

# Equity Through Co-Design: Identifying System Solutions to Barriers to Early Care & Education Enrollment in Cincinnati

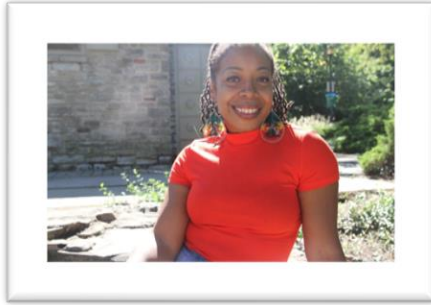
Kristen Copeland, MD  
Professor of Pediatrics

Julietta Ladipo  
Community Leader

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# Equity Through Co-Design: Identifying System Solutions to Barriers to ECE Enrollment in Cincinnati

Project Team (n=6) and Peer Researchers (n=16)



# PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite the known **positive impact of early care and education (ECE)** and available, publicly funded, high-quality slots, **many children do not enroll in preschool** because the **system is complex, siloed, disjointed, and difficult to navigate**, particularly for the families who stand to benefit the most.



Special Education  
Evaluation Services

Pediatricians

Transportation

Preschools



**COMPONENTS  
of this  
COMPLEX  
SYSTEM**

School Districts

Early Childhood  
Navigators

Tuition Assistance  
Programs

Dentists

Parents

Childcare Providers

Vital Records Office

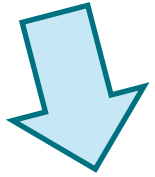
Insurers



# One Family's Journey & Struggles

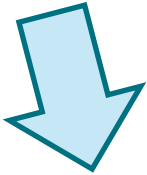
January

- Parent asks about preschool.
- Early Childhood Specialist provides parent with school and enrollment information



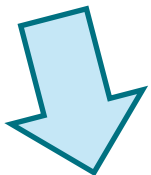
April

- Goes to local school to enroll
- Enrollment office is at another location, mom doesn't have a ride



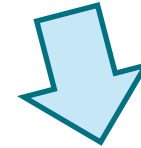
June

- Parent gets ride to enrollment office
- Doesn't have required documentation



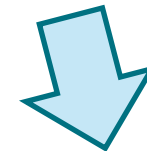
July-October

- Parent works to get all needed documentation



November

- Completes application
- No spots at nearby school
- Mom must find another program.



December

- Parent finds another program
- Completes application
- Child starts preschool

**12 Months from start of process to  
child's 1<sup>st</sup> day of preschool!**

# PROJECT GOALS

**1 Identify system-level barriers** that keep low-income families and families of color from enrolling in high-quality ECE program.

**2 Co-design potential system interventions** and prototypes with parents and ECE agency partners.

**3 Use continuous quality improvement** methods to test co-designed prototypes across agencies in partnership with families.



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Robert Wood Johnson Foundation





# METHODS



# Discovery, Synthesis, Ideation

Peer Researchers partnered with core team members to conduct:

## 20 PARENT INTERVIEWS

*18 Black/African American, 2 White  
and 18 Mothers, 2 Fathers*

## 5 ECE FOCUS GROUPS

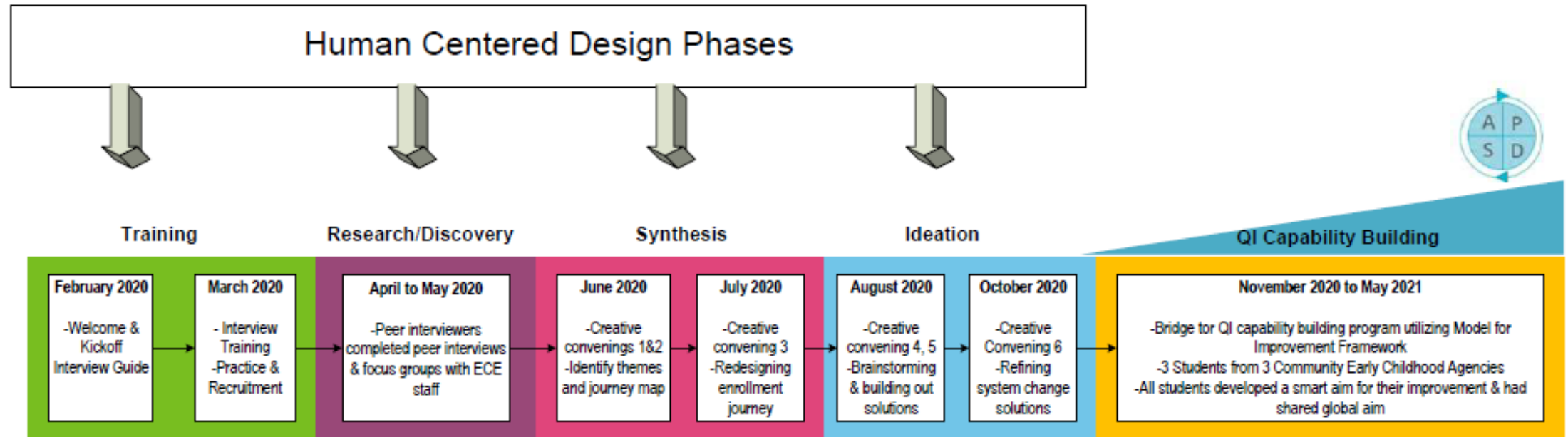
*18 Early childhood professionals representing  
and 12 different programs in the community*

