

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT PLAN



THRIVE
BIRTH TO FIVE

READY
REGION

Central





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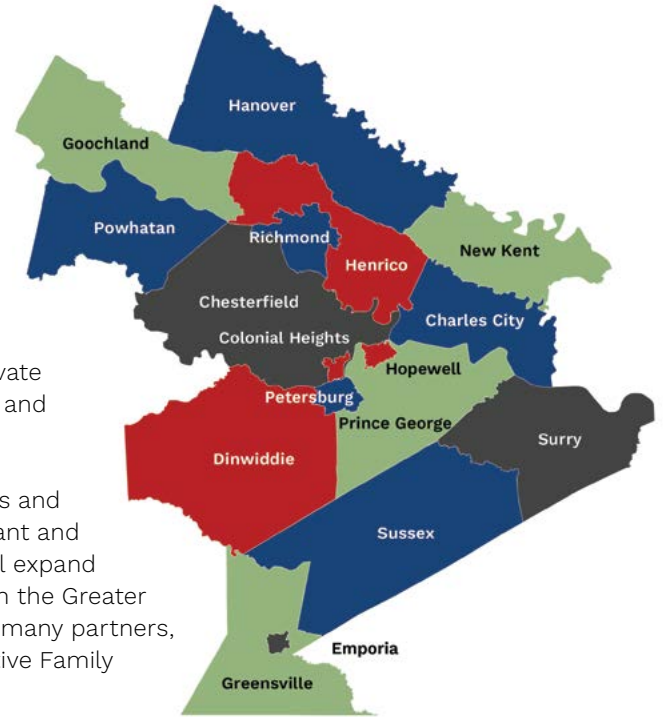


1. THRIVE BIRTH TO FIVE ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW

Ready Region Central Overview

Thrive Birth to Five, formerly known as Smart Beginnings Greater Richmond, has been the early childhood systems building organization in the Richmond Region since 2007 and was designated Ready Region Central by the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation and the Virginia Department of Education in 2022. Thrive Birth to Five's regional early childhood coalition convenes more than 125 diverse public and private organizations to work collectively so all children in our region will thrive, and race, place, and income will no longer determine success in school.

Thrive Birth to Five will continue our work in the early childhood systems and build upon our previous experience with the Preschool Development Grant and Mixed Delivery. Through our designation as Ready Region Central, we will expand Virginia Quality Birth to 5 and Family and Community Engagement within the Greater Richmond and Crater planning districts. We will be working closely with many partners, including Smart Beginnings Southeast, to create a regionally representative Family Council with opportunities for Family and Community Engagement.



Thrive Birth to Five Organizational Mission, Vision, Values



Vision 2022

All children in our region will thrive and race, place, and income will no longer determine success in school.



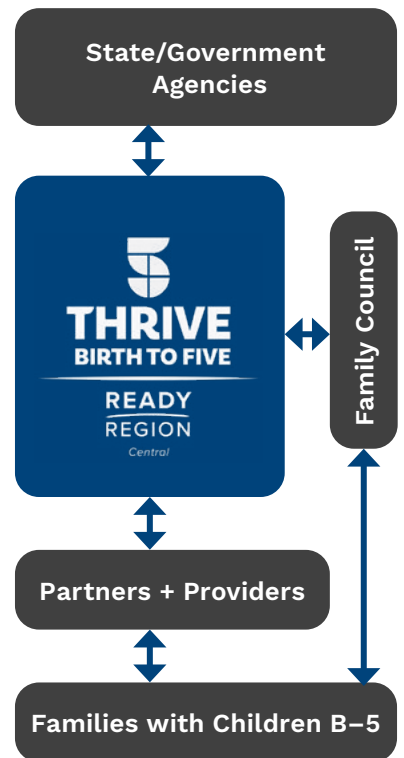
Mission

We collaborate to build our region's early childhood system and are a trusted steward of early childhood resources for families, providers and the ecosystem supporting them.

