


Trying  
to get it  
right

# Community Report

2018  
2020



*Supporting  
the work  
of early  
childhood*



# Vision

*Trying Together envisions a future  
in which all caregivers feel valued.*



# Mission

*Trying Together supports high-quality care and education for young children by providing advocacy, community resources, and professional growth opportunities for the needs and rights of children, their families, and the individuals who interact with them. Trying Together works regionally (in Southwestern Pennsylvania) and takes its expertise and models to statewide and national audiences.*



# Contents

## 3 Vision

---

## 4 Mission

---

## 6 Timeline

---

## 8 A Message from Leadership

---

## 10 Responding to Current Events

- 11 A Terroristic Attack:  
Tree of Life/L'Simcha Congregation
  - 12 A Global Pandemic: The Novel Coronavirus  
(COVID-19) or (SARS-CoV-2)
  - 20 A Pursuit for Racial Justice:  
Ending White Supremacy
- 

## 22 Strategic Goals: Progress in Context

- 23 Strategic Goal: A national leader offering its expertise  
in coordinating and connecting systems at the  
neighborhood, local, and regional levels to support  
early childhood development and early learning.
- 24 The Homewood Early Learning Hub & Family  
Center
- 24 Playful Pittsburgh Collaborative
- 27 Community Resource Impact
- 28 Strategic Goal: The premier provider of in-person and  
online professional growth opportunities for home,  
center, and school-based professionals to ensure  
that every child has access to high-quality early  
childhood and early learning experiences.
- 28 Early Learning Resource Center (ELRC) Region 5

30 Professional Growth

35 Professional Growth Impact

36 Strategic Goal: A 'go-to source' for families to aid  
them in making well-informed decisions regarding  
their child's early experiences.

37 Developmentally Appropriate Parenting

37 Family Engagement Impact

39 Strategic Goal: An expert policy resource in Western  
Pennsylvania and a leading advocate for high-quality  
early care and education in the state, mobilizing its  
network to take action on issues important to young  
children and their families.

39 Our Kids. Our Commitment.

39 Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS)

40 Early Childhood Education Advocacy Fellowship

41 Childhood Begins at Home

41 Family Care Act

43 Start Strong PA

44 Call It Child Care Initiative

44 Pre-K for PA

45 Public Policy Impact

---

## 46 Early Learning Representation

---

## 48 Revenue & Support

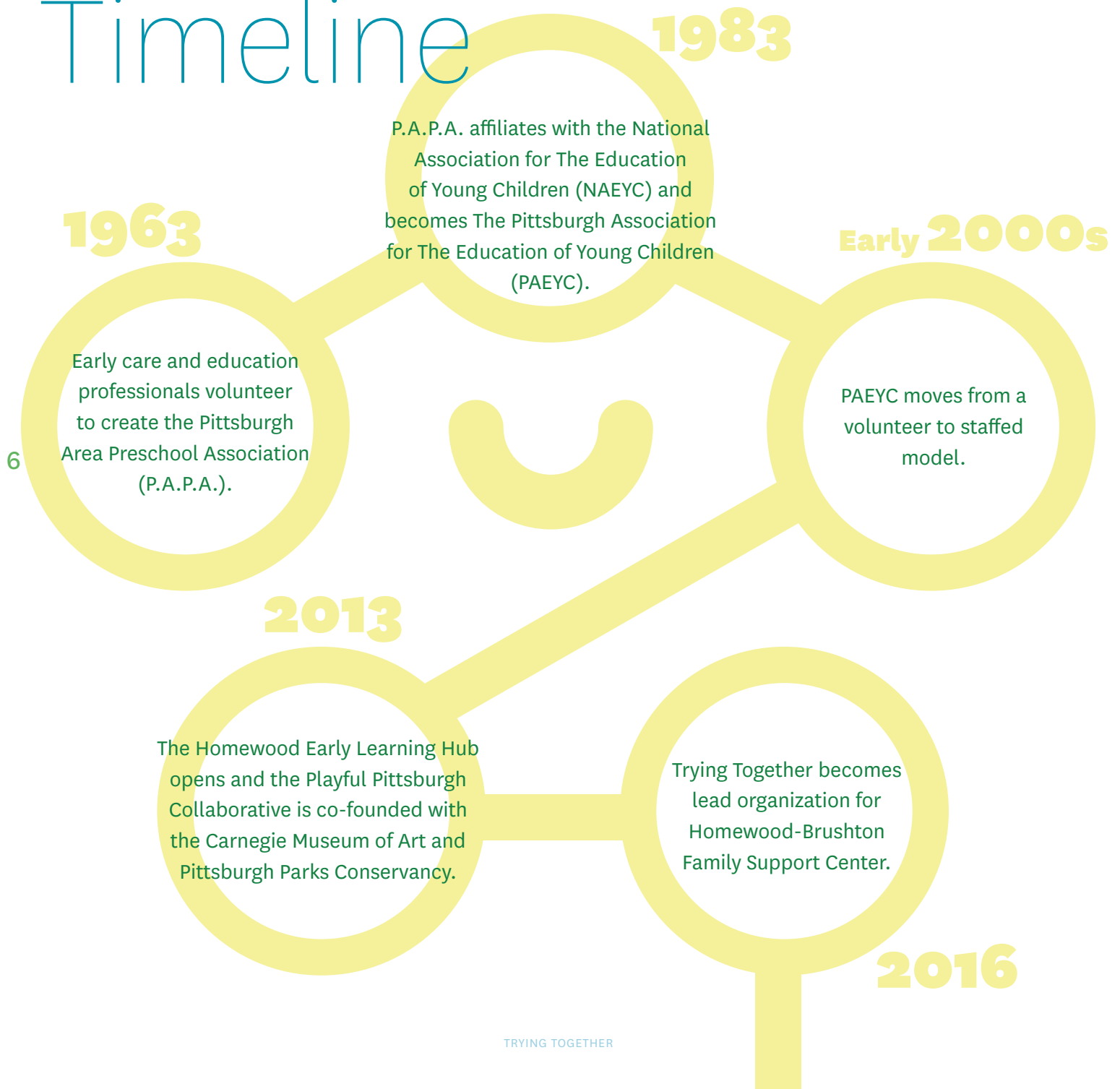
---

## 49 Philanthropic Support

---

## 50 Acknowledgments

# Timeline



2017

Five-year strategic plan and rebrand approved by PAEYC Board of Directors. PAEYC partners with The Pennsylvania Association for The Education of Young Children (PennAEYC) to support the Pittsburgh Chapter of PennAEYC.

2018

PAEYC rebrands as Trying Together. Helps to qualify The Allegheny County Children's Fund Initiative as a ballot referendum, the first to be added as the result of collecting petition signatures.

7

Trying Together becomes an advisor for the Allegheny County Children's Fund Working Group. ELRC Region 5 launches in partnership with the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL), The Alliance for Infants and Toddlers, and Trying Together.

2019

Allegheny Child Care finder tool developed to assist families with finding and caregivers with promoting care and education programs for children. Developmentally Appropriate Parenting (DAP) Series released to support families in making early learning decisions for their children. Homewood locations merge to become The Homewood Early Learning Hub & Family Center.

2020

# A Message From Leadership



Dear Caregiver,

## 8 **You have a profound impact on the lives of the children you care for and educate.**

Whether you are a parent, educator, or other caring adult in the life of a child, every interaction you have with them matters. Children do not “start” and “stop” learning based on their location. With every breath, every move, every pause, they are learning, developing, and growing.

With a prioritized focus on the importance of everyday interactions and early learning environments whether in the home or in a formal care and education setting, local and state agencies are taking a more collaborative approach when it comes to providing resources and support to all caregivers of young children. **To better meet the needs of children, families, and educators throughout our Commonwealth, there have been many changes to the early childhood landscape since 2018.** Some of these include: the creation of Early Learning Resource Centers or ELRCs which consolidated the work of Child Care Works (CCW) Agencies and Regional Keys to serve both

families and early learning programs; the rollout of OCDEL’s Professional Development Organizations (PDOs); and a revision to Pennsylvania’s quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) for licensed child care providers called Keystone STARS. We are excited to see the positive impact of these quality improvements in the lives of children, families, and educators and are happy to partner on these efforts.

While none of us could have prepared for COVID-19, an ongoing and unprecedented global tragedy, we are grateful to our community and philanthropic partners who have empowered us to continue supporting the work of early childhood throughout Southwestern Pennsylvania and beyond. The need to provide care and education for our young children has always been essential to families, to communities, and to the economy. We are thankful that our federal, state, and local policymakers also recognized the critical role early learning plays in recovering our economy. We are encouraged that they will continue working to prioritize the investments necessary to provide sustainability for children, families, and the early childhood education field.



**With your collaboration and support, we have accomplished a great deal in these past two years.**

From an organizational standpoint, Trying Together:

- **launched a Strategic Roadmap** to guide our work through 2022 and **rebranded**;
- hosted a three-day **UnConference: Being Intentional About Race and Young Children** in partnership with P.R.I.D.E. to confront racism in early learning settings;
- convened staff to do an internal audit and training series to address personal biases and to strategize on how to incorporate racial equity and justice across our work;
- partnered to qualify the first Allegheny County ballot referendum added by collecting signatures (more than 63,000) which led to the creation of the **Allegheny County Children's Fund** Working Group;
- partnered on the **launch of ELRC Region 5 in Allegheny County** to support quality improvement at early learning programs;
- merged **The Homewood Early Learning Hub & Family Center** to enhance our service to families and early care and education professionals in the Homewood community; and
- developed a **digital search tool and a forum** to support the care and education needs of families and programs in the midst of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

As we pause for this community report to reflect on all that we have achieved together, we want you to know that we are proud of you.