## 5 CREATIVE CONVENINGS



# Framework

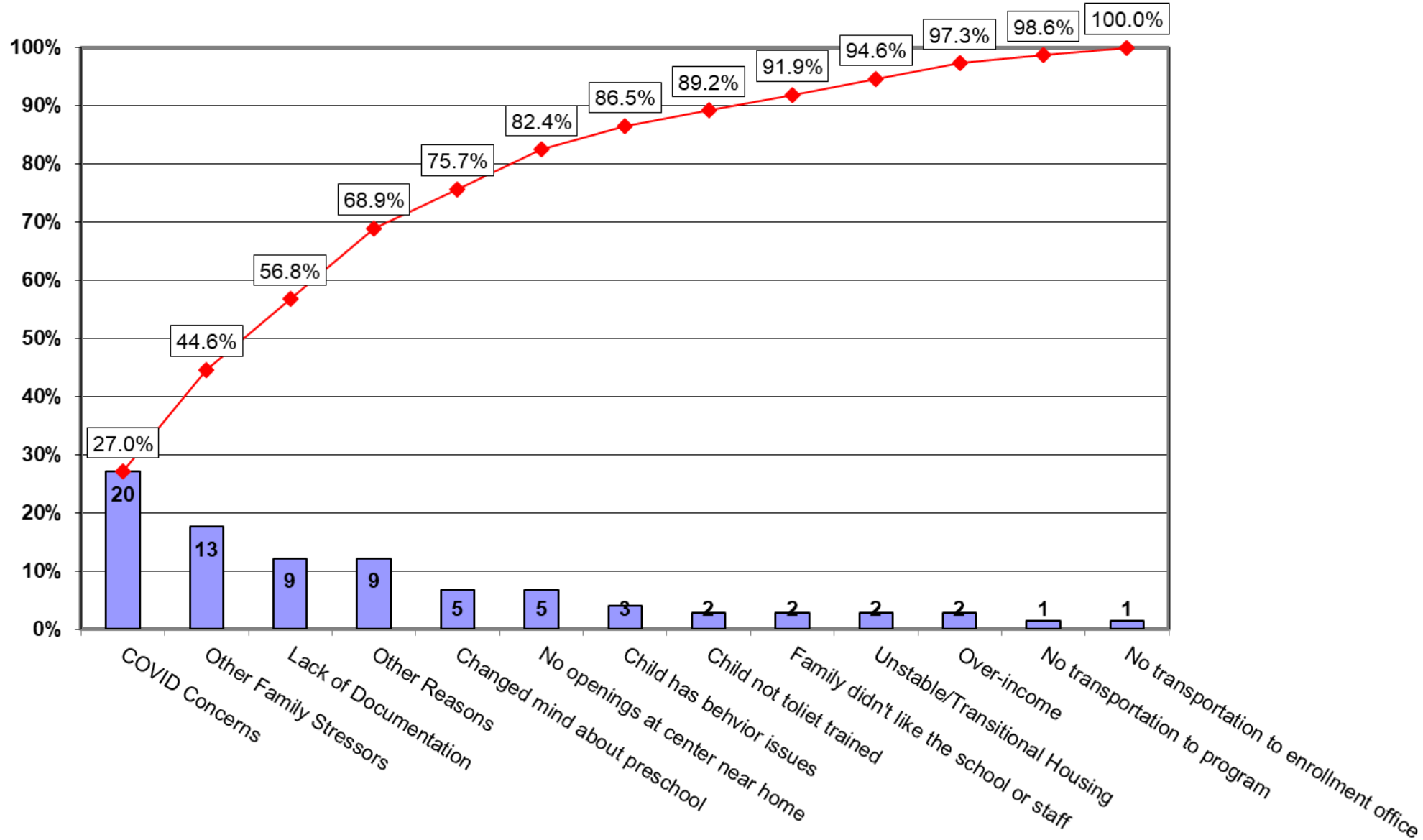
## Equity Through Co-Design & Quality Improvement Roadmap