We will consciously and intentionally live our values:

- **Accountable** - We own the progress, outcomes, and consequences of our work
- **Bold** - We will be bold leaders in all we do on behalf of families and children
- **Equitable** - We believe that all children, families, and providers deserve the opportunity and resources to thrive
- **Inclusive** - We will be intentionally collaborative and inviting to all communities
- **Honest** - We will strive to say what we mean and do what we say

Thrive Birth to Five Role





2. FAMILY ENGAGEMENT PHILOSOPHY

Defining Family Engagement

At Thrive Birth to Five, we use the following definition of **Family** to foster inclusive family engagement: Family means any member who is responsible for caring for or parenting a child in their life. This may include a person(s) not legally related to the individual. Family includes a child’s families, regardless of the gender of either parent, and encompasses legal families, foster or adoptive families, same-sex families, step-families, those serving in loco parentis, and other persons operating in caretaker roles. Members of families include spouses, domestic partners, and both different-sex and same-sex significant others.

We define **Family Engagement** as a process between providers and families that is mutually beneficial. It goes beyond a touchpoint by overcoming barriers and creating opportunities to break down silos and misconceptions to build trust.

Family Engagement **IS**...

- The intentional and systematic inclusion of families in programs and activities that have an impact on the development, learning, and wellness of their children and other children in their communities
- Taking a whole-family approach to child development
- About building genuine relationships and connections that can help children grow and thrive
- Establishing a network of community resources

- An intentional process that involves the people most capable of supporting children – their family
- Thoughtful and meaningful follow through
- Equipping families with tools to enhance and extend learning
- About facilitating family-to-family support
- Doing and talking “*with*”
- Learning *from* families

Family Engagement **IS NOT**...

- A synonym for community engagement
- A one-way street
- Simply providing information
- Disengaging after an initial conversation
- Doing “*to*” or talking “*at*”

In practice, family engagement looks a little different for each of Thrive Birth to Five’s programs (see *Section 4. Family Engagement in Practice*) but this definition is at the core of this document and our approach to working collaboratively with families.



How to Use this Document

This Family Engagement Plan is intended to be a practical guide for Thrive Birth to Five that supports the goals outlined in the 2025 Futures Plan. The guide is tailored to the needs of families across the full breadth of Ready Region Central and is designed to walk staff members through the process of planning for equitable and inclusive family engagement.

Keep in mind that this Family Engagement Plan is a living document, meaning there is information here that may get updated from time to time. If we’re doing our job correctly, two things should happen: 1) families should have a clear and consistent commitment from us regarding family engagement, and 2) families should be informed of updates and changes to important information related to family engagement – whether it is how we evaluate success, our region’s demographic data, or updated contact information. But the one piece that doesn’t change is our clear and consistent commitment to families and children across our region.



3. THE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

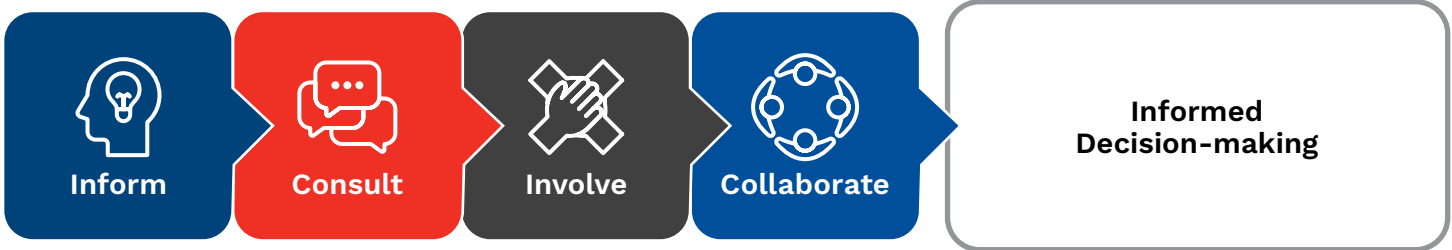
Our Role as a Connector

We are responsible for connecting and supporting partners and providers serving families with children from birth to age five within our region to increase coordination, collaboration, accountability, and engagement to support families in accessing what they need and choose. We are working to help every community in our region be:

- **Accountable** - Ready Region Central's early education system must prepare children for success.
- **Family-centered** - Families must be engaged in designing a system that works for them.
- **Responsive** - Families must be able to choose the early care program they want and need.
- **Reliable** - Early education programs need consistent support to deliver quality services.
- **Bold** - Every community in Ready Region Central should be a place where families can thrive.