**Proud of:**

- how you have embraced system-wide operational changes to continue to provide high-quality care and education to our youngest citizens;
- your bravery and vulnerability when facing the overwhelming stress of caring for children in the face of COVID-19, and how you advocated to ensure our legislators prioritized the funds necessary to continue providing critical care and education programs to working families; and
- how you have acknowledged and challenged yourself to confront the racism within yourself, your community, and each other; and how you have worked to educate yourself about and been willing to learn how to actively address racism in early learning environments so we can create a more just society.

The work of early childhood has never been easy. Despite this, you have met and will overcome these challenges. And why? Because the work of early childhood isn't just important, it's essential.

On behalf of our Board of Directors and staff, we want to thank you for all that you have done, all that you are doing, and all that you will do for children, families, and our world. When we are trying together with all of you, we know just about anything can be possible. If you have any questions regarding this community report, please email us at [info@tryingtogether.org](mailto:info@tryingtogether.org).

Sincerely,

**Cara Ciminillo** EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**Jan Sapotichne** ASSOCIATE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

# Responding to Current Events

10

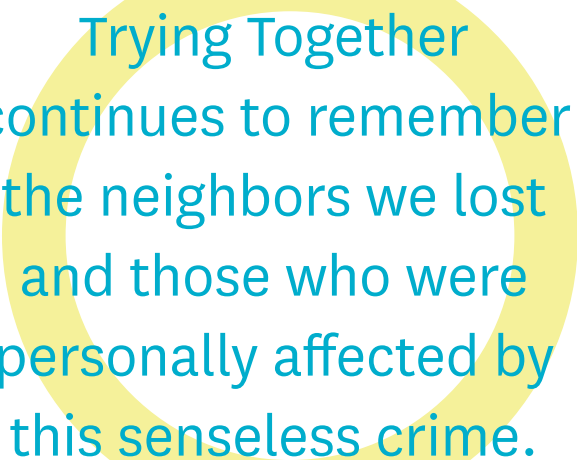


The United States of America and the world are currently facing unprecedented challenges and events which have caused division in society and emboldened the worst in individuals. In response, Trying Together has reaffirmed its commitment to responding to these circumstances by working together with educators, families, and community partners to create healthy learning environments for young children. As an organization, Trying Together holds space for its neighbors who have been and continue to be affected by these events.

# A Terrorist Attack: Tree of Life/L'Simcha Congregation

On October 27, 2018, 11 members of the Tree of Life/L'Simcha Congregation lost their lives to an anti-semitic hate crime in the Squirrel Hill neighborhood of Pittsburgh. The world along with Trying Together was devastated by this tragedy which took place just two blocks away from its home office. Dating back to the founding of the organization, Trying Together has long valued its relationship with the Jewish community which has played an integral role in the development and sustainability of its collective work. In the weeks following, [Trying Together echoed and shared resources curated by The Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh](#) with its audiences. On November 7, 2018, Executive Director Cara Ciminillo participated in the panel discussion *Helping Young Children Cope With Fear and Tragedy* at Rodef Shalom. Co-sponsored by Trying Together, the event aimed to help early educators provide trauma-informed care to their children, and self-care for themselves.

Just three days later on October 30, 2018, educators and community builders from across Southwestern Pennsylvania and northern West Virginia gathered at the Carnegie Museum of Art (CMOA) in Pittsburgh's Oakland neighborhood to explore how play can be used to build community and support learning at UnConference: Play for Change. Co-hosted by Playful Pittsburgh Collaborative, Trying Together, CMOA, Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, and Philadelphia Playful Learning Landscapes, Play for Change was a 'call to action' to harness play in service of building community. For many, it was the first opportunity to gather with colleagues after the mass shooting at Tree of Life/L'Simcha Synagogue. While the participants processed the tragedy collectively throughout the day, the healing power of play was present.



Trying Together  
continues to remember  
the neighbors we lost  
and those who were  
personally affected by  
this senseless crime.

# A Global Pandemic: The Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) or (SARS-CoV-2)

*A novel coronavirus is a new coronavirus that has not been previously identified. The virus causing coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), is not the same as the coronaviruses that commonly circulate among humans and cause mild illness, like the common cold.*

*COVID-19 is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. There are many types of human coronaviruses, including some that commonly cause mild upper-respiratory tract illnesses. COVID-19 is a new disease, caused by a novel (or new) coronavirus that has not previously been seen in humans.*

– Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and U.S. Food & Drug Administration, April 30, 2020

The COVID-19 global pandemic is an unprecedented event in human history, and rapidly changing as health and safety professionals continue working to manage and slow the spread of the virus and to find treatments.





---

## In response to this crisis throughout the spring and summer of 2020, Trying Together:

- mobilized advocates to ensure that the emergency funds necessary to sustain the child care industry were made available;
- distributed critical health and safety supplies to early learning programs meeting the care and education needs of essential workers and families;
- developed an [online search tool to assist essential workers and families](#) with quickly finding and choosing early learning programs that met their needs;
- created an [online community for families to connect](#), discuss, and support one another in their care and education planning for the 2020-21 school year;
- offered weekly virtual opportunities for children, families, and educators to engage with, learn from, and support one another; and
- curated comprehensive COVID-19 resource lists online with one for [families and caregivers](#), and another for [early care and education professionals \(www.tryingtogether.org/covid-19-resources-parents-caregivers/\)](#).

At the time that this report was issued, these needs continue to be relevant. It is still unclear what the long term effects of this disease will be on the development of children, the well-being of families, and the sustainability of the early childhood education field. Whatever the outcome, Trying Together will be here working to ensure that young children and their families have access to affordable, high-quality early learning opportunities and that early care and education professionals are valued for the essential work they do.

For the most up-to-date information on the COVID-19 response in Pennsylvania, please visit the Pennsylvania Department of Health online at [www.health.pa.gov](http://www.health.pa.gov).

---

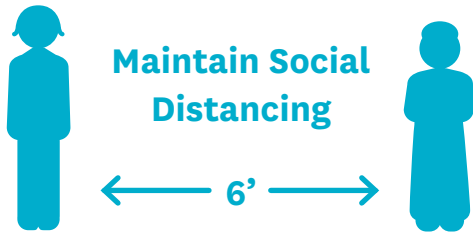
## Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act Funding

The COVID-19 pandemic which began in 2019 emphasized the importance and essential nature of the child care system, but it also revealed its fragility.

Though child care is a critical factor in the country's economic recovery, many programs were forced into a series of impossible choices between health, safety, quality, and financial solvency. In response, Trying Together, along with its statewide advocacy campaign partners, promoted a series of targeted asks to policymakers in April and May 2020 mobilized around "Six Weeks to #SaveEarlyLearning", calling for state and federal funds for child care. While the state budget was funded at the same level as the previous budget year, the campaign succeeded in getting the state legislature to allocate additional undesignated federal stimulus dollars for child care.

At the federal level, the Senate and House voted unanimously to pass a stimulus bill authorizing the spending of the majority of the \$3.9 billion in federal CARES Act funding. The bill included \$106 million to stabilize child care providers and \$9 million to help stabilize pre-k and Head Start providers. This funding was a crucial step forward for programs to recover a portion of lost revenue during mandatory closures from parent co-pays for subsidized child care and private tuition.





**Wear a mask to  
protect you ad  
your friends**

---

**Wash hands for  
20 seconds**



*Thank you for all your work on behalf of the younger members of our society. I can't believe how much the early childhood field has grown and proved to people that this field is a major necessity if we are to build a strong foundation in our communities. I don't think there is another organization who has demonstrated that, 'We are in this together and together we can break all barriers'.*

– **Sister Barbara Ann Boss**, CEO, ELIZABETH SETON CENTER

---

## Relative Provider Grants

Many families in Allegheny County rely on Relative Providers (family members who receive subsidy payments to care for and educate related children under age 13) for their child care needs. As the Relative Provider community is often already at an economic disadvantage, the COVID-19 pandemic has been an especially difficult experience. To ease some of this burden, through the generous support of the philanthropic community, Trying Together secured funds to make one-time grants to them in June 2020.



## Health & Safety Supply Distributions

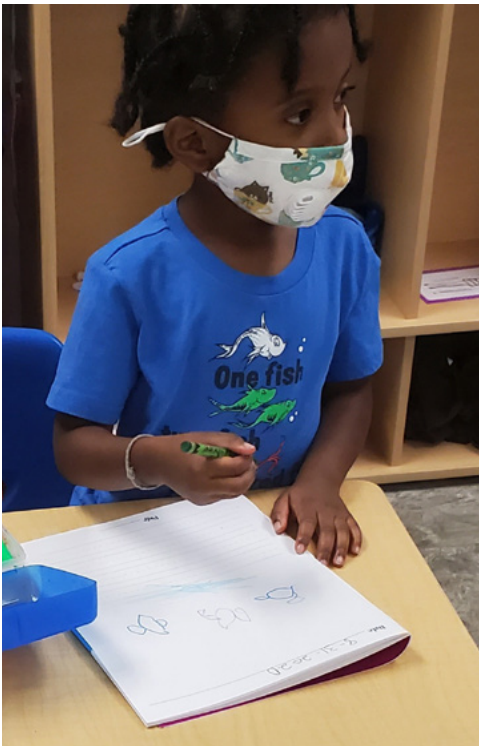
In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, ELRC Region 5, Trying Together, and Global Links worked together to gather and distribute health and safety supplies such as washable cloth face coverings and disinfectants to more than 600 licensed child care providers in Allegheny County from May through July 2020. The first supply distribution provided up to 50 washable cloth face coverings to more than 200 child care providers each, most of whom were providing child care services to essential workers.