### QI Lens:

- Mapped stakeholders with each process step
- Predicted failure modes
- System level Key Drivers
- Co-Designed interventions/prototypes

## Barriers to Enrollment in Early Childhood Program



# BARRIERS / FACILITATORS TO ECE ENROLLMENT

Kristen

## Enrollment Process

Lack of awareness

Paperwork

Outdated  
Technologies

Lack of transparency

## Logistics

Transportation

Cost

COVID - 19

## Human Factors

Safety & Trust

Diversity

# PAPERWORK

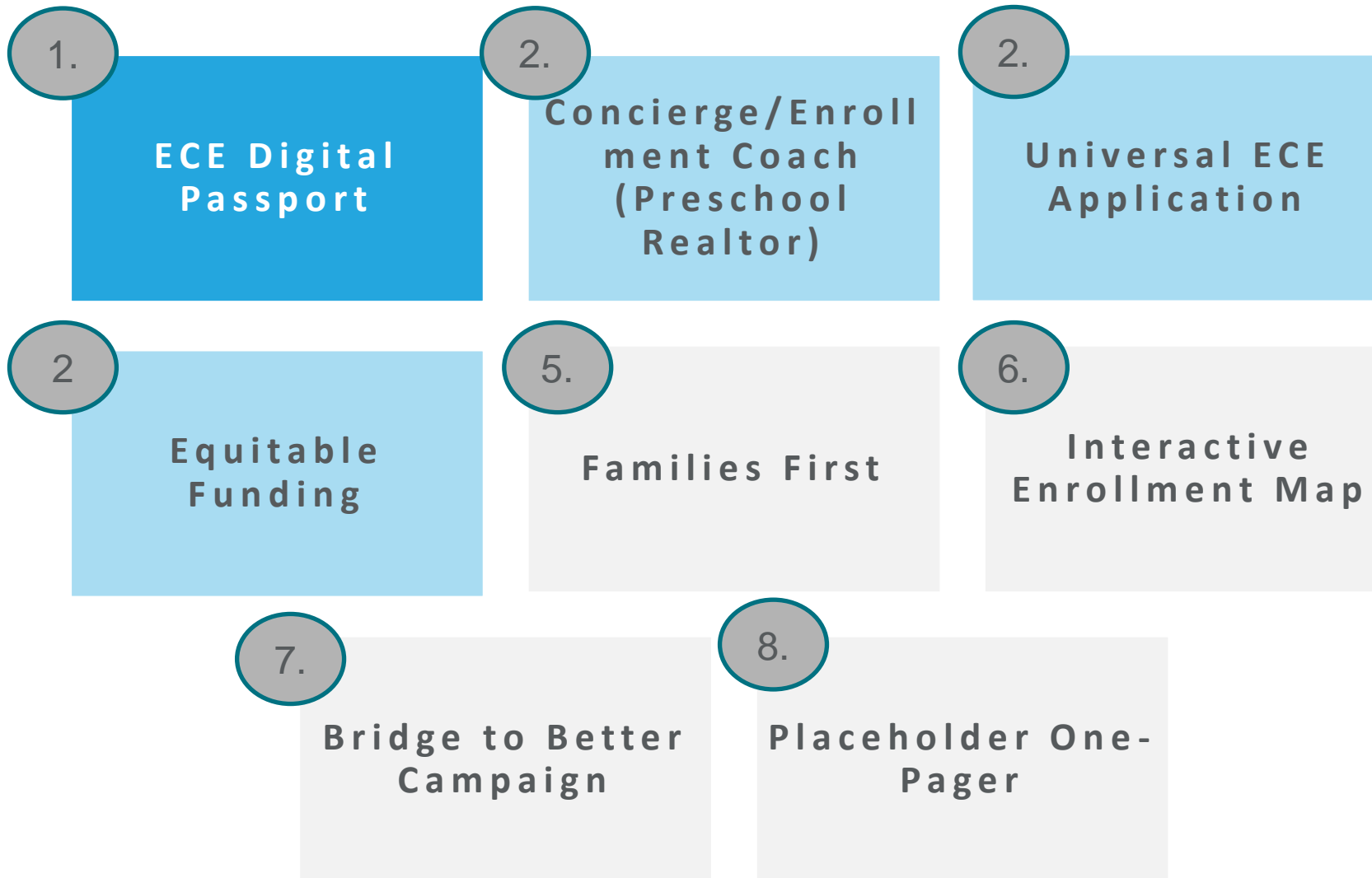
- Forms can be repetitive, at times intrusive, and tedious.
- Repeatedly being asked to disclose and prove financial need takes an emotional toll on families