PARTNER PERSPECTIVE:
 “Many families are busy in multiple ways and need a one-stop source for important issues. They don’t have the time to go from agency to agency.”

Our role as a connector is key to humanizing the experience of seeking services for children. We always want to be clear about the role of our partners, providers, and families in planning and decision-making, and to outline how much influence each has over planning or decision-making processes.



At Thrive Birth to Five, we use the following levels of engagement based on the International Association of Public Participation’s (IAP2) [Spectrum of Public Participation](#) with our partners, providers, and families. We recognize that each program may require a different level of engagement and we are committed to communicating the appropriate information and expectation(s) each time we step into our role as a connector.

Inform - The Inform level provides our partners, providers, and families with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions. It does not actually provide the opportunity for participation. Sometimes there is no opportunity to influence decision-making. We are simply giving our partners, providers, and families what they need to fully understand the project or decision and to reach their own conclusions.

Consult - The Consult level of engagement allows Thrive Birth to Five to obtain feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions. Our promise is to listen thoughtfully and acknowledge the receipt of feedback. We will incorporate the information shared as appropriate and whenever possible. This level can be useful for obtaining feedback about a draft document, proposed program, or for exploring a range of viewpoints early in a longer process.



Involve - The Involve level of engagement sees Thrive Birth to Five work directly with our partners, providers, and families throughout the process to ensure that their concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered. This level goes beyond just one meeting.



Collaborate - The Collaborate level is about collaboration with our partners, providers, and families in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution. This level implies an interactive process with an emphasis on two-way processes and it requires trust to be built.

No matter which level of engagement we choose, our hope is that they all lead to informed decision-making for families. By clearly outlining the family’s role and setting clear expectations, including what will be done with the input they provided, we ensure engagement is meaningful and worth the time of the families we serve.



Our Commitment as a Connector

Thrive Birth to Five is committed to ensuring a successful future for all its constituents, built on the pillars of a strong educational system, a thriving economy, and ongoing equitable opportunity for its diverse communities. The path forward begins with a regionwide, shared commitment to supporting all children in Ready Region Central, regardless of economic status or cultural or ethnic background.

Thrive Birth to Five connects and supports partners and providers serving families with children from birth to age five within our region to increase coordination, collaboration, accountability, and family engagement to support families in accessing what they need and choose. Here’s how we do it:

How We Hold Ourselves Accountable

In our role as a connector, Thrive Birth to Five has the privilege of interacting with partners and providers across the region on a daily basis.

It’s our job at Thrive Birth to Five, to ensure our partners, providers—and ultimately families—understand and can access the full range of resources we provide in order to reach the family and child outcomes we aspire to achieve in Ready Region Central.

We’re committed not only to doing this work, but to measuring and evaluating our success, through the following activities:

Community and Family

Engagement: Create a true “value exchange” with families, caregivers and the community to ensure that all have the resources, opportunities and relationships to optimize every child’s development.



To accomplish this, we will:

- ✓ Build a Family Council
- ✓ Build a Childcare Council
- ✓ Expand our Coalition to new geographies
- ✓ Build Data Infrastructure to enable the state of early childhood in our region
- ✓ Create Marketing campaigns to build public will for early childhood care and education

Child Wellbeing: Children are physically, mentally, socially, and emotionally healthy. Their development and learning are supported so they grow and learn optimally and build the skills to reach their full potential.