As additional child care providers began to reopen, it became obvious that the need for personal protective equipment (PPE) was increasing. Because of this, Tring Together

hosted a second round of distributions to deliver face masks, face shields, gloves, and infrared thermometers to support the Health and Safety Screening Process recommended for all child care providers as they reopened under the new CDC guidance plans.

The third, and largest, round of distributions were completed in July 2020. PPE distributed included: a case of facial tissues; a case of Clorox disinfectant; multiple boxes of gloves; a gallon of hand sanitizer; face shields; and face masks to participating early learning providers. Working alongside its partners, Trying Together was able to distribute these supplies to additional providers who were unable to attend a distribution event. This allowed all licensed child care providers in Allegheny County to receive the needed PPE supplies to reopen and to provide a safe and healthy environment for the children and staff in their programs.

16





---

## Allegheny Child Care

From the COVID-19 crisis, Allegheny Child Care was a unique pilot project developed to support the child care needs of families (specifically ‘essential workers’ at the time) and assist providers with marketing and promoting their programs to fill vacant spots.

Beginning May 11, 2020, Allegheny County families with young children could search available child care spots at all early learning, after-school, out-of-school, summer camp, and virtual programs in real time with the [Allegheny Child Care tool \(www.alleghenychildcare.org\)](http://www.alleghenychildcare.org). To assist some of Pittsburgh’s largest employers like PNC and the University of Pittsburgh, Trying Together hosted several Virtual Child Care Fair events to review the tool with prospective parent-users and to connect them with providers who were still serving working families.

Trying Together developed this tool in partnership with the [Allegheny County Department of Human Services](#), and [Allegheny Partners for Out-of-School Time](#) (APOST), [an initiative of the United Way of Southwestern PA](#); with additional support from the City of Pittsburgh; in collaboration with [Child Care Aware of America](#), [The Heinz Endowments](#), and technology partners [Bowtie](#), [BrightHive](#), and [BridgeCare](#).

---

## Family Care & Education Forum

In the face of COVID-19, many families struggled with the array of care and education options available for their children.

Beginning August 3, 2020, the [Family Care & Education Forum](#)

(<https://forum.tryingtogether.org>) connected parents and caregivers across Southwestern Pennsylvania and provided a space where they could discuss care and education options amidst uncertainty surrounding the 2020-21 school year. Upon signing-up, parents and other caregivers are able to post questions, respond to comments, connect, and support each other in making well-informed decisions about their children’s learning experiences for fall and beyond. Additionally, this Forum provided caregivers who had availability and were seeking employment opportunities to provide care and education for children a space to connect with families.

---

## Virtual Meetings & Programs

### Director Roundtables

To provide guidance and support to all directors and managers of early learning programs in Allegheny County during the COVID-19 pandemic, Trying Together began (as ELRC Region 5’s quality partner) to host a series of Director Roundtable sessions several times weekly to discuss pertinent topics. Examples of these topics included: health and safety; updates from Governor Tom Wolf; and Child Care Works (CCW) payments. In later months, these sessions also began to discuss considerations for the future of early learning programming.

During these virtual video chats, up to 100 directors, assistant directors, owners, and teachers attended each of these sessions which were made available at various times in the day to increase accessibility. The Director Roundtable sessions also featured guest speakers who could provide guidance about grants, finances,

and digital communications. Participants stated that the Director Roundtable sessions helped them plan for reopening, learn how programs across the County were handling the same issues, and gain access to additional resources for their families.

### **An Hour With Diana Schwab**

In response to concerns from early learning program directors and administrators on the Director Roundtables, Trying Together partnered with Diana Schwab, Developmental Specialist, M.Ed., LCSW to join the Roundtables to discuss supporting the mental health of children and staff.

As an offshoot from the Roundtables, Trying Together scheduled regular check-ins called “An Hour with Diana Schwab” via Zoom. During these sessions, program directors or other staff could join their ELRC Region 5 Quality Coach to meet with Diana to review a specific situation they were experiencing. Through these virtual conversations, Diana was able to share strategies so the program directors and staff could support their children and each other. The work with Diana will continue through the 2020-21 school year.

### **One Hour With Early Learning Program Engagement Specialists**

For those who qualify, having a Relative Provider provides peace of mind that a trusted relative is caring for their child.

As many Relative Providers are economically disadvantaged and senior in age, the COVID-19 pandemic presented many unique challenges. To support Relative Providers needs and to provide them an opportunity to connect with and learn from others in the same circumstance, Trying Together’s Early Learning Program Engagement Specialists or ELPES started a weekly video chat



to provide a friendly space to connect with other adults and to support their resource needs.

## Connections & Conversations Virtual Check-Ins

Connections and Conversations Virtual Check-Ins are interactive sessions that highlight topics of interest to the field of early childhood education which began during COVID-19. During these professional growth engagements, participants learned from child development experts while interacting with early learning practitioners to share questions, experiences, and expertise about the highlighted topic. To date, more than 230 attendees have participated in four of these virtual discussions via Zoom.

## Family Programs

The Homewood Early Learning Hub & Family Center regularly provides weekly family and monthly group support programs. After social-distancing measures were put in place, these programs were moved to a virtual model in order to continue serving families. These programs included:

**Fathers Trying Together** | First Fridays Monthly | 6 - 8 p.m.

**Women's Rap** | Second Fridays Monthly | 6 - 7:30 p.m.

**Rise Together** (co-ed) | Fourth Fridays Monthly | 6 - 7:30 p.m.

**Raising Readers Together Club**

Wednesdays | Tweens, Teens, and Caregivers | 6 - 7 p.m.

Thursdays | Children ages six and under and Caregivers | 6 - 7 p.m.

Trying Together extends its sincere sympathies to those who have been negatively impacted by this virus and encourages everyone to follow the **health and safety guidelines set by the CDC to minimize the spread of COVID-19.**



# A Pursuit for Racial Justice: Ending White Supremacy

Racism in America did not begin in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. George Floyd was not the first Black or brown person to be killed during an arrest. And despite the first documented protest against white supremacy taking place more than 200 years ago, it is still necessary (perhaps even more so now) to take action to address the racist and violent acts made upon Black and brown people which are still prevalent in present-day America.

Simply and effectively stated: Black Lives Matter. It is not often that so short a phrase has inspired so many to action. **#BlackLivesMatter began in 2013 as a movement to “end State-sanctioned violence, liberate Black people, and end white supremacy forever”** in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin’s murderer. Since that time it has grown into a global organization that spans the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada.





Human beings are not color-blind. To deny race is to deny an aspect of one's humanity. Research shows that children as young as several months old begin to change their behaviors based on the racial identity of their caregivers and peers. If the goal is to create a more just future for the next generation, it is for these reasons and others that the adults who interact with young children must do so in ways that do not (intentionally or unintentionally) perpetuate racism. In other words, being culturally responsive in the classroom is imperative to fostering racial justice.

Through its work, Trying Together has made efforts locally to address racial inequity over the years. From [addressing the suspensions and expulsions in pre-k-3rd grade which overwhelmingly affect Black and brown males by authoring a position paper and producing a guide for families on how to address this](#), to hosting two professional growth events in 2018 specifically on how to educate and interact with children about race as part of its UnConference series, Trying Together is committed to ensuring that educators and other caregivers take an active role in ending racism. While these resources are important, Trying Together acknowledges that publishing documents, or offering a one-day training are not enough.

Since February 2020 under the leadership of its Executive Director, Trying Together staff are personally, professionally, and as an organization, addressing issues of racism in our systems and ourselves. Trying Together has:

- committed to bi-weekly 'lunch and learn' discussions about race and equity. During these conversations, using resources such as documentaries and books to frame the conversations, staff are learning to confront the uncomfortable truths of deeply rooted prejudices that have halted individual growth and the progression of the community. By authentically

participating in these experiences of self-reflection and group discussion, staff are taking steps toward addressing ignorance and structural biases;

- established an internal Justice, Equity, Inclusion and Diversity work group to both chart a course ahead and to hold the organization accountable to its commitment;
- sought out and utilized partner expertise, including Dr. Aisha White and Medina Jackson, at the University of Pittsburgh Positive Racial Identity Development in Early Education (P.R.I.D.E) program;
- centered the existing racial inequities in local, regional, and statewide policies that impact early learning environments in Trying Together's 2021-22 Public Policy Agenda priorities that will be released in early 2021; and
- developed a second white paper on eliminating suspensions and expulsions specifically in birth-five settings focused on developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive approaches which was released in fall 2020.

Trying Together has created a community within its organization that is reflective of the diverse communities it serves and believes it has a responsibility to actively work to eliminate racism and address the inequities in systems. Unfortunately, the roots of racism are deep, so Trying Together also recognizes that this work will not end this year or the next; undoing systemic racism is something that will need to be actively attended to as individuals and an organization for years to come.

For those who would like to begin to examine how their own actions or inactions have contributed to racism, [Trying Together has curated resources to begin one's own racial justice journey which are available at \[www.tryingtogether.org/community-resources/anti-racism-tools/\]\(http://www.tryingtogether.org/community-resources/anti-racism-tools/\)](#).