## Quotes:

I had to print income verification, proof of where I live. I don't have quick access to those documents. I had to schedule a time to talk to my property manager. I had to drive all around the city getting medical documents because I couldn't get them faxed. Fill out release forms to get documents faxed. Barriers were document related." Parent Interviewee

"Why do they need to know exactly what you earn? Why is that your business? Food stamps + Medicaid already demonstrate that you're below poverty line, so I do not think they need to prove the exact information of income." Parent Interviewee

# 8 SYSTEM CHANGE PROTOTYPES:



## CONCEPT 3

# ECE DIGITAL PASSPORT

## VIGNETTE:

*Jamal is trying to enroll his daughter in preschool. He goes to the enrollment office and is told he needs to bring back the following documentation: proof of address, proof of income, child's birth certificate, child's completed dental form, child's medical form, and child's immunization record. Jamal does not have any of this paperwork. He used to have her birth certificate but after searching the apartment he thinks it got lost in their last move. It is overwhelming for him to get all this paperwork together. It takes him weeks and several visits to the health department, Job and Family Services, the dentist's office, and the doctor's office to get all of the needed documents together. He finally submits his documentation and his daughter is able to start preschool. Two months later, Jamal has to move because he can no longer afford their current rent. He moves to another part of town and can no longer get his daughter back and forth to preschool. He knows preschool is important, so he finds another program near their new apartment. He goes to enroll and they ask for all of this same paperwork. Jamal can not find anything from last time. He must have lost it in the move again. He spends another few weeks getting all the paperwork together. During this time, his daughter misses a month of preschool. Later in the year, Jamal goes to enroll his daughter in kindergarten for the upcoming school year. The local elementary school asks for similar paperwork. Again, Jamal can't find where he put his daughter's birth certificate. He is very frustrated that he is going to have to pay \$24 again and take off work again to go get her birth certificate. This means he will need to cut back their grocery money this week and will need to find a food pantry to help.*



**Managing paperwork is the biggest barrier to successful enrollment faced by families. The ECE Passport is a HIPPA compliant, cloud-based resource for parents to store documents and manage their applications. The passport helps families manage the enrollment process, enabling them to easily track progress, as well as access and share paperwork with other providers. ECE Programs would accept the documentation on the passport and not require original copies. This passport will be especially useful to families if they move and need to switch to another preschool program. In addition, when it's time to enroll in kindergarten, all the child's needed documentation and enrollment paperwork will be easily accessible.**

## PARTNERS/EXISTING RESOURCES:

- Representatives from all partner agencies (JFS, ECE, 4C, CCHMC, CAA, CPS, PP, ESC)
- Dental, WIC
- The Partnership Center (VESTA)
- Job and Family Services
- Community child care centers

## ENROLLMENT STEPS:

- 1 Family is interested in EC Programs
- 2 Family is able to identify a center that matches their needs
- 3 Family contacts EC program
- 4 EC Program sets up enrollment appointment
- 5 Family is able to obtain all needed documentation
- 6 Family attends enrollment appointment
- 7 Confirm enrollment in high quality EC program