To accomplish this, we will:

- ✓ Strengthen partnerships and convene the network
- ✓ Inventory current resources and available tools
- ✓ Support the development of early childhood care and education navigators
- ✓ Share resources for families and providers
- ✓ Innovate new solutions for gaps identified



Quality Programs: An early childhood development system that is comprehensive, cohesive and processes that are as easy as possible to navigate. A best-in-class preschool delivery system that has quality as the foundation and drives results for children.

To accomplish this, we will:

- ✓ Implement Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) for our region
- ✓ Develop a Professional Development Coaching and Support Systems for Educators
- ✓ Assess data to identify gaps in the early childhood system
- ✓ Promote quality early care best practices across the region
- ✓ Expand Virginia Quality Birth to 5 (VQB5) to voluntarily participating programs



Equitable Access: Families have access to quality early childhood resources, programs and services that meet their needs and are delivered through a coordinated, collaborative process that is as easy as possible to navigate.

To accomplish this, we will:

- ✓ Assess and evaluate public preschool options
- ✓ Develop strategies to maximize Head Start and the Virginia Preschool Initiative
- ✓ Innovate and establish Mixed Delivery
- ✓ Expand engagement with military and tribal childcare providers
- ✓ Create an easy to navigate coordinated enrollment system for family choice



Regional Early Childhood Capacity: Our regional system addresses the challenges and capacity of the early childhood industry and seeks solutions to elevate the needs of the early childhood workforce.

To accomplish this, we will:

- ✓ Advocate for early childhood care and education workforce
- ✓ Deliver professional development and coaching for childcare educators
- ✓ Advocate for fair compensation for family childcare provider subsidy reimbursements
- ✓ Provide resources to strengthen best business practices in the early childhood landscape.
- ✓ Involve our regional business community in supporting childcare capacity

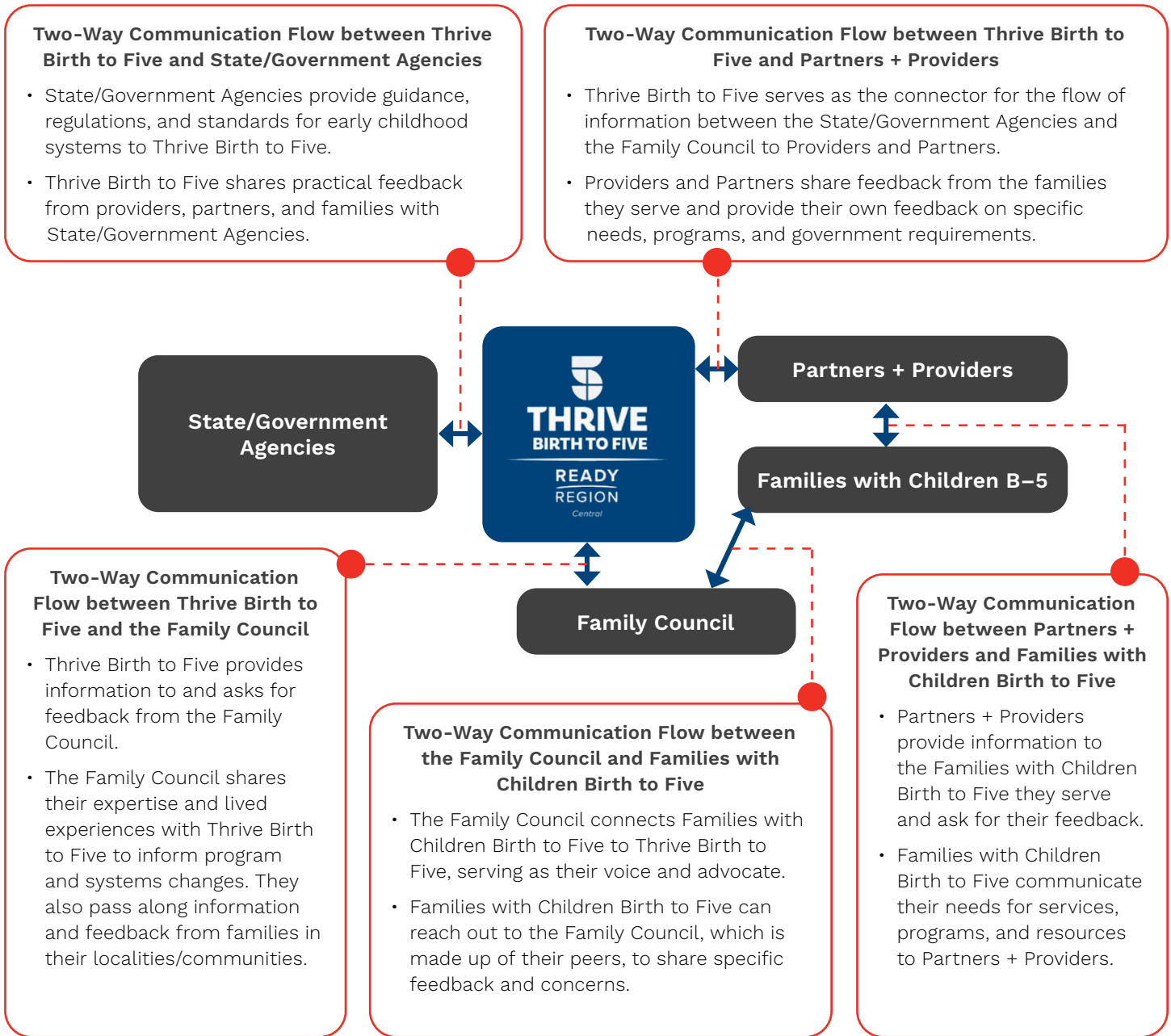
Our intention is to accomplish the above by 2025. We will provide an annual update to share our progress on these actions.