# Strategic Goals: Progress in Context

## <sup>22</sup> **In 2018, Trying Together launched its Strategic Roadmap.**

Never has there been a better example for why Trying Together embarked on real-time strategic planning, than these past couple years. Over these last seven months, Trying Together was acutely aware of how quickly the world is changing and the importance of having charted a long-term direction with the flexibility to respond rapidly. Trying Together now finds itself at the midway point of this journey as these goals are being prioritized through 2022. Throughout this community report, Trying Together will highlight its success in meeting these goals, and others that require continued perseverance and reconsideration.

[tryingtogether.org/about-us/strategic-roadmap](https://tryingtogether.org/about-us/strategic-roadmap)

## Strategic Goal:

**A national leader offering its expertise in coordinating and connecting systems at the neighborhood, local, and regional levels to support early childhood development and early learning.**



In Pittsburgh alone there are 90 neighborhoods, and there are approximately 15,000 children under the age of five within these communities. Throughout these locations, there are: businesses; civic organizations; homes; places of worship; playgrounds; schools; and other venues; each one of these with its own identity, infrastructure, politics, and systems.

It is often said that, “it takes a village.” In early childhood, this is not only a proverb, it’s an affirmation. For just as one’s family and educators make an impact on their development and learning, so does one’s neighborhood environment. With this in mind, Trying Together has established itself as a convener of change for early learning environments in these communities with a physical presence in Homewood and collaborative partnerships with individuals and organizations in East Liberty, Hazelwood, Hill District, Northside, and Wilkinsburg.

From 2018 through 2020 with the support of its community partners, Trying Together:

- merged The Homewood Early Learning Hub & Family Center locations to enhance service to families and center- and home-based early learning programs;
- collaborated with Hazelwood residents and stakeholders to finalize the revitalization of The Elizabeth Street Park & Mural and finish two stops on the Hazelwood Play Trail; and
- presented to a national audience as part of a Brookings Institution panel on transforming neighborhoods for play-based learning.

---

## The Homewood Early Learning Hub & Family Center

Trying Together has provided opportunities for families and early childhood educators in the Homewood community to ‘gather, play, and grow’ together for nearly a decade.

Since it became the lead organization for the Homewood-Brushton Family Support Center in 2016, Trying Together has provided fulfilling experiences and meaningful interactions to families in the Homewood community. In spring 2020, [Allegheny County Family Centers expanded its mission](#) to provide authentic and supportive connections for children up to age 18 and their caregivers; in summer 2020, [The Homewood Early Learning Hub & Family Center](#) opened on Kelly Street, merging this work to one location in an effort to improve the lives of young children by working more collaboratively with their families and educators. Though this change brings exciting new opportunities for serving the community in Homewood, the Hub & Family Center staff remain focused on the needs of families and those of the early learning professionals who care for and educate young children.

### BUZZWORD Pittsburgh

BUZZWORD Pittsburgh is an early literacy collaborative made up of eight arts and educational-based organizations including: The Pittsburgh Cultural Trust; The Pittsburgh Festival Opera; The Pittsburgh Ballet; The Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh; The Carnegie Science Center of Pittsburgh; The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy; Trying Together; and the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.

In response to COVID-19, BUZZWORD quickly pivoted to virtual programming, creating “BUZZ Boxes” to distribute to families with the help of established community partners such as the Greater Hazelwood Family Support Center and the Homewood-Brushton YWCA. BUZZ Boxes provide children’s books, family engagement activities and materials, partner organization materials and resources, and links to virtual programming produced by the BUZZWORD partners.

---

## Playful Pittsburgh Collaborative

[The Playful Pittsburgh Collaborative is a group of organizations dedicated to advancing the importance of play in the lives of children, families, and communities in the Pittsburgh region \(www.playfulpittsburgh.org\).](#)

Founded in 2013, the Collaborative works to raise awareness of, educate decision-makers about, and model actions that support the incorporation of play into everyone’s daily lives. In the last two years, the Collaborative has achieved several exciting accomplishments which have furthered its goals and expanded its reach to national audiences.

### UnConference: Play for Change

As a follow-up to UnConference: Play for Change, the *Today We Will Play* poster was designed by Root + All in collaboration with Little Kelpie. The goal of this poster was to highlight the various ways play can occur in daily life and includes images of play in a grocery store, museum, park, and more. The phrase, “today we will play”, was coined by educator Medina Jackson as part of her lightning talk at the UnConference. The poster was shared with all





participants and is available to the public for distribution through Trying Together's main office.

From the connections made at the UnConference, conversations continued with the [Philadelphia Playful Learning Landscapes](#) (now [Playful Learning Landscapes Action Network or PLLAN](#)) about the work of play in communities. At the invitation of the Remake Learning network and The Grable Foundation, the [Director of Playful Pittsburgh Collaborative and a PLLAN Board Member](#) were asked to present on a national [Brookings Institution panel around reimagining neighborhoods to foster playful learning](#). The event where this panel discussion took place convened community leaders, city planners, designers, and behavioral scientists that share a vision for creating family-friendly cities across the world.



## Ultimate Play Day

The Ultimate Play Day is a celebration of play for people of all ages and takes place in a new community each year. Beginning in 2018, the Ultimate Play Day officially became part of the now national Remake Learning Days Across America which takes place in May and June. On May 19, 2019, the Ultimate Play Day was held at the Whitehall Public Library and offered 26 activities. A first for the Collaborative, all of the play-based and event signs were translated into multiple languages while hands-on activities offered interpretation as needed in partnership with Global Wordsmiths.

## Community-Based Play

Trying Together's commitment to helping Hazelwood residents realize their vision to be an example of what community-based play can look like in urban neighborhoods continues through the following projects which are coordinated by the Collaborative.

### Hazelwood Play Trail

Beginning in 2015 with a vision to raise awareness about the benefits of play and to engage the public in Hazelwood's unique natural elements, the initial work of the Hazelwood Play Trail Steering Committee is coming closer to fruition with the completion of several major projects. With sponsorship from Keurig Dr. Pepper and KaBOOM! through the Let's Play Everywhere Challenge in Allegheny County in 2019, the Collaborative was awarded funding for the Neighborhood Play Stop Project. Through this Project, Hazelwood artists Edith Abeyta and Dylan Rooke led a team of community members to create three play stops along the Trail including: Dylamato's Market; YGarden; and The Spartan Center. The stops at Dylamato's Market and YGarden are open to the public while The Spartan Center stop is nearing completion.

### The Elizabeth Street Park & Mural

Finalized on August 28, 2019 at a ribbon cutting ceremony, The Elizabeth Street Park and Elizabeth Street Mural are both a part of the ongoing work on the Hazelwood Play Trail.

With funding support from The Heinz Endowments, the space for the Park was decided upon by community members looking to revitalize existing play spaces in Hazelwood. Formerly the site of the Elizabeth Street Tot Lot, The Elizabeth Street Park was decommissioned by the city and sat vacant for several decades. The mural entitled "Time Travelers" was designed by Hazelwood artist Edith Abeyta and Sandy Kessler Kaminski. Re-envisioned by Hazelwood teens and community members, The Elizabeth Street Park is now a green and event space located adjacent to the KaBOOM! Playground which was built in 2016 by the community, the Collaborative, Trying Together, and other partners at the former Lytle Land site.

### Recess Advocacy Team

Trying Together and the Playful Pittsburgh Collaborative lead the Recess Advocacy Team ([www.playfulpittsburgh.org/recess-advocacy-team](http://www.playfulpittsburgh.org/recess-advocacy-team)), a group of organizations dedicated to health, wellness, education, and play with a focus on recess practices and policies.

These goals are accomplished by:

- educating and advocating for the importance of recess;
- engaging with children, families, and educators on recess experiences;
- establishing resources for recess-related advocacy, policy, and best practices for families and educators; and
- engaging stakeholders to support recess advocacy work.



A survey conducted in 2018 was the first step in an effort to gather information on school recess practices throughout Allegheny County. A total of 841 parents, caregivers, and educators responded to the survey indicating that:

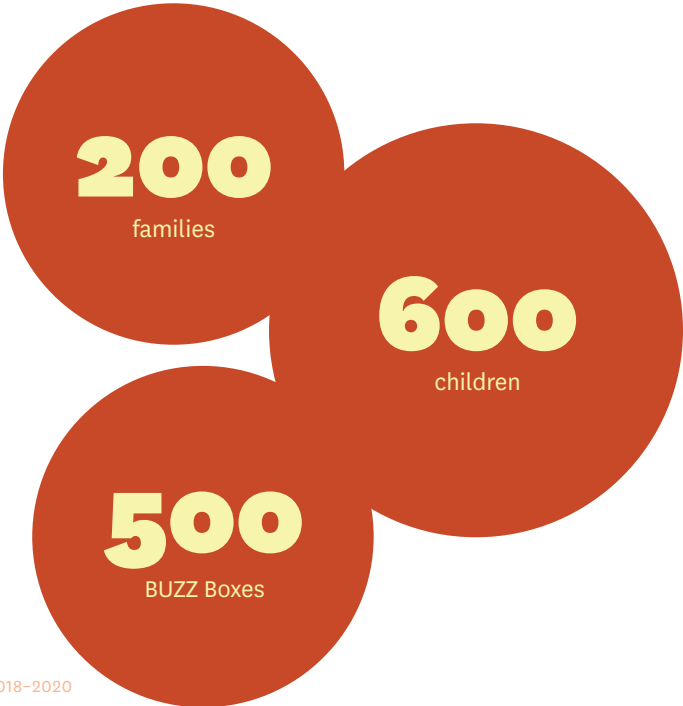
- 95% of respondents believed recess is important for children’s health and wellbeing; and
- 88% believed it is important for academic success.