# CONCIERGE/ENROLLMENT COACH

## VIGNETTE:

Jaden wants to enroll his 4 year old daughter in preschool. He doesn't know anything about preschool, where to start, or where to find a program. He goes to the local library to try an internet search. He comes across some information for a private preschool but after calling the school, Jaden knows he can not afford to pay their tuition. He stops in a couple of child care centers that he sees when driving in their neighborhood. Jaden might be able to enroll his daughter at one of these schools but he wants to find the best program for his daughter. He doesn't know what to look for or what questions to ask when going to preschools. Jaden wishes there was someone to help him. He just randomly picks a program and hopes it is a good one. But when he is told what he has to do to apply, Jaden isn't sure he will be able to do everything. This is much tougher than he thought. He is really struggling because he leaves for work at 7:15 am and doesn't get home until 6:00 pm. He can't make phone calls at work so he's struggling to get a hold of anyone at the preschool program. He keeps leaving messages after work and then they leave a message during the day. Jaden isn't sure how he will complete the paperwork without taking a day off work. He recently started this job so he doesn't have time off and is afraid if he asks his boss that she will think he is not dedicated to the job.



A combination online portal and phone number that families can access to reach a family navigator/enrollment coach who will help them with the enrollment process. Families can access online help via chat, by calling or by texting the coach. These enrollment coaches will be available inside as well as outside of “traditional” service hours giving families options for assistance on various nights and weekends. They can assist families with understanding what preschool options are available and finding the programs that best match the families needs. They can also assist with the application process, obtaining needed documentation, and supporting and encouraging parents throughout the enrollment process as needed.

## PARTNERS/EXISTING RESOURCES:

- 4C for Children
- HCJFS
- 211
- Needed: Funding for staff to work as navigators

## ENROLLMENT STEPS:

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## CONCEPT 6

# UNIVERSAL ECE APPLICATION

## VIGNETTE:

*Kayla is enrolling her twin sons into preschool. She goes to the local preschool program with both boys, her toddler, and infant in tow. It is very difficult for mom to take all these children to the program but she knows preschool is important. She fills out an application for both boys, which takes over 4 hours because she was trying to manage all 4 children while completing two different applications even though they had most of the same information. She later finds out that this program is full and she is put on the waiting list. Mom finds another program that has openings for both boys. So she again packs up all four children and goes to apply. She spends another 3.5 hours filling out applications for both boys. Luckily they both get a spot at this preschool. Unfortunately, one month later, Kayla is evicted from her apartment and has to move in with family across town. She finds another center in her new neighborhood and needs to complete the entire application process again for both children. Sitting and filling out 2 sets of 20 page applications while managing an infant, toddler, and two preschoolers is exhausting. Mom almost gives up during the process. She wishes there was an easier way.*



**A single online portal connected to all early childhood education agencies and a central intake site(s) that can assist with enrollment for any of the ECE programs. Families visit the online portal or enrollment site to complete all necessary enrollment paperwork and provide needed documentation. Parents/families can log onto the online portal at any time to track the current status of the application and waitlist status. When each ECE agency accesses the portal they can obtain all needed information from one single place. This will make the process easier for families and ECE staff alike.**

## PARTNERS/EXISTING RESOURCES:

- Heads of all agencies i.e. CEOs, managers, directors
- Initially: A cross-agency advisory board to compare application needs
- Advertising supports e.g. billboards, radio, social media

## ENROLLMENT STEPS:

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## CONCEPT 8

# FUNDING

## VIGNETTE:

*Sarah is interested in enrolling her 4 year old daughter in preschool. Currently a neighbor is watching her daughter but Sarah knows that the children mostly watch most of the day. Sarah's daughter doesn't know any letters or colors yet and Sarah is worried she won't be ready for kindergarten. She goes to the child care center a block away from her house to ask about preschool/child care. She is told that preschool will cost \$230 per week unless she has child care vouchers from Job and Family Services. Sarah goes through a lot of work to get the lengthy application completed. Unfortunately Sarah finds out that she makes \$10 per month more than the limit to receive vouchers, so she is not eligible. With her current income, she is also unable to pay \$230 per week for preschool/child care. She heard about another program that might offer free preschool for her daughter. Sarah takes off work to go to the program during their open hours (8:30 am- 5 pm). She completes the application and spends a couple weeks getting together all the needed documentation. Once Sarah turns everything in, she finds out that she is not income eligible for this program either. The program tells Sarah about a program she might qualify for but it is not close to their house and the family does not have reliable transportation. Sarah calls the program but they tell her that they do not offer transportation services. Sarah continues to leave her daughter at the neighbor's house while she works. Sarah is so worried her daughter is going to be behind when she starts school.*