Communication throughout the Process

For Thrive Birth to Five, part of being effective means creating opportunities for multi-way communication with our families, partners, and providers.

We understand we cannot carry out this important work without the valuable knowledge and perspectives our partners and providers have to share, because they are our direct link to the families we aim to support. To accomplish this, Thrive Birth to Five works to create appropriate channels and mechanisms to help our partners and providers navigate pathways to accessing supplementary support, services, and resources.

When it comes to identifying opportunities to share knowledge, insights, and feedback as well as meaningfully communicating the outcomes of that sharing, Thrive Birth to Five will develop and demonstrate a positive feedback loop, grounded in a strengths-based, affirmative inquiry approach that mirrors the following:



Communication Commitments

We commit to using plain language and reducing industry jargon to the greatest extent possible in our communications. All communications will be accessible, translated into native languages when necessary, and delivered through multiple channels to ensure families, partners, and providers receive the information they need.

Before sharing important information, we will ask ourselves the following questions:

- *Who is the intended audience for this information and what do we want them to understand?*
- *Who else might find this information useful?*
- *Will sharing information in this way help produce the outcomes we're looking to achieve through our work or our partner/agency and/or providers' work?*
- *Are there information gaps we need to close to make this message more relevant and easier to understand?*



4. FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN PRACTICE

We use the term expectations in this document to illustrate that in working with Thrive Birth to Five, there are certain things you should be able to expect *from us*—particularly as it relates to Family Engagement activities.

Program Areas

The Basics

The Basics are five simple and evidenced-based principles that families, caregivers, and child care providers can use to help young children thrive in the early years and beyond. These five family and care-giving principles can benefit children from all backgrounds and across the socioeconomic spectrum¹, and they support the social, emotional, and cognitive development of children from birth to age three. The Basics provide a framework with easy-to-use tools for interacting with little learners in fun and meaningful ways.

Thrive Birth to Five is committed to providing accurate and up-to-date information through The Basics that assists families with understanding the importance of family/child interactions, raises awareness of child development, validates quality practices already occurring at home, and supports families' understanding of brain growth and development.