In November 2019, the Recess Advocacy Team held its first Community Conversation at the Frick Environmental Center. At this event, children, families, and educators came together to discuss what recess looks like and to learn more about how the Recess Advocacy Team could serve as a resource. In February 2020, the team convened its second Community Conversation at the newly opened MuseumLab where families received a free hour to play and explore the museum before the discussion. Throughout the past few years, there have also been several presentations to parent teacher organizations to establish connections and strengthen support in schools.

Additionally, a monthly newsletter was launched to highlight recess news, tips, and champions. In efforts to think about the larger picture, the Recess Advocacy Team researched recess policies in other states and developed a policy memo with recommendations for statewide recess legislation. In response to COVID-19, the Team is rethinking how to best support play and physical activity and how to continue to elevate recess as the future of schools and learning changes.

## Community Resource Impact

- 45 home- and center-based early educators from 19 early learning organizations in Homewood have received professional development.
- 200 families in the Homewood community and throughout Pittsburgh have regularly participated in these programs.
- 600 children and families served by BUZZWORD since 2018 during its sessions in the Pittsburgh East End and Hazelwood neighborhoods.
- 100 new words introduced through 20 children’s books by BUZZWORD.
- 500 BUZZ Boxes distributed by BUZZWORD to Pittsburgh families and children.
- 18 Organizations are members of the Recess Advocacy Team.
- Two Community Conversations were held for Recess Advocacy reaching a total of 50 participants.



## Strategic Goal:

The premier provider of in-person and online professional growth opportunities for home, center, and school-based professionals to ensure that every child has access to high-quality early childhood and early learning experiences.



Supporting early care and education professionals in the work that they do and ensuring that they know how valued they are was the impetus for Trying Together. Since its humble beginnings as an all-volunteer organization in 1963, the early childhood education field has undergone many changes and adjustments. Through it all, early care and education professionals have worked tirelessly to adjust, learn, and meet quality expectations to care for and educate young children.

### After the revised Keystone STARS Performance Standards

were released in 2017, the Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) announced in 2018 that the state was moving toward a new service model called an Early Learning Resource Center (ELRC) to consolidate family and early learning provider services.

As a result of these advancements, Trying Together's quality initiatives have increased exponentially since 2018. From Apprenticeship to UnConferences, Trying Together has continued to meet educators where they are so they are supported in their work. While the shifts in policy and procedure statewide have been expansive in the past few years, regional early educators, community partners, and OCDEL have collaborated with Trying Together, thus enabling this collective group to continue providing high-quality support and service to children and families.

## Early Learning Resource Center (ELRC) Region 5

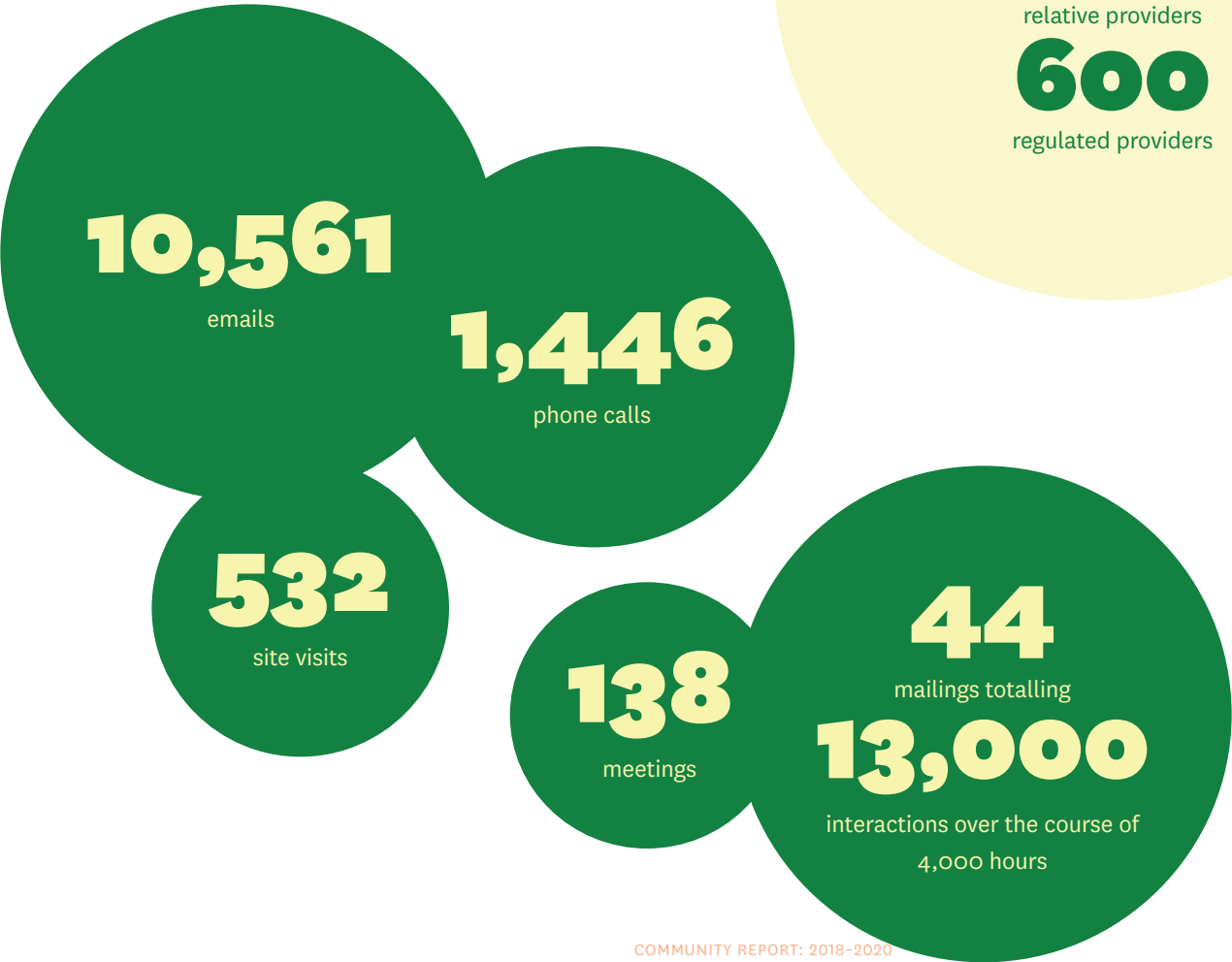
On July 1, 2019, Early Learning Resource Center (ELRC) Region 5 opened to serve as a single point-of-contact for families and early learning providers in Allegheny County ([www.elrc5.alleghenycounty.us](http://www.elrc5.alleghenycounty.us)).

The Alliance for Infants and Toddlers was selected as the family partner to manage subsidized child

care and resource referral while Trying Together was selected as the quality partner to work with early learning educators and programs under the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, the lead for ELRC Region 5. In this role, Trying Together now supports quality improvements for more than 600 licensed providers throughout the County and ensures that several hundred relative providers are supported in their care and education approach with young children.

**During the first year of operation at ELRC Region 5, Quality Coaches contacted more than 600 early learning providers with:**

**Since the COVID-19 pandemic was recognized in Pennsylvania in early March, Early Learning Program Engagement Specialists have made contact with:**







## Professional Growth

To support the learning and career advancement of early learning professionals, Trying Together offers a combination of **in-person and virtual courses**, coaching, mentoring, and UnConferences. **Custom professional development services are also available upon request.**

**In 2019, Trying Together released its first revised professional development catalog since 2016.** The catalog features 40 courses that align with the revised Keystone STARS Standards.

Courses are labeled by the area of focus and organized by title, delivery method, number of hours, description, level of training, and Keystone STARS and CDA alignment.

In March 2020, Trying Together began to transition its learning management system (LMS) from Moodle Classrooms to Schoology. Schoology is a nationally-renowned online learning platform that will enhance Trying Together's ability to offer virtual professional growth opportunities in a user-friendly manner. At the time of this report, more than 80 online courses are available on this platform.



# **Pennsylvania Professional Development Organization (PDO)**

In June 2020, Trying Together began its partnership with the Pennsylvania Professional Development Organization (PDO) Shippensburg University to serve as a regional PDO Liaison. In this role, Trying Together connects early learning professionals to credit-bearing coursework and credentials offered by professional development organizations and institutions of higher education in the region. Through this, Trying Together ensures that high-quality professional development is available and accessible to early learning professionals at all levels.

## **Apprenticeship**

Apprenticeship combines on-the-job learning with relevant instruction to build skills that increase the potential for higher wages and career advancement. Launched in 2019 in partnership with The Heinz Endowments, Partner4Work, 1199c, the Southwestern Pennsylvania Early Childhood Education Apprenticeship Program provides these opportunities to employers, incumbent workers, and job seekers in their region with the support of partner organizations and higher education institutions.

Since 2018, Trying Together has provided apprenticeship services to early learning professionals, Apprenticeship Coaches, and employers in Southwestern Pennsylvania and the Harrisburg area. Coaches received six hours of professional development as an orientation, followed by nine hours of mentoring and additional professional development. Employers continue to receive guided support and technical assistance.

Trying Together took part in the Pennsylvania Early Childhood Education Apprenticeship Ambassador Program with the

District 1199c Training and Upgrading Fund. As Apprenticeship Ambassadors, Trying Together provided technical assistance and support to the Northwestern Pennsylvania Apprenticeship Hub, Southwestern Hub, and Harrisburg Hub.

