE by utilizing existing school facilities and providing partners with subsidized leasing costs, enabling the ability to serve more students. Microcenters in EBR that have shown early success are Kidz Karousel at Crestworth and London Bridge at Westminster, which contributed to an expansion of six microcenters in the parish, including one in partnership with YWCA Early Head Start.

Another notable achievement is that EBRPSS successfully raised \$154,885 in local funds in collaboration with the Foundation for East Baton Rouge Parish School System. These funds were matched dollar-for-dollar by the state through the Early Childhood Education Fund (ECE Fund), resulting in a total of \$309,770 to serve birth to 3-year-old children. Accessing this fund and fully leveraging its benefits depends on securing local investments. While this is a remarkable achievement, this amount is lower than what other comparable-sized parishes raised in 2023-2024, such as Caddo (\$2.8 million, in partnership with the City of Shreveport and Community Foundation of North Louisiana) and Jefferson (\$375,545)¹⁵.

These innovative efforts showcase the parish’s commitment to addressing its ECE system's current quality and access gaps. However, scaling these successes requires moving away from fragmented approaches and building a cohesive system that successfully operationalizes a collective vision for EBR’s ECE landscape.

¹⁵ For more details, please see [ECE Fund FY 23-24 Report](#).

Key takeaways

Clearly defining a collective understanding of the ideal state of EBR's ECE system is essential to building sustainable and positive change. An extensive stakeholder engagement process, which included Task Force conversations and focus groups, elevated that EBR wants to build a system where:

- All **children** have access to a high-quality early childhood spot that prepares them for kindergarten and beyond.
- All **families** can access affordable, reliable care for their young children so that they may participate in the local economy. Families enroll their children in ECE through a seamless experience and are active partners in their child's care and education.
- The **early childhood** workforce is well-compensated and supported to provide children with a high-quality early learning experience.
- ECE **providers and sites** have the workforce necessary to achieve a high bar of quality and compensate them fairly. Leaders know what providing high-quality care and education means and are supported to achieve that for children and families.
- The **community** invests funds and resources to promote a strong early childhood system.
- The **ECE system** is celebrated as a community strength in East Baton Rouge Parish.

As a result of this, four distinct priorities emerged to make progress toward reaching these collective goals:



Foster **coherent system-level decision-making** by promoting shared information, a collective understanding of successes and gaps, and aligned efforts across the entire ECE ecosystem



Establish **funding structures and partnerships** that maximize the impact of every public dollar to serve as many children as possible, incorporating sliding scale models that include family cost-sharing where appropriate



Develop a **coherent strategy for quality improvement**, including support for the ECE workforce, across funding streams and site types and leverages all resources toward the most impactful solutions



Create a **family-friendly early childhood system** that builds meaningful partnerships with families, engages them in their child's care, and provides care and education solutions that meet family and community needs

Opportunity 1: Coherent System-Level Decision-Making

System-wide coherence is a crucial yet challenging task. To unlock access, quality, and real choices for families, the ECE system needs to create the conditions for public, private, and non-profit providers alike to serve children through public funding. However, existing fragmentation can negatively impact all other ECE efforts, such as funding decisions, quality improvement, and family engagement. This makes it difficult for administrators to ensure successful coordination despite their already heavy administrative workloads.

For EBR to successfully enable coherent system-level decision-making in its early childhood education system, it would take:



- **Shared information:** ECE leaders must have access to data and information across programs and funding streams to effectively prioritize resources, efforts, and capacity, ensuring they address the needs of children, families, and providers.
- **Collective understanding of successes and gaps:** All EBR leaders should have a shared, clear understanding of where efforts are most successful, the key drivers of that success, and the reasons behind existing gaps across the system of providers and supports, including business, higher education, and workforce support.
- **Aligned efforts:** ECE leaders must work beyond individual organizations and align solutions with community-wide priorities, moving away from siloed approaches that fail to achieve scale.
- **Continuous feedback loops:** ECE leaders must empower families and providers as active partners by soliciting robust, ongoing opportunities for feedback. Continuously capturing and integrating the insights of families, teachers, and providers will drive the system-wide approach that works best for everyone.

Various nationwide localities have successfully achieved this by creating separate **backbone organizations** that foster and monitor system-wide coordination. In Denver, Denver Preschool Program (DPP) acts in that capacity to:

- Successfully coordinate and braid public funding streams to provide tuition assistance to families based on their needs after receiving all other financial supports for which they are eligible.
- Create clear accountability systems by rigorously overseeing program implementation across funding streams and site types and sharing data with ECE decision-makers.
- Empower ECE providers and teachers through operational grants, incentives, and professional development to enhance quality, achieve higher credentials, and create better learning environments.
- Place families as partners in their children’s education by helping them make informed decisions about ECE services available.
- Build trust in the overall system by staying responsive to community needs, such as providing ECE workforce mental health support services.

