

Children First

Strategic Plan 2021-2025

September 2021

children
FIRST
THE ADVOCATE FOR KIDS
FORMERLY PCCY



“Children First has been smart about trying to build broad based networks of support, to not simply be seen as a predictable liberal voice.”

2020 Context

The COVID-19 pandemic has far-reaching implications. It has exposed and worsened existing racial and income inequality in health, education, employment, and digital access. Children and youth have been challenged with virtual learning in addition to loss and trauma in their communities. Mental and behavioral health needs are on the increase. Early learning centers -- critical support infrastructure for children -- are struggling to stay financially viable.

The pandemic has resulted in greater public support for proactive investments in health, social safety net, and early learning. However, city and state budgets will be in a resource-scarce environment in the next few years. Growing public support for the Black Lives Matter movement and continuing shifts in the nonprofit sector assert the importance of race equity and engagement of people who are directly impacted by Children First's advocacy.

Pennsylvania's political landscape is becoming more blue, with more Democrats in local and state elected positions. Republicans will nevertheless remain strong and influential in House and Senate.

To develop this plan, Children First convened a strategic planning committee (“SPC”) comprised of board and staff. The SPC met regularly to plan the data collection and research and develop recommendations for the strategic plan. The board and staff provided input at three retreats through July 2020 (July 14th, 15th, 20th, 2020), and through their involvement in staff meetings, content area meetings, and other meetings dedicated to specific strategic questions. Additional input was provided by the board on Sept 17th, 2020. Praxis Consulting Group facilitated the planning process. For the planning process, interviews were conducted with Children First's stakeholders and with other advocacy organizations. For a full list of interview participants, visit childrenfirstPA.org/strategicplan.

Children First Mission Statement

Children First improves the lives and life chances of our region's low-income, Black, and Hispanic children by advocating for the building blocks of opportunity -- equitable access to high-quality early education, sound health care, effective public schools, as well as dependency and delinquency systems that heal children. We work with and organize parents, youth, and concerned citizens to advance these fundamental requirements of a more just society and a better future.

Children First's Position

We have a strong reputation and history as a unique organization advocating for a breadth of issues that affect kids. We are a trusted and credible voice. We are a well-connected coalition builder and a bridge between moderate and liberal policy agendas. We have increased our state-level influence through an active geographic footprint in southeastern Pennsylvania and statewide partnerships. We have grown dramatically over the last five years and are positioned to make a greater difference in the region and in the state.

What are the strategic decisions that will guide our next five years?

“Listen to the voices of kids who are most impacted by harmful policies, with focus on racial justice.”



Early Childhood Education

5-Year Policy Goals

5-Year Children First Metric for Success

Cumulative Potential Impact of this Policy Work on Racial Equity and/or Upward Mobility

Increase access to high-quality early childhood education for children 0-5

Improved payment system for STAR 3 and STAR 4

6,500 additional children enrolled in high-quality early childhood education programs

Increase access to high-quality early learning for children of color

State-level technical assistance system established to improve quality, with focus on communities of color

Children of color in programs increase by 10%

Increase access to high-quality ECE for Dual Language Learners

More credentialed teachers of color

10% more Dual Language Learners children have access to high-quality programs

Increase access to developmental supports for children under five

Policy reforms to improve Early Intervention, Medicaid, and other funding support for behavioral health

10% more children with continuous access in Early Intervention Services

Sustain and improve PA's commitment to quality ECE

100 fewer early education providers suspending/expelling children, with a focus on providers serving children of color

More providers, the public, and lawmakers have greater confidence in the licensure and QRIS systems

2021



2021



2022



2023



2024



2025

K-12 Education

5-Year Policy Goals

Increase resources to boost low-income, Black, and Hispanic student outcomes

Ensure greater racial equity in access to educational resources

Improve low-income, and Black and Hispanic student performance by reforming the oversight and payments in the charter sector

Build a youth led advocacy arm of Children First

5-Year Children First Metric for Success

State develops new methods to direct funds to low-wealth districts with resources comparable to those used to support the state's Hold Harmless policy

School funding increases linked to focusing resources on math and reading outcomes of Black and Hispanic students

Equity reviews implemented

State charter school legislation that supports accountability and tuition reform

Youth Advocacy Arm of Children First is designing and implementing strategies to boost state funding for schools & promote intradistrict equity

Cumulative Potential Impact of this Policy Work on Racial Equity and/or Upward Mobility

100,000 Black and Hispanic students receive higher quality education

Increase the share of Black and Hispanic students proficient by 5% in low-wealth districts

Fewer educational resources spent on low-performing charter schools

At least 60 youth, at least 1/3 Black and Hispanic, engaged in the advocacy arm of Children First promoting education equity across region

2021



2021



2022



2023



2024



2025

Health

5-Year Policy Goals

5-Year Children First Metric for Success

Cumulative Potential Impact of this Policy Work on Racial Equity and/or Upward Mobility

Decrease the risk of childhood lead poisoning and improve services to find and treat poisoned children

Lead protections in place in Philadelphia and 14 suburban counties

7,500 fewer children exposed to lead (2/3 children of color)

Decrease the share of uninsured children with a focus on expanding coverage to undocumented children

State-level incentives for effective testing and follow-up services, and state-level process to distribute remediation funds to high need areas

2,250 fewer children will not require Early Intervention or Special Ed (1/3 children of color)

Improve mental wellness of low-income children

Policy enacted to allow enrollment of currently ineligible children into CHIP and Medicaid

12,000 unauthorized immigrant children are enrolled in CHIP/Medicaid

Advance policies that promote family wellness

Philadelphia adopts universal behavioral health access system

4,000 more children receive quality behavioral health care and experience positive life outcomes

One county adopts ACEs based qualification for behavioral health services
State-level Paid Family Leave passed

Provide family leave for 47% of Black parents and 55% of Hispanic parents currently ineligible

Increase utilization of family leave for 70% of Black and 80% of Hispanic parents who are eligible but cannot afford it because it is unpaid

2021



2021



2022



2023



2024



2025

Vulnerable Youth

5-Year Policy Goals

Improve the outcomes of youth in institutional/congregate care settings

Decrease the disproportionate rate of institutional placements of Black and Hispanic youth

Increase the share of youth in foster care achieving key wellness indicators

5-Year Children First Metric for Success

Quality and proactive Ombudsperson Office and regular assessments of institutional on-grounds schools established

Key decisionmakers establish training and processes to reduce disproportionality, including a functional public data system and reform of technical parole violations

Department for Human Services increase in alternatives to congregate care and revises Community Umbrella Agency contracts with expectations for wellness indicators

Court systems and stakeholders adapt more evidence-based diversion, treatment programs, and support services for youth

Cumulative Potential Impact of this Policy Work on Racial Equity and/or Upward Mobility

Reduce children's risk of harm by 25% and improve their educational outcomes by at least 10% ¹

Percentage of Black and Hispanic youth in institutionalized care reduced by 35% ²

Reduction in disproportionality of youth detained as a result of technical parole violation by 10%

5% more foster care youth graduate high school and avoid contact with criminal justice system

20% fewer children in institutional congregate care

10% fewer youth are placed and/or adjudicated delinquent

¹ Black and Hispanic youth account for xx% of children in institutional settings

² This 35% reduction would represent Black and Hispanic youth having proportional placements in institutional settings.

2021



2021



2022



2023



2024



2025

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