## **Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential Preparation Program**

Trying Together’s Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential Preparation Program offers 135 hours of professional development over the course of six to nine months focused on practice knowledge and skills early learning professionals need to become credentialed. Program participants can matriculate up to nine course credits at Carlow University once they obtain their credential.

Trying Together offers this program at a community-based level with the support of various funding and development partners including: Shippensburg University; Richard King Mellon Foundation; The Buhl Foundation; and The Pennsylvania Key. Trying Together also supports Early Head Start programs in meeting federal qualification requirements through CDA and mentoring programming.

## **Mentoring and Coaching**

Trying Together offers coaching and mentoring services to help strengthen the professional practices and learning processes of Infant/Toddler Teachers who serve Early Head Start children in their programs through the Early Head Start Care Partnership grant.



## Teacher Certification

In Pennsylvania, Pre-K Counts teachers are required upon hire to have a Level I teaching certificate after which they have six years to obtain a Level II teacher certification. Teachers must meet several criteria to obtain a Level II certification, including the following:

- teach in Pennsylvania on a Level I certificate for three to six years of satisfactory service;
- earn 24 post-Baccalaureate credits;
- obtain six credits associated with the area(s) of certification; and
- complete a Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) approved Induction program.

Trying Together offers an Induction program for Level I teachers in Allegheny and surrounding counties that features 12 hours with an experienced mentor and 18 hours of high-quality professional development. This program is provided to teachers in Pre-K Counts classrooms. Additionally, Trying Together provides evaluators with early childhood experience that meets PDE requirements for certified Level I and Level II Early Childhood Education teachers.

## UnConference Series

Made possible by PNC Grow Up Great, Trying Together hosts innovative, hands-on professional growth UnConferences centered on a range of early childhood themes and topics. Hosted in-person or online, UnConferences over the past two years have discussed the following topics: race, play, technology, business, the impact of COVID-19 on child care, and STEM. Six Pennsylvania Quality Assistance System (PQAS) hours were available at each event.

## Exceptional Care With A Team Approach to Inclusion

was scheduled for March 28, 2020, but was postponed due to COVID-19. Trying Together and its partners plan to reschedule this UnConference. This event will cover early intervention.

- P.R.I.D.E. Speaker Series – Reimagining Early Childhood: Being Intentional About Race and Young Children | September 27, 2018
- Being Intentional about Race and Young Children | September 29, 2018

**Keynote Speaker:** Dr. Erin N. Winkler, Professor of African and African Diaspora Studies and Urban Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

*I plan to be mindful of who is represented in my classroom displays/books and how they are represented.*

- Play for Change | October 30, 2018

**Keynote Speaker:** Sarah Wolman, Senior Advisor at the LEGO Foundation

*Sarah made me reflect that we all bring our own interpretations and experiences into our interactions and work.*

- Destination Moon | November 3, 2018

**Keynote Speakers:** Mariruth Leftwich, Director of Education at the Heinz History Center and Ann Caspari, Smithsonian Air and Space Museum Early Learning Specialist



*I appreciated how well the activity ideas brought the concepts down to an early childhood level. There were multiple, practical ideas I plan to try.*

- 
- **Young Learner's Guide to Tech** | March 30, 2019

**Keynote Speaker:** Jennifer Eehalt, Pittsburgh Regional Manager at Common Sense Media

- 
- **The Business of Child Care** | October 19, 2019

**Keynote Speaker:** Marilyn Coleman, Director of Shared Services at the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust

*I have regularly attended these conferences and have gained so much from each and every one! Thank you to all who put these together!*

- 
- **Re-Opening to Our New Normal (Virtual)** | May 26, 2020

**Keynote Speakers:** Michelle Figlar, The Heinz Endowments; LaTrenda Leonard Sherrill, Common Cause Consulting; Muffy Mendoza, Brown Mamas; and mental health expert Diana Schwab

*Thank you for helping us understand the HR of going back to work. It helped me with all the questions I will have from the teachers.*

**Watch the archived keynote and workshops on Trying Together's VIMEO page now!**

---

## Message from Me

In March 2019, Trying Together received funding through the PNC Grow Up Great Initiative to expand Message from Me to PNC markets across the United States. This financial support enabled a **redesign of the Message from Me website ([www.messagefromme.org](http://www.messagefromme.org))**.

Additionally, this funding enabled Message from Me to build national partnerships across PNC Grow Up Great early learning communities; expand its services in Michigan, Missouri, and Pennsylvania; and increase the number of centers using the tool by 10 percent. Relationships were also built with PNC markets in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, Wisconsin, North Carolina, and Washington, D.C. In July 2019, Message from Me was nominated as a global digital innovation for The HundrED Spotlight on Digital Wellbeing. HundrED identifies impactful and scalable educational initiatives across the world. Trying Together will continue Message from Me's expansion in three PNC Grow Up Great markets that serve bilingual (English and Spanish) families.

Trying Together recently collaborated again with the Carnegie Mellon University CREATE Lab to develop a Message from Me Caregivers App to enable the receipt of messages via app notifications.



## Hi5! Kindergarten Transition

During the 2018-19 school year, the [Hi5! Kindergarten Transition campaign](#) reached an all-time high for on-time kindergarten registrations in Allegheny County, with 97% of families registering on time. To recognize this, the campaign convened 100 stakeholders, including representatives from OCDEL, for a celebration in May 2019 at the Allegheny Intermediate Unit.

In November 2019 and February 2020, the campaign hosted two Hi5! Roundtables that convened teachers and representatives from school districts and early learning programs. Additionally, the campaign utilized Preschool Development Grant Funds to expand its professional development services to early learning programs, which made mini grants available to support programs' pre-k transition activities.

34 In response to COVID-19, the Hi5! Campaign held virtual conversations with school districts and early learning programs in April 2020 to share ideas, think through challenges, and identify opportunities to increase enrollment, support families, and engage young children. One solution included a public service announcement that was created in collaboration with WQED Multimedia that encouraged families to register their children for kindergarten.

In May 2020, the campaign recognized its 10th Anniversary by hosting a [week-long virtual celebration](#) to acknowledge the progress it has made with local school districts. The celebration [featured a campaign video](#) and letters from [Trying Together Executive Director Cara Ciminillo](#) and [Allegheny County Department of Human Services Director Marc Cherna](#).



# Professional Growth Impact

- 970 professional development hours were provided to nearly 4,600 professionals.
- 48 Level I teachers completed Trying Together’s Induction program.
- 182 evaluations were conducted for Level I teachers and 56 evaluations were conducted for Level II teachers.
- 12 early learning professionals, 15 Apprenticeship Coaches, and five employers were served through the Southwestern Pennsylvania Apprenticeship Program; all 12 professionals completed their CDA Credential and 11 enrolled in an Associate’s Degree program.
- Six early learning professionals, six Apprenticeship Coaches, and three employers were served through the Harrisburg Apprenticeship Program.
- Six CDA Credential Preparation Program cohorts were conducted, serving 129 early learning professionals; 88 professionals received their Credential, 85 received coaching support, 17 finalized their application process, five enrolled in higher education degree programs, and five received assistance in renewing their Credential.

- 26 early learning programs and more than 120 Infant/Toddler Teachers received coaching and mentoring services.
- One virtual and five in-person UnConferences were hosted, with the support of 40 corporate and nonprofit partners, that engaged more than 1,500 early childhood professionals.
- 3,200 children across the country visually and verbally communicated their daily experiences through the Message from Me tool.
- 80 teachers and administrators from 23 school districts and 12 early learning programs attended a Hi5! Kindergarten Transition Roundtable.
- 97 percent of families completed their kindergarten registration on time in Allegheny County during the 2018-19 school year.

970

professional development hours  
were provided to nearly  
4,600 professionals

48

Level I teachers completed  
Trying Together’s  
Induction program

120

Infant/Toddler Teachers received  
coaching and mentoring services

97%

of families completed their  
kindergarten registration  
on time

## Strategic Goal:

A 'go-to source' for families to aid them in making well-informed decisions regarding their child's early experiences.

Parents are a child's first and most important teacher. The importance of the everyday interactions that adults have with the young children in their care have a great impact on their healthy development and learning. When families and educators are working together to meet the needs of children, there are better outcomes for children.

In light of this, agencies across Pennsylvania including the Department of Human Services (DHS) are taking a more cohesive approach to addressing the needs of both families and early care and education professionals.

As a partner in this statewide work and through its own efforts, Trying Together has made significant strides in helping families make educated choices about their children's care and education.

Since 2018, Trying Together has:

- published several Guides for Families including topics such as: [addressing suspensions and expulsions](#); and [how to find, choose, and pay for high-quality child care](#);
- [developed a digital search tool and a forum to support families in finding and choosing care and education](#); and
- [launched Developmentally Appropriate Parenting, a 12-part, parenting resource series](#) for caregivers to engage in positive ways with their young children that support healthy learning environments and relationships.