Moving away from systemic siloes would equip EBR ECE leaders with a system-wide perspective to support the allocation of resources to scale successful ECE efforts and remove current roadblocks. In turn, this would:

- Streamline and unify all the data and information necessary for impactful decision-making.
- Communicate clearly to all stakeholders the current state of ECE in EBR and plans for the system, providing insight and understanding across the system for parish leaders, coalition members, advocates, providers, and families.
- Alleviate the technical burdens placed on early childhood providers, allowing them to focus on building high-quality learning environments where EBR’s youngest can thrive.
- Increase access to high-quality seats, allowing every child born in EBR the opportunity to participate in the ECE system.



Opportunity 2: Create Funding Structures and Partnerships

Funding remains the biggest barrier to early care and education access nationwide, and EBR is no exception. While multiple funding streams help children access care and education on their path to kindergarten, the system lacks enough resources to subsidize all families, particularly those with infants and toddlers. Adding to the challenge, each funding stream comes with different requirements—from family eligibility and program standards to administrative rules—making it difficult to maximize every available dollar and serve as many children as possible.

For EBR to successfully enable strong and sustainable funding structures and partnerships in its ECE system, it would take:

- **A continued commitment to mixed delivery:** No single provider can serve all children. EBR must maintain a stable, diverse network of providers across the parish, ensuring families can access quality care for children of all ages before kindergarten.
- **Combining tuition and public funds:** Many families often find early care and education unaffordable. Sliding scale funding models can leverage public dollars, making ECE more accessible to a broader range of families.
- **Innovative partnerships:** EBR has taken significant steps toward increasing partnerships, including its innovative microcenter approach. Building on these efforts can lead to more collaborations between providers and funding streams, reducing seat costs, expanding access in underserved communities, and increasing options for the hardest-to-serve age groups.

EBR families from all backgrounds struggle to find affordable care for their children. ECE providers face funding gaps, resource constraints, and the need for greater workforce supports. Strengthening existing partnerships in the ECE landscape, fostering further collaboration, and creating funding structures that make the most of every public dollar available can make a significant difference for families and providers.

These funding roadblocks are widespread not only across the state of Louisiana but the entire nation. While state and federal investments in ECE are an essential part of the equation, local leaders in EBR can set the parish up for success in pursuing other sources of revenue and investment to support ECE efforts. EBR can learn from other localities around Louisiana that have secured additional ECE funding through School Readiness Tax Credit campaigns (Pointe Coupée Parish), partnerships with local foundations (Caddo Parish), and even repurposed juvenile justice dollars (Ascension Parish).

To pursue sustainable funding and take advantage of the Early Childhood Education Fund and the state 1:1 match would require establishing a clear financing strategy that leverages all funding at scale. Additional examples of localities that have expanded access to ECE with local dollars include:

- New Orleans (LA): Provides subsidized child care seats for children aged 0-3 funded by a local millage.
- Denver (CO): Provides universal preK access through tiered tuition support for families, acting as “the last dollar in” after families have accessed all other available public funding sources.
- Philadelphia (PA): Offers 5,250 free seats to 3- and 4-year-olds through a program funded by a local beverage tax, partnering with over 220 providers.

Expanding ECE partnerships and pursuing innovative solutions represent EBR's past and present commitment to its mixed delivery system. Strengthening those partnerships could stabilize EBR's ECE sector by investing funds in existing sites, giving providers opportunities for expansion, and promoting the creation of more micro centers. Additionally, this would drive quality improvement across provider

types and ages, creating real choices for families based on their needs and preferences and creating spaces where all children can learn together regardless of household income or background.

Opportunity 3: Coherent Strategy for Quality Improvement

Too many children in EBR are entering kindergarten unprepared. While the key players of East Baton Rouge's early childhood system care deeply about improving quality, the fragmented ECE system results in multiple organizations with individual plans and approaches. These plans have led to quality improvement in EBR's ECE classrooms, particularly in CLASS® scores, but these efforts are not always coordinated and often operated in siloes, or layered on top of each other. Data indicate that there is more work to be done to improve outcomes for all of EBR's young children.

Additionally, Task Force members consistently named that ECE workforce challenges were an issue. The turnover challenges in the ECE field make it impossible to improve quality by focusing just on the workforce of today. To achieve its goals, Task Force members were clear that EBR will also need to think about a broader workforce strategy that supports its current teachers to develop skills and gain credentials, and recruits, trains, and retains a pipeline of future teachers who are supported to provide quality care and education in the parish.

