

# 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.**

Over the past two years, the early childhood education field has consistently undergone changes and adjustments. Early care and education professionals have had to pivot, adjust, and learn to meet quality expectations, keep their businesses open, find qualified staff, and keep the children they care for safe during a global pandemic.

Pennsylvania's ECE programs struggled and faced the possibility of losing their Keystone STARS rating due to the difficulty in finding and maintaining a strong, qualified workforce.

Trying Together continued to support educators in their work by meeting them where they were and working with them to navigate new professional standards, the Keystone STARS designation/renewal process, and grant applications, as well as offering a variety of professional development opportunities.

In November 2020, Trying Together also hired a Home-Based Child Care Coach to support home-based child care providers in Allegheny County to develop new skills and continuously improve their early childhood teaching practices to achieve higher program quality.

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## Early Learning Resource Center (ELRC) Region 5

As the quality partner of the ELRC Region 5 for three years, the Trying Together Quality Coaches, Early Learning Program Engagement Specialists (ELPES), Leadership Development Strategist, and Everyday Interactions Matter Strategist have supported quality improvements for more than 600 licensed child care providers throughout Allegheny County.

Staff have worked with program administrators, classroom teachers, and assistant teachers and home-based child care providers to develop new skills and continuously improve their early childhood teaching practices to achieve higher program quality. Between July 2020 and June 2022, 49 child care providers have made positive movement in Keystone STARS:

- STAR 1 to STAR 2 - 19
- STAR 1 to STAR 3 - 1
- STAR 1 to STAR 4 - 5
- STAR 2 to STAR 3 - 4
- STAR 2 to STAR 4 - 10
- STAR 3 to STAR 4 - 10

ELRC Region 5 Quality Coach Outreach:

- 77,811 emails
- 5,260 phone calls
- 713 site visits (impacted by COVID-19 pandemic)
- 860 meetings (in person and virtual)
- 84,749 interactions

From July 1, 2020, to June 30, 2022, ELPES had 8,014 total contacts with relative care providers—mostly through emails and phone—mainly relating to CARES stimulus funding, payment/invoice issues, the enrollment and application process, and assistance with clearances. As of June 2022, ELPES were supporting 450 relative providers serving 985 children.





## 26 Director Roundtables

Trying Together, as ELRC Region 5's quality partner, continued its series of weekly Director Roundtable sessions to support directors and managers of early learning programs in Allegheny County. During these sessions, participants discussed important topics such as the impact of COVID-19, staffing difficulties, funding opportunities, health and safety protocols, the mental health of educators and children, and more.

Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) representatives and certification supervisors of the OCDEL western region office regularly joined the roundtables on a monthly basis to share updates, provide guidance, and answer questions from participants.

Since its inception, 288 unique providers have attended, with an average of 60 unique providers per week. Though the Director Roundtables began as a way to guide providers during

the COVID-19 pandemic, participants have expressed a desire to continue, as the sessions have helped them share ideas and network with others.

### **Virtual Community of Practice and Ask The Coaches Sessions**

In 2020, the ELRC Region 5 Quality Coaches began offering their Community of Practice sessions via a virtual platform to support providers in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In March 2021, Quality Coaches kicked off a monthly one-hour discussion for child care owners, directors, and teaching staff to ask questions, network with peers, and learn about resources available to them.

Topics for these sessions included school-age programming, mental health, the Internal Assessment Process with PA Keys, Keystone STARS, and more. Participants received PQAS credit for attending the sessions.

## 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.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Trying Together has been offering professional development sessions via Zoom and Schoology, a nationally renowned online learning management system (LMS) that enhances Trying Together's ability to offer virtual professional growth opportunities in a user-friendly manner. The Schoology platform supports Trying Together's Child Development Associate (CDA) programs, the Early Childhood Education (ECE) Apprenticeship program, and custom and public professional development courses.

### **Pennsylvania Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators**

In 2022, Pennsylvania adopted a new set of standards and competencies informed by trends and shifts occurring nationally to ensure consistency and reliability in early care and education. Replacing the PA Core Knowledge Competencies (CKCs), the Pennsylvania Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators (PA PSCECE) are the general knowledge and skills that educators need to know and be able to demonstrate to support the growth and development of every child.

To prepare for the transition, Trying Together hired a Curriculum Development Specialist to work closely with the

professional development team to review curriculum content and include a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and social/emotional wellness perspective.

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

Trying Together partners with the Early Childhood Education Professional Development Organization at Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education (ECE PDO@PASSHE) 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. PDO funding covers tuition, expenses, and other support.

Through this, Trying Together ensures that high-quality professional development is available and accessible to early learning professionals at all levels. Trying Together's PDO Coordinator has supported 460 educators in the application process to receive funding for higher education programs.

### **Child Development Associate (CDA) Programs**

Trying Together offers three unique community-based Child Development Associate (CDA) programs:

- 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. Participants can matriculate up to nine course credits at Carlow University once they obtain their credential.
- CDA Community of Practice assists educators with

completing CDA portfolio requirements, as well as CDA test preparation and CDA observation steps.

- CDA Renewal supports early learning professionals in Pennsylvania who are interested in renewing their CDA Credential.

Trying Together offers the CDA program at a community-based level with the support of various funding and development partners, including: Shippensburg University; Hillman Foundation; The Buhl Foundation; and The Pennsylvania Key. With support from the Council of Three Rivers American Indian Center, Trying Together also supports Early Head Start programs in meeting federal qualification requirements through CDA and mentoring programming.