## Developmentally Appropriate Parenting

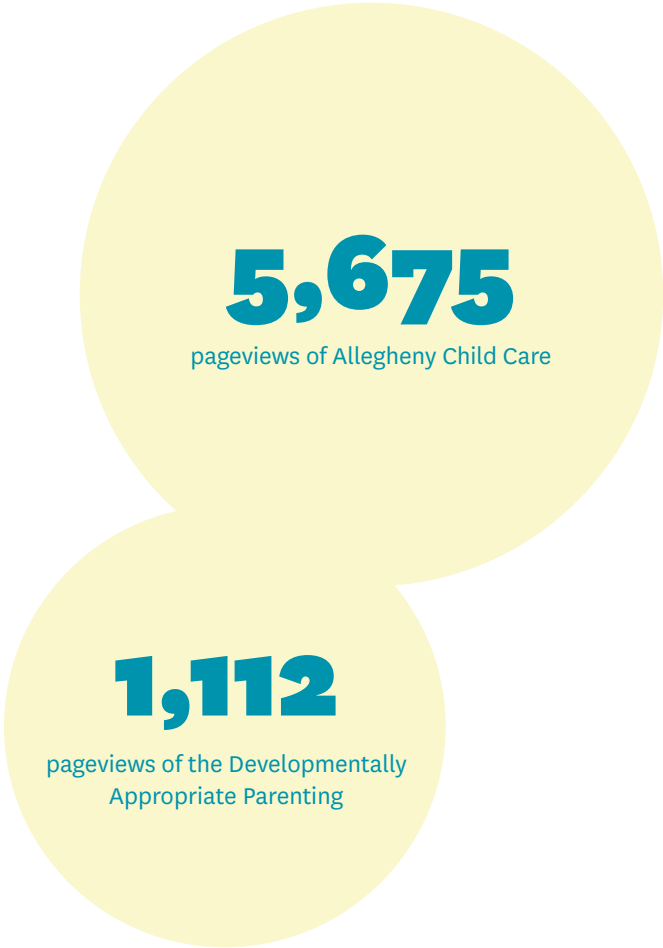
On June 15, 2020, Trying Together launched its new family resource content series, Developmentally Appropriate Parenting ([www.tryingtogether.org/parenting-resources](http://www.tryingtogether.org/parenting-resources)).

Consisting of 12 parts to be released through 2022, this resource was developed to empower parents, relative providers, and other caregivers to create high-quality experiences at the earliest stages of their child’s life. In each part, Trying Together focuses on a specific early childhood topic and shares relevant digital and printable content that features information, tips, and helpful resources. Part I focused on Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP), an approach used by early educators to best meet a child’s unique developmental needs.

Part II: Childhood Physical Health and Part III: Child Care are planned for release in fall/winter 2020. As Trying Together continues to develop the series, plans include developing a formalized learning pathway for parents, relative providers, and other adult caregivers of young children who do not work in professional early education settings but wish to increase their knowledge about healthy development and learning techniques.

## Family Engagement Impact

- 5,675 pageviews of Allegheny Child Care making it the second most visited page at [tryingtogether.org](http://tryingtogether.org) since May 2020.
- 1,112 pageviews of the Developmentally Appropriate Parenting series page at [tryingtogether.org](http://tryingtogether.org) since May 2020.





## Strategic Goal:

An expert policy resource in Western Pennsylvania and a leading advocate for high-quality early care and education in the state, mobilizing its network to take action on issues important to young children and their families.

Hearing from early educators and families with young children plays a crucial role when elected officials are deciding what to prioritize in terms of funding and policies that affect early learning environments. Throughout Pennsylvania, Trying Together works collaboratively with several partners to advocate for improvements to and increased investments in the early childhood sector. With many programs now closed for extended periods of time or permanently, the demands on essential workers, and more parents caring for their children while working from home simultaneously in response to the global pandemic, there has been an increased recognition nationally of the importance of reliable child care.

While advocates were successful in securing emergency investments with CARES Act funding to stabilize the child care industry, there is still no confirmation on guaranteed investments beyond the CARES Act for the current budget year. [Calling on policymakers now and in the immediate future to increase state investments for early learning programs is essential for the continued healthy development and learning of young children and for a full economic recovery for the Commonwealth.](#)

In 2018, Trying Together became a steering committee member of the Our Kids. Our Commitment. (OKOC) Allegheny County Children's Fund Initiative to secure a dedicated funding stream that would support early learning, after-school, and nutrition programs for children. While this ballot initiative did not meet a majority vote to become enacted, it inspired a commitment to secure funding for this purpose from Allegheny County Executive Richard Fitzgerald and other stakeholders. With the support of almost a quarter million residents and advocates who took action by signing the petition and/or voting for this initiative, children and families in Allegheny County are much closer to realizing the benefits of increased investments for these programs.



---

## Our Kids. Our Commitment. Allegheny County Children's Fund Initiative

Trying Together served as part of the steering committee in 2018 for OKOC, a ballot initiative that sought to change the way the county funds efforts that are proven to ensure the health and wellbeing of kids across the county.

In order to qualify a question for the November 6, 2018 ballot, Trying Together helped collect 63,499 signatures from registered voters in the county. With these signatures, the OKOC initiative successfully qualified a ballot question that proposed an increase to property taxes to fund critical early childhood education, after-school, and nutrition programs for children.

While the initiative did not pass, more than 250,000 people (48.4 %) voted in favor, and it elevated discussions of local and regional revenue streams for early childhood education.

**In March 2019, Allegheny County Executive Rich Fitzgerald convened a 26-member Allegheny County Children's Fund Working Group—including Trying Together's Executive Director Cara Ciminillo—to look at the creation of a potential children's fund to provide resources to early childhood learning and out-of-school time programs across the county.**

This six-month process included six public meetings, two focus groups, an online survey (in English and Spanish), and a meeting-in-a-box kit to get the input of teens.

In October 2019, the working group formally presented a report to the County Executive for his review and consideration. In it, the group recommended the creation of a new county department dedicated to children, as well as an annual investment of up to \$20 million to support high-quality learning and out-of-school-time programs.

---

## Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS)

From 2018 through 2020, Trying Together participated in various local efforts to support Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) and the community, including serving on the: **early childhood design team for the Future Ready Comprehensive State Plan**; **Birth-8 Imagine PPS Design Team**; and the **All In to Reopen Our Schools team**.

Other efforts included:

### Restorative Justice Practices

**In March 2019, Trying Together partnered with A Plus Schools and Carlow University's Education Department to co-host Restorative Justice Practices: Disrupting the School-to-Prison Pipeline with Dr. Fania Davis.** Nearly 100 people attended the event and Trying Together joined an esteemed panel of local educators and administrators. Along with Dr. Davis, panelists offered their perspectives on policies and practices impacting children from birth to age five.

### Vote School Board First!

**During the 2019 primary elections, Trying Together joined local efforts as a co-sponsor for the Vote School Board First campaign.** Led by A Plus Schools, the campaign set to educate and engage voters around the Pittsburgh School Board elections in Districts 2, 4, 6, and 8. Trying Together emphasized the role that high-quality early childhood education plays in students' long-term success, as PPS is the largest pre-k provider in Pittsburgh.

39



## Early Childhood Education Advocacy Fellowship



### In January 2020, Trying Together launched its second Early Childhood Education (ECE) Advocacy Fellowship.

In this nine-month program, 14 early care and education professionals met each month and engaged in half-day workshops; heard from informed early childhood, public policy, or community leaders; networked; and more.

The 2020 fellows represented various roles in the ECE field including center directors, Pre-k and kindergarten teachers, early interventionists, and school counselors. They received a unique, hands-on learning opportunity that connected their professional practice to policy; built on their leadership strengths to mobilize as advocates; and further developed their public policy knowledge and its connection to the ECE landscape on a local, state, and national level.

The fellows connected with guests from the: Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL); PennAEYC; state legislators; the Allegheny County mayor's office; local school board members; and other local community leaders. Each fellow also created and will maintain advocacy goals and activities to continue their journey as ECE champions.



---

## Childhood Begins at Home

Trying Together continues to serve as principal partner to the Childhood Begins at Home Campaign which focuses on voluntary, evidence-based home visiting programs. These services provide parents and others raising children with the support necessary to improve the health, safety, literacy, and economic self-sufficiency of the family. In March 2019, Trying Together held a roundtable where home visitors of various programs and a family they served discussed the benefits with a group of legislators.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, home visiting services have been a lifeline for families. Home visiting programs such as Early Head Start and Nurse-Family Partnership provided remote visits with a focus on emergency needs, maternal and infant health, child development, and parenting.

---

## Family Care Act

Trying Together is a partner of the PA Coalition for Healthy Families and Workplace campaign supporting the Family Care Act, which aims to secure a paid family medical leave insurance fund for families statewide.

If Pennsylvania passes the Family Care Act, families will no longer have to choose between remaining financially stable in the workforce and caring for their young child in the most critical period of their life. Making paid family leave available is critical to infant health and development, and a critical support for early care and education professionals who still do not have access to benefits.







---

## Start Strong PA

**Start Strong PA, the campaign for high-quality child care ([startstrongpa.org](http://startstrongpa.org))**, launched on January 28, 2019 in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania with more than 100 supporters in attendance.

Start Strong PA builds on the collaboration of the ELPA coalition to advocate for increased access to and affordability of high-quality child care programs, beginning with infants and toddlers. As a principal partner in statewide advocacy efforts, Trying Together played a critical role in the development of the mission, goals, and strategy for this campaign to focus on infants and toddlers including guiding the branding process and leads the communications and policy committees.

To date, 181 organizations and 1,372 individuals have signed on as Start Strong PA supporters.

In 2019, **Trying Together authored *The Case for High-Quality Infant and Toddler Child Care***, which serves as a foundational research report for the Start Strong PA campaign. **A dozen videos were also produced** to educate parents, caregivers, and community members about accessing, affording, and identifying high-quality early care and education programs. In 2019 and 2020, Trying Together hosted screenings of **No Small Matter** for more than 100 early learning professionals, a documentary film that shows the importance of early childhood education and its impact on children, families, and the economy.