Families can expect:

- The Basics content to be expanded to cover the full breadth of the Ready Region Central footprint
- The ability to receive information and updates via the website, social media, email, and text messages
- Responses within 3 business days to emails sent to The Basics contacts listed on the website

Level of Engagement with Families - **Inform**

Partners and Providers can expect:

- To be able to direct families to consistently reliable information and resources through The Basics
- To be able to share feedback with Thrive Birth to Five based on their use of The Basics
- To have the opportunity to share feedback and evaluate the usefulness of the existing information in The Basics and the effectiveness of communication tactics

Level of Engagement with Partners and Providers - **Inform/Consult**

Promoting The Basics

The Basics has incredible resources for families. Consider expanding the reach of this work by promoting the work widely through:

- Google Adwords
- Promoted Social Media Posts
- Proactive Media Outreach

Partner Recommendations for The Basics

In a recent survey of community partners, we heard the following recommendations for The Basics:

- Develop physical materials and circulate to partners and providers for distribution. Examples given included magnets, posters, flyers, and lesson plan add-ons.
- Translate materials into multiple languages.
- Create a series of videos in English and Spanish showing families how to incorporate The Basics in their daily routines.
- Host virtual and/or in-person events focused on practical application of The Basics.

¹ When we say socioeconomic spectrum, we're referring to socioeconomic status which is complex and multidimensional and includes variables like income, education, and occupation.

Kindergarten Registration

We understand that Kindergarten Registration can be an intimidating process. When it comes to requirements, information, and the many steps that children and families must take to get ready for kindergarten, it seems like something is always changing. In this evolving landscape, Thrive Birth to Five's role is also changing. We will continue to work with school districts in our region to provide the latest information.

Families, providers, and partners can still rely on Thrive Birth to Five - in its role as a regional connector - to promote information about Kindergarten registration for all school districts across Ready Region Central. You can expect:

- Accurate and up-to-date information about Kindergarten Registration
- To be able to direct families to reliable information and resources
- Preparation tips for families
- Registration requirements, including necessary forms and documents
- Contact information for school districts in Ready Region Central

Level of Engagement with Families, Providers, and Partners - **Inform**

Coordinated Enrollment

Early childhood care and education (ECCE) services are provided across a diverse array of settings, including private businesses (child care centers and family child care providers) and in programs administered through school systems, local municipalities and in mixed delivery settings.

At its simplest: Coordination among early childhood care and education providers aims to get the greatest number of children in quality child care, while providing choice for families.

Thrive Birth to Five is committed to participating in thoughtful, well-planned, and equitable coordinated enrollment practices at the community level to support our ECCE partners and providers.

Families can expect:

- A coordinated and collaborative process
- Information and resources to help them find care that meets their needs
- To learn where programs exist for their children, how families can qualify for them, and information such as cost, hours, and location
- Resources to be updated as frequently as necessary and possible
- The ability to receive information via the website, social media, and email
- Responses within 3 business days to emails sent to Coordinated Enrollment contacts listed on the website
- An annual opportunity for families to share feedback and evaluate the usefulness of the existing information in Coordinated Enrollment and the effectiveness of communication efforts

Level of Engagement with Families - **Inform/Consult**

Partners and Providers can expect:

- Ongoing support to prepare and implement Virginia's new statewide unified measurement and improvement system, known as the Virginia Quality Birth to Five System (VQB5)
- Support and resources that create opportunities to streamline administrative tasks and free up time and energy to focus on serving and increasing connections with families, including but not limited to: informational resources, informational campaigns, eligibility determination, application processes, and/or waitlist information
- A collaborative partnership to keep enrollment numbers high, communicate when vacancies are available, and support to cover the true costs of quality services



PARTNER PERSPECTIVE:
“Kindergarten registration is the very first encounter that a new parent may have with the school, so we need information to share in many forms and we need understanding across schools that families shouldn't be turned away because they are missing something needed to enroll.”