A coherent strategy for quality improvement would include:

- **A comprehensive workforce development strategy:** Informed by data, ECE leaders should establish a single plan to create an ECE teacher pipeline and a clear pathway to supporting current ECE teachers to offer high-quality opportunities for all children. Higher education institutions, the Child Care Resource & Referral Agency, nontraditional pathways, and workforce development organizations all need to play a role as close partners to execute on this strategy. This is an opportunity to consider the most important competencies in early childhood teachers and how the system fosters those in current and future ECE teachers.
- **Building on the success of CLASS®:** Using the CLASS® tool as a clear north star for quality in EBR has been a transformative approach to improving quality in ECE classrooms, and EBR should build on this success. ECE leaders can create a pathway for supports to continue to level up the quality of classrooms, moving further than CLASS® in a coaching strategy once ECE teachers have gained mastery by moving into curriculum and assessment supports.

Task Force members discussed at length how to best align on a definition of kindergarten readiness. These conversations are not specific to EBR, as the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) currently defines kindergarten readiness measures and assessments. Currently, there is a disconnect between assessments taking place in preK and what is measured at the start of kindergarten to assess readiness. In Arkansas, kindergarten readiness [indicators](#) were broken down by 1) skills measured at kindergarten entry, 2) skills and behaviors for school success, 3) and additional skills, knowledge, and behaviors aligned to child development milestones. ECE leaders could take a similar approach so that there is a collective community understanding of the definition of kindergarten

readiness that encompasses both a comprehensive approach with the skills needed to be on track to read by third grade. With an agreed-upon definition of readiness, and a community understanding of the major milestones at every age level from infancy to 4 years old, more children could enter kindergarten ready to learn and productively engage in their classrooms on day 1.

“We need to align on what readiness is for kindergarten.” – Task Force member

“We need a clear local definition of quality – above the state system’s definition – that drives readiness...” – Task Force member

“In an ideal state, EBR would have a sustainable workforce of well-prepared teachers.” – Task Force member

“In an ideal state, EBR’s ECE workforce would be steady and committed.” – Task Force member

“Professional Development and pay raises [for ECE teachers] are critical.” – EBR Parent, Focus Groups



Opportunity 4: Family-Friendly Early Childhood System

Task Force members and focus group participants indicated that families in EBR currently struggle to find information about ECE seats and supports to apply to them, ultimately leaving them with many hoops to jump through when finding high-quality care for their young children. Families participating in the focus groups indicated that the high cost of education, combined with accessibility challenges, affected their ability to find an ECE spot for their child.

For EBR to successfully ensure a family-friendly early childhood system, it would take:

- **A unified communication strategy:** Families receive clear information about early childhood in EBR from anywhere families of young children might visit or consult - including health care providers, libraries, websites, community events, parent groups, and more.
- **No wrong door:** No siloes in access – families can apply for all early childhood programs through the same process, including magnet programs. Additional support and services from which families may benefit are also easily accessible through this process, including home visiting and special education services.



- **Parent engagement:** Families receive effective support to be true partners in their child's development, with communication and resources that help them to be their child's best first teacher.
- **Ongoing family feedback:** Families have ample opportunities to share their experiences in navigating the ECE system, and EBR leaders course correct as necessary to best meet families's needs.



“We want families in EBR to experience accessible, supportive, and affordable opportunities in ECE.” -Task Force member

“Families should access ECE in EBR through a seamless experience.” -Task Force member

Leveraging partnerships across the parish is essential to delivering consistent, meaningful messaging to families about ECE opportunities. In Guilford County, North Carolina, the organization Ready for School, Ready for Life (commonly known as “Ready-Ready”) coordinates an extensive network of partnerships with all major healthcare providers who interact with expecting families and infants. By collaborating closely with partners and maintaining streamlined, unified messaging, Ready-Ready ensures every expecting mother in the county can connect to healthcare navigators and nurse-home visiting programs that support their child's healthy development. While Guilford County's approach centers on health and early childhood development, Ready-Ready's method of engaging all young mothers highlights how unified communications and partnerships are key to ensuring all families can access what they need.

Another strategy to support families would be updating and simplifying the coordinated enrollment process in which families find and apply for ECE seats. While both EBR and New Orleans have worked towards improving coordinated enrollment, one key difference is New Orleans Public Schools Common Application Process (NCAP), a system through which families can enroll for all publicly-funded early childhood seats across programs and settings. New Orleans Early Education Network (NOEEN) publishes a family guide with information about every site, along with a family-friendly FAQ list¹⁶, and provides substantial technical assistance in multiple languages for families navigating their applications through family resource centers.