Trying Together surveyed families to assess their needs, and then **produced videos featuring people** whose real stories affirmed that funding child care matters. Trying Together's advocacy team also hosted dozens of meetings and interactions with policymakers to advance the case for greater investments in child care to increase quality, access, and affordability for families.

The necessity of the Start Strong PA campaign continues to be evident as the state administration and legislature has not increased state funding for child care since FY 2010-11. During the 2019-20 fiscal year, although federal funds were increased, the state reduced its appropriation to child care by \$36 million. The proposed state budget for fiscal year 2020-21 includes \$15.3 million in new federal funding toward child care subsidy base rates but no new state funding.

43

**Sign-on to support our  
policy campaigns at  
<http://bit.ly/ECEpoliciesPA>**

---

## Call it Child Care Initiative

In June of 2018, the Pennsylvania state legislature passed House Bill 1677 to update Pennsylvania's regulations and code to use the term "child care" rather than "day care" to reflect the work of early learning programs more accurately. Trying Together worked closely with the bill's prime sponsor, state Representative Jason Ortity, who represents Allegheny and Washington counties.

To elevate the conversation around this important change, Trying Together launched the **'Call It Child Care' Initiative ([www.tryingtogether.org/callitchildcare](http://www.tryingtogether.org/callitchildcare))** in 2019 and developed tool kits for child care providers that included: talking points; posters; social media graphics; and letters to help them effectively communicate that:

- The impact of child care is much longer than a day.
- The words we use matter because they affect the public's perception and the field's own accountability in providing high-quality care.
- "Child care" acknowledges the complexity of a high-quality early care and education program.

In all, Trying Together distributed 250 toolkits and made 14 formal presentations as part of the initiative.

---

## Pre-K for PA

**The Pre-K for PA campaign works to ensure that every child in Pennsylvania enters kindergarten ready to succeed ([www.prekforpa.org](http://www.prekforpa.org))**. State funding for pre-k has significantly increased since the 2014 inception of the campaign. The 2018-19 fiscal year saw a \$25 million increase for a total of \$192.3 million; and the 2019-20 fiscal year saw a \$30 million increase for a total of \$217.3 million. Facing a significant revenue shortfall, the State level-funded pre-k in its five month interim budget for 20-21.

To date, more than 20,000 individuals and 700 organizations have signed on as Pre-K for PA supporters.

Building from the release of its first white papers on developmentally appropriate practice and kindergarten transition, the Trying Together Policy team released **End Early Childhood Suspensions and Expulsions: Developmentally Appropriate Practices and Policies For Addressing Behaviors In The Early Elementary School Grades**.

A supporting one-page guide was also created for families to raise awareness for the negative impacts of exclusionary practices and connect them to local resources for support.

Public Policy Impact

**\$11.7M**

dollars for home visiting  
(increased investments)

**101**

meetings with state legislators  
(district office, capitol, virtual)

**35**

in-district tours with state  
and local elected officials

**\$800K**

dollars for child care

**27**

meetings with city,  
school board,  
and local  
elected officials

**14**

Early Childhood  
Advocacy Fellows

**\$55M**

dollars for Pre-K  
(increased investments)



# Early Learning Representation

Through their work, Trying Together staff provide their expertise to support the work of early childhood on regional and statewide boards and committees.

46



# Regional Representation

Allegheny County Children's Fund Working Group

Allegheny County Children, Youth and Family Advisory Board

Allegheny County Family Center Network

Best Books for Babies Committee

Buzzword Pittsburgh Collaborative

Digital Media and Learning Affinity Group of Remake Learning

ELRC Region 5, Local Leadership Council

Hi5! Transition from Pre-k to Kindergarten Team

Kidsburgh Advisory Committee

Lead Safe Allegheny

One North Side

Our Kids. Our Commitment. Steering Committee

Pittsburgh Learning Committee

Playful Pittsburgh Collaborative Member

Positive Racial Identity Development in Early Education (P.R.I.D.E.) Advisory Committee

Remake Learning Council

The Homewood Community Engagement Center Advisory Council

The Pittsburgh Study

Western Pennsylvania Early Literacy Team

# Statewide Representation

BUILD Initiative

Childhood Begins at Home Campaign

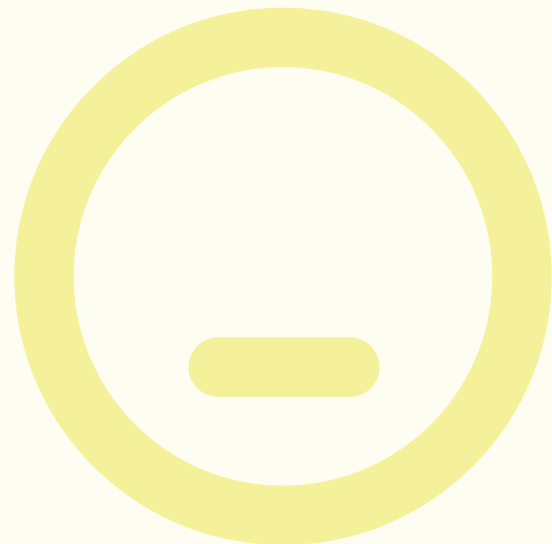
Early Learning Council (ELC)

Pennsylvania School-Age Child Care Alliance

Pre-K for PA Campaign

SharedSource Pennsylvania

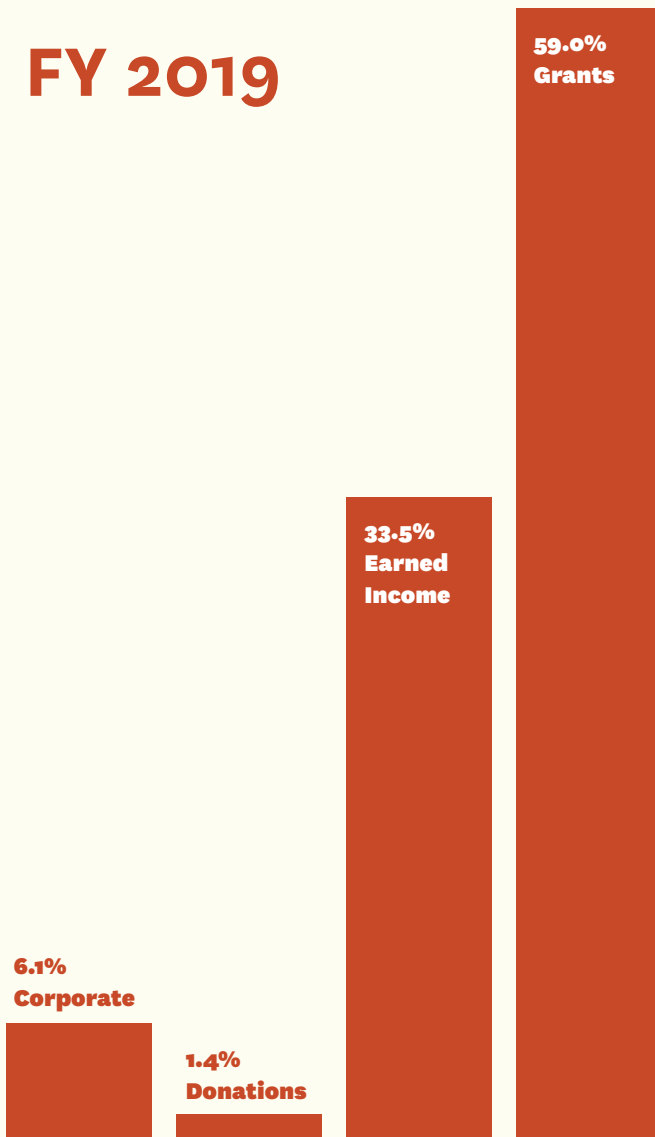
Start Strong PA Campaign



# Revenue & Support

48

**FY 2019**



**FY 2020**



# Philanthropic Support

Trying Together was able to advance its strategic goals through 2020 thanks to the generosity of the following philanthropic partners:

**Birmingham Foundation**

**Hillman Foundation**

**Jefferson Regional Foundation**

**KABOOM!**

**McAuley Ministries**

**New Sun Rising**

**PNC Grow Up Great**

**Remake Learning**

**Richard King Mellon Foundation**

**The Buhl Foundation**

**The Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation**

**The Grable Foundation**

**The Heinz Endowments**

**The Pittsburgh Foundation**

**United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania**

**William Penn Foundation**

**Women & Girls Foundation**



# Acknowledgments

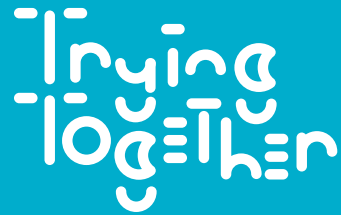
Best wishes and thanks for their service to the Board of Directors members whose terms ended in the years listed respectively: Julie Klasen, Michelle Reyes, and Diana Schwab (2019); and Fern Schwartz (2020).

50 Trying Together also extends deep appreciation to all of its Board of Directors members and staff without whom this work could not be achieved.

Credit: The 2018–2020 Trying Together Community Report was written and edited by the Communications Department including: Kara Bayer; Maria Pisano; Heidi Winkler; and Lainey Yockey and designed by Little Kelpie.







## Supporting the work of early childhood

5604 Solway Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15217

T: 412-421-3889

F: 412-421-7624

[info@tryingtogether.org](mailto:info@tryingtogether.org)

[tryingtogether.org](http://tryingtogether.org)

Trying Together is  
pleased to partner with  
PennAEYC to support the  
Pittsburgh Chapter of  
PennAEYC.