**Funding is needed to provide free preschool for all children ages 3 & 4 no matter what the family's income is or where they live. Funding is needed to provide transportation for parents to get back and forth to enrollment offices as well as transportation for the children to get back and forth to school on a daily basis. Transportation is needed for children attending both half-day programs and full-day preschool. Funding is needed to create and staff a centralized enrollment office and create an online portal for enrollment. Funding is needed to create an ECE enrollment map and to create and manage an online cloud based education passport to store family's documents. Funding is needed to help parents pay for needed documentation (i.e. birth certificates).**

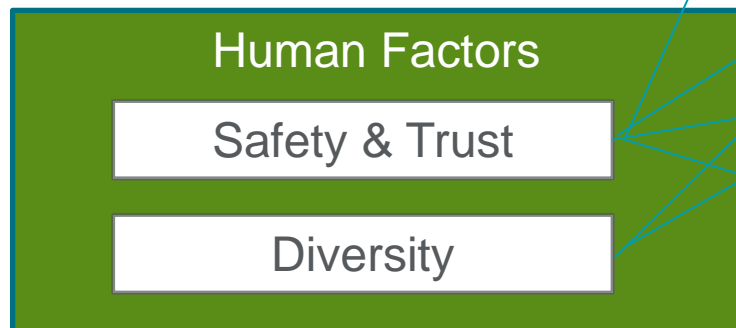
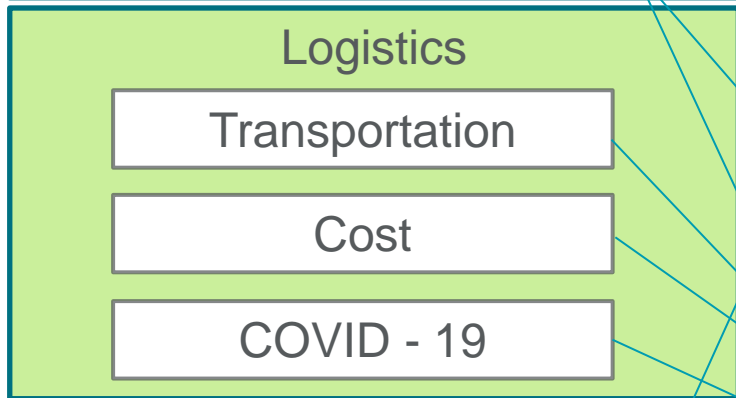
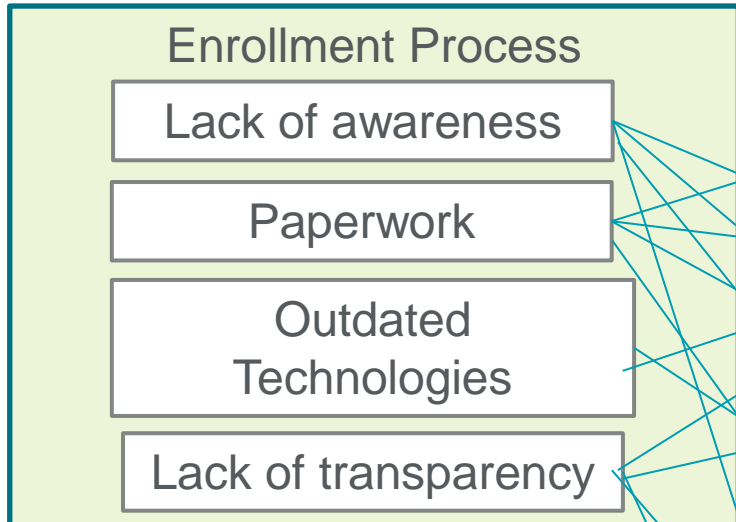
## PARTNERS/EXISTING RESOURCES:

- Local funders
- Government programs
- School district funding
- County budget

## ENROLLMENT STEPS:

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## BARRIERS / FACILITATORS TO ECE ENROLLMENT



## ECE STAFF & PARENT CO-CREATED SOLUTIONS

Universal Application

ECE Digital Passport

ECE Coach / Navigator

Searchable Map from mobile platform

One-pager Placeholder Application

Families First Orientation

Equitable and Increased Funding

Bridge to Better

# THEMES FROM THE WORK

- Parent voice guided the learnings throughout the work
- ECE agency partners learned about parent perspective in interviewing them, parent peer researchers learned benefits of ECE in working alongside ECE peer researchers
- Health equity and educational equity are interdependent
- Shared barriers, shared measures, and shared learnings built collective will which is now mobilized into collective action



# QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

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