## Matriculation

28 Through the partnership with ECE PDO@PASSHE, Trying Together hired a Curriculum Development Specialist to develop articulation agreements with local universities and community colleges to offer college course credit to participants who complete Trying Together's CDA program and select professional development series. Trying Together currently has agreements with Carlow University and Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC).

Trying Together's CDA and professional development series curriculum for early childhood educators continues to be reviewed for educational rigor and aligned with NAEYC standards, the Danielson Framework, and the new Pennsylvania Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators (PA PSCECE).



## Early Childhood Education (ECE) Apprenticeship Program

The Southwestern Pennsylvania Early Childhood Education Apprenticeship Program is a learn-as-you-earn career pathway that helps early learning professionals in Allegheny County earn a CDA Credential or Associate's Degree while maintaining employment at an early learning program. The program is employer-driven and flexible in meeting apprentices' needs.

Apprenticeship combines on-the-job learning with relevant instruction to build skills that increase the potential for higher wages and career advancement.

Through a partnership with the CCAC, Trying Together currently offers a CDA-Track Apprenticeship and an Associate's Level Apprenticeship. Trying Together also partnered with Literacy Pittsburgh to offer expanded support to apprentices, such as tutoring and access to a variety of resources.

Trying Together plans to extend the apprenticeship program opportunities to home-based child care providers.

## Teacher Induction and 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
- 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.

From June 2020 to June 2022, 40 Level I teachers completed Trying Together's Induction program and 289 teacher evaluations were conducted for Induction and Teacher Certification Level I and Level II teachers.

## ECE Lending Library

In December 2021, the Trying Together and ELRC Region 5 ECE Lending Library opened for early learning providers to borrow an array of materials for their programs. The ECE Lending Library items support and recognize learning abilities, cultural diversity, and health and safety. Available materials include children's books, child and program assessment materials, teaching and leadership resources, play kits, storytelling kits, and three Inspire Interactive Panels. All items are located at Trying Together's Squirrel Hill office.

ECE PDO@PASSHE funded the library materials as well as the purchase of technology devices, such as iPads, laptops, hotspots, and tablets, to eliminate technology barriers for educators.

Educators from 19 distinct early learning programs have borrowed 46 items from the ECE Lending Library in the first six months.



## 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 virtually, UnConferences over the past two years have discussed inclusion, trauma-informed care, selfcare for ECE professionals, and the impact of COVID-19 on child care, and served 916 participants.

### Caring in a “New Normal” | September 2020

Workshops:

- Positive Interactions During the Pandemic
- A Conversation on How to Support the Social/Emotional Needs of Children
- Building a Foundation for your Organization’s Financial Wellness
- Providing Safe and Healthy Care in Child Care Now and Beyond the Pandemic

### Exceptional Care with a Team Approach to Inclusion | January 2021 (Co-Hosted with The Children’s Institute of Pittsburgh) | Keynote Speaker: Wendy Pardee, The Children’s Institute of Pittsburgh

Workshops:

- Transition and Educational Support in the Early Childhood Environment
- Creating and Building Inclusive Support Teams for Children
- How to Assess Your Students’ Needs: Using the ASQ

Through the Lens of Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Program

- Overview of Infant/Toddler Early Intervention Services in Allegheny County Referral Through Transitioning Out of 0-3 Services
- Catering to The Whole Classroom: Lesson Development and Implementation That Speaks to Every Child

### Creating a Safe Place with Trauma-Informed Care | February 2022 | Keynote Speaker: Dr. Veirdre Jackson, Living Strong Consulting

Workshops:

- Co-Creating a Healing Community of Equity & Trust
- Rapid Response Team: Reducing Expulsions and Suspensions in Early Childhood Education
- Self-Care Isn’t Selfish, It’s Necessary: Practical Tools for Early Childhood Educators to Reduce Stress and Avoid Burnout
- Talking to Listen: Exploring Family Stressors and Creating Positive Relationships to Support Families
- Teaching Children Through a Trauma Lens

Trying Together and partners are planning an UnConference in fall 2022 that will cover race equity in early childhood.

## Message from Me

Message from Me serves as a tool for children to communicate with their families about their daily activities and learning experiences through the use of digital pictures and recorded audio messages. From 2020-2022, families received 39,840 messages from their children.

In January 2022, Trying Together and the Carnegie Mellon University CREATE Lab launched the Message from Me Caregivers App where families could access their child's message. Caregivers without smartphones can still receive the messages in the form of an email.

## Professional Growth Impact

**144**

professional development events were attended by 3,629 participants

**Nine**

Trying Together CDA students have matriculated to Carlow University for college credits

**15**

early learning professionals, 12 Apprenticeship Coaches, and seven employers were served through the Southwestern Pennsylvania Apprenticeship Program; three professionals have continued their education to obtain an Associate's Degree

**Nine**

community-based Child Development Associate (CDA) cohorts were conducted, serving 203 early learning professionals, with 12 pursuing a higher education degree

Three virtual UnConferences were hosted with the support of PNC Grow Up Great, engaging

**916**

early childhood professionals

**460**

The Trying Together Professional Development Organization (PDO) Coordinator supported

early care and education professionals in the application process to receive funding for higher education programs