¹⁶ <https://enrollnolaps.com/birth-4-years-faqs>

To ensure families have what they need to support their child's development, EBR can also prioritize equipping families with accessible, culturally relevant, high-quality resources. Resources for families with young children might include:

- Developmental milestones checklists
- Interactive learning materials
- Parent workshops
- Connections to community-based programs like home visiting services.

EBR's family-friendly system could deliver targeted support for families with young children so that every caregiver understands the available ECE opportunities and has access to resources that help them nurture their child's development.



Considerations to Accomplish Priorities

EBR should consider thoughtfully what it would take to accomplish these priorities. Over the course of the Task Force, several members named the desire for a stronger coordination function:

- “EBR needs a structure and pathway that enables partnerships and increases access.”
- “We need one entity – a trusted backbone – running ECE and seeing across the system.”
- “Right now, there are a lot of different ECE organizations you can donate to, including the school district, the CCR&R, and individual centers. We don't know how to answer, ‘Who do we write the check to?’ We need to create a system that streamlines and can communicate the need.”

In other localities the Task Force learned about, a nonprofit with a clear coordination charge existed. Some key features of this nonprofit include:

- As a nonprofit, it sat outside of the political structure, enabling it to advocate for the community's early childhood vision and the resources it would take to achieve that vision.

- As a non-government organization, it was also able to procure services and contractors more nimbly, while maintaining a high level of transparency around its budget and data that established the organization as trustworthy, and ensured its continued existence.
- It had a specific focus to enable mixed delivery of care and education, helping providers to focus on what they know best: serving children in high-quality settings.
- It had an emphasis on collecting, understanding, and reporting clear data to drive decision-making.
- It established a clear communications strategy for various audiences, including families, providers, the broader community, and key decision-makers.
- It used funds to invest in providers already serving children - instead of running seats and programs themselves.

A new EBR backbone organization could take on the following functions to address these four identified priorities:

- Serve as a one-stop shop of information to families as they navigate the ECE system
- Use data both to drive decisions and also tell the story of ECE's importance in the community
- Support the establishment, administration, and expansion of mixed delivery partnerships across schools, centers, and Head Start
- Oversee system-wide coordinating functions, including classroom quality observations, coordinated recruitment and enrollment processes, and publicly-funded child count
- Establish a sustainable investment and financing strategy that leverages public and private funding at a significant scale for EBR, including pursuing its long-term goal of increased local investment to support ECE efforts

The collective impact of a new backbone organization—supported by all parish ECE organizations—could transform the lives of EBR's youngest children, strengthen families, and positively shape the entire community.

“If structured currently, a non-governmental, centralized entity could help streamline funding, data collection, and resource allocation while reducing bureaucratic burdens on providers. It must be community-driven and accountable to the people most affected: low-income families, providers, and educators...” -Task Force member



Appendix

Appendix 1. Complete list of ECE Task Force members and organizations

Mayor-President Sid Edwards , Mayor's Office	Jennifer Eplett Reilly , Harvard Advanced Leadership Initiative
Charlie Davis , Mayor's Office	Tessa Holloway , Kidz Karousel
Mayor-President Sharon Weston-Broome , Mayor's Office (Former)	Dr. Sherrel Pointer , Treasures from Heaven
Dante Bidwell , Mayor's Office (Former)	Tia Fields , One Rouge
Julie Baxter Payer , Mayor's Office (Former)	Tonya Harden , VOA Greater Baton Rouge
Vernadine Mabry , Mayor's Office DHDS	Shannon Abney , VOA Greater Baton Rouge
Superintendent LaMont Cole , EBR School System	Adonica Duggan , BR Alliance for Students
Shenoa Warren , EBR School System	Dr. KarTina Roberts , Head Start
Catasha Edwards , EBR School System	Shelisa Theus , BRCC
Von Iyengar , EBR School System	Jennifer Lightfoot , Foundation for EBR School System
Mellynn Baker , LA Department of Education	Karen Stevens , TIKES Mental Health Consultation
Karen Powell , LA Department of Education	Dr. Lisa Delpit , Southern University
Dr. Libbie Sonnier , LA Policy Institute for Children	Dean Roland Mitchell , LSU
Dr. Leigh Jefferson , LAFORCE	Hamilton Simons-Jones , ResourceFull Consulting
Trey Godfrey , BRAC	Lauren Herbert Henderson , Baton Rouge General
Lori Melancon , BRAC	Chris Meyer , BRAf
Dianna Payton , YWCA	Brenna Benson Lamb , BRAf
Christian Engle , YMCA	Eric Dexter , BRAf
Cree Matlock , YMCA	Leah Taylor , BRAf
Michael Tipton , BCBS of Louisiana Foundation	
David Beach , Huey and Angelina Wilson Foundation	

