



Strong Start Goal:

All Maine children receive a healthy start and arrive at kindergarten developmentally prepared to succeed in school and life.

Why this issue is important: The first years of life are critical for the development of the human brain. A child's earliest experiences lay the foundation for future learning, behavior, and health. Getting it right from the start also makes economic sense. It is the most effective and cost-efficient way to address many issues important to Maine, including graduation rates, workforce needs, health outcomes, and overall quality of life. In the end, we all benefit when Maine's youngest children and their families thrive. We can't wait until young children start kindergarten to take a collective interest in their well-being.

What we learned: Our review of early childhood development in Maine found extensive research and established standards for what expectant parents, young children, and their families need to thrive. However, we also encountered the reality that many families do not have access to best practices, information, and support to raise their children. At the same time, current Maine state policies do not reflect the value of investing in early childhood as an economic development strategy.

Our vision: Maine leaders, parents, and the public understand that high quality early childhood investments foster healthy child development, strengthen our workforce, grow our economy, and reduce social spending. Early childhood organizations collaborate around a common vision and best practices to support children, families, and early childhood professionals. Children ages 0-5 have access to high-quality care and education experiences that lead to healthy growth and development. Families are supported with adequate resources and effective public systems and policies, backed by strong, ongoing advocacy.

Our strategies:

MaineCF will use its reputation and voice to increase public understanding of the importance of investing in the first years of life to the success of Maine's children, communities, and economy.

We will mobilize resources for new investments to improve effective early childhood practices in Maine communities. Promising models include two-generational approaches that enable parents to increase their education and work skills while their children receive quality care, as well as collaborative initiatives that seek change at the local level.

We will work with our partners in public policy and education to advocate and build public support for investments and policies that advance early childhood development and improve outcomes for young children and families.

How you can help:

Give to the **Strong Start Fund** at MaineCF to advance activities, including:

- **Early Childhood Community Planning Grant program**—providing an opportunity for communities to form local networks across sectors, build data profiles related to children ages 0-5, and identify local solutions to reduce barriers to kindergarten readiness.
- **Early childhood advocacy and policy**—supporting coalitions working to improve Maine’s public policies, practices, and resources to better support young children and families.
- **Support for partners**—increasing resources for partners who are doing critical work to advance the field, such as addressing family and early childhood needs through two-generational models and improving access to, and the quality of, early childhood care and education.

If you would like more background information about MaineCF’s goal for early childhood development, please contact Senior Program Officer Stephanie Eglinton at seglinton@mainecf.org or 207-412-0837.