- Facilitated coordination among ECCE providers and an understanding that some partners and providers already have working plans in place
- Reliable information and support related to state funding
- To be included in communications regarding opportunities for feedback, insights, updates, and changes related to Coordinated Enrollment

Level of Engagement with partners and Providers - **Inform/Consult/Involve/ Collaborate**

Partner Recommendations for Coordinated Enrollment

In a recent survey of community partners, we heard the following needs and recommendations for supporting Coordinated Enrollment:

- Assistance reaching families with diverse experiences
- Host interactive networking opportunities to brainstorm collaborations between all systems
- Hold conversations with a neutral third-party facilitator at the local level for programs where collaboration has been challenging in the past
- Development of a database that supports true collaboration between providers.

Mixed Delivery

Mixed Delivery serves as a complementary program to the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI), meeting the same eligibility, curriculum, and assessment standards as VPI. The program provides public funding that supports family choice in the type of private preschool setting that best meets a child and family’s needs.

Thrive Birth to Five is committed to allowing for parent choice among high-quality options that meet the specific needs of their child and family.

Families can expect:

- Accurate and up-to-date information on options for high-quality, publicly funded, private preschool providers that meet their child’s needs and their family’s preferences
- A coordinated, collaborative, and easy to navigate process
- Resources to be updated regularly
- The ability to receive information via the website, social media, and email
- Responses within 3 business days to emails sent to Mixed Delivery contacts listed on the website

Level of Engagement with Families - **Inform**

Partners and Providers can expect:

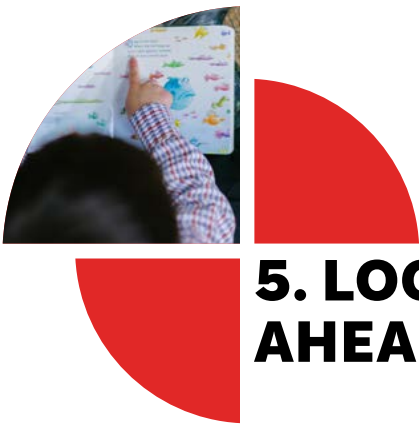
- Access to funding opportunities for child care services
- Partnership in reaching children in localities that meet Mixed Delivery requirements
- Support in providing families with information about flexible options that meet their needs, including information on funding updates and opportunities
- A coordinated, collaborative, and easy to navigate process
- Resources to be updated regularly
- The ability to receive information via the website, social media, and email
- Responses within 3 business days to emails sent to Mixed Delivery contacts listed on the website

Level of Engagement with Partners and Providers - **Inform/Consult/ Collaborate**

Partner Recommendations for Mixed Delivery

In a recent survey of community partners, we heard the following needs and recommendations for Mixed Delivery:

- Raise awareness of Mixed Delivery for caregivers and in ECCE settings
- Ask families directly how they became aware of the options available to them and use this information to guide future efforts
- Use medical providers as a resource to help explain all options for families



5. LOOKING AHEAD

Organizational Shifts to Support Family Engagement Plan

We recognize this important work will take more than words and documents to accomplish successfully. It will take actions and sustained, thoughtful effort on behalf of Thrive Birth to Five.

As an organization, we are committed to a strong, vibrant staff and Board of Directors—understanding this is a clear indicator of a healthy organization.

We are also committed to challenging existing beliefs and systems and assessing and re-evaluating the way things have historically been done in favor of improving our existing family engagement efforts and creating opportunities to ensure the effectiveness of our work.