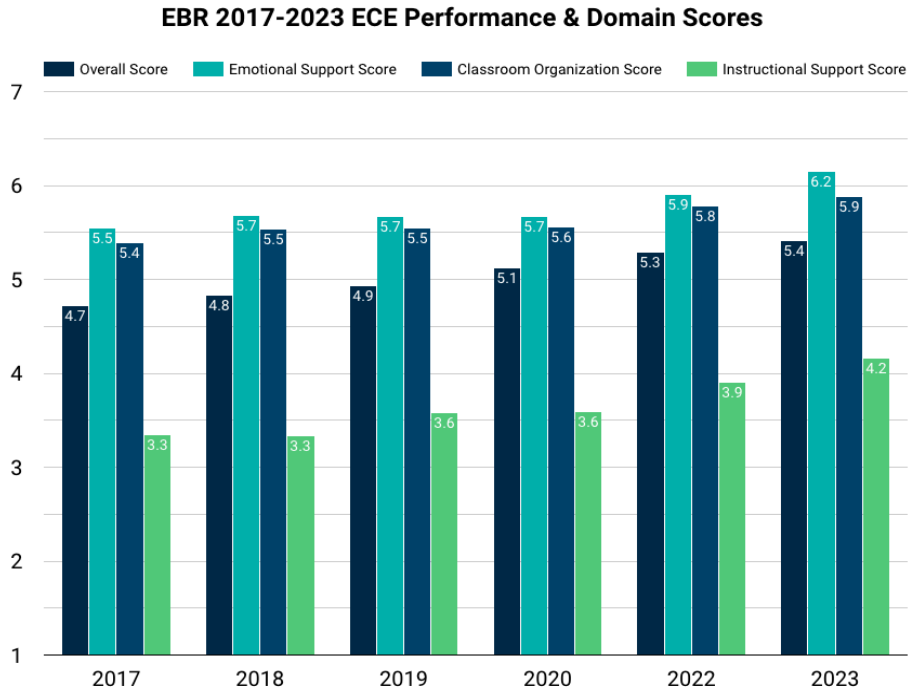
Appendix 2. Summary of major ECE organizations in EBR

Summary of Major ECE Organizations in EBR		
Role	Responsible Organization	Function
Lead Agency	East Baton Rouge Parish School System (EBRPSS)	Manages early childhood network, oversees coordinated enrollment, CLASS® observations, and accountability for public funds
Ready Start Network	EBRPSS	Creates a local strategic plan, builds a coalition and advisory council, and seeks additional revenue generation
Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R)	Volunteers of America (VOA) Greater Baton Rouge	Connects families with child care, provides coaching, professional development, and supports educators
Head Start Grantee	City of Baton Rouge	Serves 3- and 4-year-olds from low-income families, ensuring compliance with funding requirements and offering comprehensive services to children in health, nutrition, mental health, and dental
Early Head Start Grantee	YWCA of Baton Rouge	Serves birth to 2-year-olds from low-income families and offers comprehensive services to support pregnant women

Appendix 3. Funding by program

Program/ Funding Source	Ages Served	Funding Flow	Eligibility Criteria	Funding Amount (23-24)
LA 4	4-year-olds	LDOE to LEAs	200% FPL	\$7,248,420
NSECD	3- and 4-year-olds	LDOE to Private Providers	200% FPL	\$814,680
Head Start	3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds	Federal to City of Baton Rouge	100% FPL Prioritization based on income, also serves children with disabilities that are over income	\$12,435,572
Early Head Start	Birth through 2-year-olds	Federal to YWCA	100% FPL	\$4,045,628
CCAP B-3	Birth through 3-year-olds	LDOE to EBRPSS	85% SMI, 20 hours work/school	\$2,176,680
<u>ECE Fund</u> match to local investments	Birth through 3-year-olds	LDOE to EBRPSS or (Community Network Lead Agency)	85% SMI, 20 hours work/school	\$309,770*
CCAP (Flexible)	Birth-5 full day	LDOE to Providers	85% SMI, 20 hours work/school	Funding flows to providers directly. No data for EBR available.
Tuition	Birth-5	Parent to Provider	No Restrictions	
Other LEA Funds	3- and 4-year-olds	EBRPSS	Determined by funding source	

Appendix 4. EBR CLASS® 2017 - 2023 scores by year and domain



Appendix 5. EBR CLASS® 2017 - 2023 Instructional Support scores