In practice, this looks like implementing, evaluating, and adjusting what we've outlined in this document. It also looks like the following efforts inside of Thrive Birth to Five:

- **Navigating Change:** During this stage of organizational growth, we are committed to assessing, evaluating, and adjusting our internal structure to better meet the unique and diverse needs of the partners, providers, and families we serve, which includes but is not limited to:
 - Staffing and capacity needs
 - Updating and/or creating job descriptions based on industry needs, staffing and capacity needs
 - Adjustments, where necessary, to our recruitment, hiring, and interviewing practices with particular emphasis on increased diversity, equity, and inclusion
 - Clarity on and communication of roles, responsibilities, and decision-making, particularly as it relates to the development of the Family Council
- **Communication:** We understand that a critical component of the success of family engagement efforts is communication. We believe that the best communication meets people *exactly where they are*; humanizes the information-sharing and decision-making process, and centers to lift the voices of those who know their children best: their families. We are committed to deepening our understanding of what “exactly where they are” looks like in practice (i.e., social media, virtual events, etc.) and developing marketing materials reflective of the needs of our partners and providers, especially as it relates to reaching families across the region. We also recognize that accessibility in communication looks like an investment in helping identify and connect to translation services and accommodations—not just for the benefit of our own team, but for our partners and providers as well. Additionally, Thrive Birth to Five is in the process of implementing an information management system to reach families more efficiently. This information management system will eventually support the administration of an annual survey or other opportunity for feedback for families that will allow Thrive Birth to Five to evaluate the usefulness of and track progress on family engagement efforts.
- **Staff Development:** We acknowledge that our staff is the most valuable resource at Thrive Birth to Five and with our staff comes a wealth of knowledge, experience, and insight to support the implementation of our family engagement plan. We are committed to examining the skills and strengths of our own team members to provide additional support where needed and to identify knowledge and skill gaps where they exist. We'll use this information to support staffing and capacity planning conversations and decisions.



- **Time and Resources:** When asked about the barriers to family engagement, 78 percent of our partners and providers responded that “time commitment” was among the top reasons—followed by reliable transportation and childcare, respectively. Our team is committed to identifying and implementing effective, efficient, and adaptable engagement strategies to support what we have set out to accomplish in Ready Region Central.

The Family Council

Understanding the experiences, preferences, and needs of families is critical to achieving our mission and the Family Council is one tool in our family engagement toolbox. While we will continue engaging families through surveys, focus groups, and events, the Family Council will help us build an ongoing partnership with families to better serve our region.

The Family Council is unique. It requires higher levels of involvement than the traditional family engagement pathways and it is aimed at systems- and programs-level influence and change. It is also a new endeavor for Thrive Birth to Five and the Council’s exact role and involvement in the existing programs will be determined in collaboration with our first Family Council. As such, we did not identify and include the Council’s Level of Engagement in Section 4 above. This document is a living document, and we will update it as appropriate following the launch of and input from our Family Council.

Learn more about our Family Council goals, purpose, and structure in our Family Council Framework.

If you are interested or know someone who might be interested in joining the Family Council, please contact Chanel Bea at cbea@ThriveB5.org.

Identified Needs

In addition to industry best practices, this Family Engagement Plan was based on interviews with Thrive Birth to Five staff members, a survey distributed to community partners, and a review of background information and existing resources aimed at family engagement. The assessment of that information identified a few gaps that Thrive Birth to Five may want to consider as they look to expand family engagement efforts.

The identified needs included:

- Additional support for finding providers who offer accommodations and the promotion of resources for families with children with disabilities and/or developmental delays
- Connections with/to community engagement events, local organizations, and resources
- More opportunities to share ideas, challenges, and success stories from other locations both across Ready Region Central and beyond
- Access to information translated in the most common languages used by families within Ready Region Central



PARTNER PERSPECTIVE:
“The current system is extremely challenging and confusing for families of children with disabilities to navigate. There are simply not enough providers who offer community based inclusive education to support all learners.”



Closing Thoughts and Additional Resources

It’s important for our partners, providers, and families to understand that this Family Engagement Plan is a living document, meaning there is information here that will get updated from time to time. We are excited for and committed to continuous learning and growth, especially through our Family Council. As we engage with and learn from each other, our hope is that our family engagement plan and efforts will adjust accordingly to reflect the real-time needs of our families.

If you’re interested in learning more about the programs and services Thrive Birth to Five offers or in getting involved with our family engagement efforts, please head to our [website](http://www.thriveb5.org) or reach out to Info@ThriveB5.org.