

INTRODUCTION

Down East Partnership for Children (DEPC) has a 20-year history of creating programs and building systems to ensure that all children and families in a two-county service area have the opportunity to reach their full potential. This history has evolved since 1992 to a point where it is possible to make transparent the system of supports that result in successful outcomes for individual children and families and the local community. This paper outlines that history within the context of a theory of change.

DEPC was incorporated as a non-profit in 1993 by a group of community leaders who were concerned about the quality of life for children and families in Edgecombe and Nash counties in North Carolina. At the time, both counties, but especially Edgecombe County, ranked low in quality of life statistics such as poverty, infant mortality, low birth weight infants, teen pregnancies and child abuse and neglect. The group of leaders, many of who were also participating in a two-county *Vision 2000* strategic planning process and a chamber-led Common Ground process to discuss racial equity, began to focus on children and child care as a way to make a long-term difference in the community.

At the same time, North Carolina, under the leadership of Governor James Hunt launched Smart Start as a statewide early childhood initiative designed to ensure that all young children enter school healthy and ready to succeed. Smart Start was visionary and innovative, created as a state-funded but locally controlled system of non-profits that could design and implement early childhood education systems and strategies based on local need.

The Edgecombe-Nash community leaders understood that the only way to improve the quality of life statistics in the two-county area was to develop and change the systems of early care, education and family support. They also realized that Smart Start funding was one way to make that happen. In their first application for funding in 1993, in response to the question, “Why your county?” the writers noted that their goal was “to build a universal system of family services that is comprehensive, synergistic, integrated, preventive, family centered/family driven, developmental, flexible, sensitive to culture and race, accessible, school-linked and outcome-oriented.” (Edgecombe-Nash Smart Start Application, September 15, 1993) Although the two counties did not receive Smart Start funding during the first round of grants, they did in the second round and twenty years later that original goal is a reality.

Theory of Change

To understand how DEPC is making a difference for children and families and creating change in Edgecombe and Nash counties, it is helpful to look at the 20-year evolution of DEPC’s efforts to build an

early education system in the two-county area. For purposes of this narrative, DEPC's work will be considered as a whole from the perspective of a *systems initiative*, defined by Julia Coffman as "an organized effort to improve a system and its impacts." Coffman's theory of change delineates five areas of impact that a systems initiative might focus on to improve a system—Context, Components, Connections, Infrastructure and Scale. This narrative will outline DEPC efforts to successfully build a political environment leading to resources (Context) that establish effective programs and services (Components); create better linkages between programs and services (Connections); and create supports that enable continuous improvement (Infrastructure) in order to produce broad impact for children and families (Scale). (*Build Strong Foundations for Our Youngest Children*, Julia Coffman, August 2007)

Following Coffman's "Theory of Change Menu for Systems Initiative", this narrative will briefly describe the local, state and national context that existed prior to DEPC being established in 1993. This will be followed by a description of DEPC's *activities* and the *qualitative* outcomes for each of the five areas of change over two time periods in DEPC's history, 1993-2001 and 2001 to present. The final section will describe DEPC's backbone support and the "optimal package of services" that are making an impact on children, families and the community and outline DEPC's vision of the next phase of work for each of the five areas of change.

20-YEAR EVOLUTION OF DEPC

Context Before DEPC

When DEPC was incorporated in 1993, the idea of a *system* of early education was not something that most people considered. There were child care centers and family child care homes located in the two counties but the quality was low (2 centers held the highest North Carolina rating based primarily on health, safety and space standards) and there were not enough (3,911 regulated slots for 7,345 children under 6 with working families). Most family homes were unregulated with untrained staff and usually served more children than allowed by the state. There was also no developmental day care for children with special needs and most typical providers were unwilling to care for this population.

Although some training and technical assistance was available through both community colleges' credential and T.E.A.C.H. programs and through mental health early intervention and Nash Edgecombe Economic Development, Inc., there was still a shortage of well trained child care providers. A day care association also provided limited training and, while there was a local Association for the Education of Young Children (AEYC), their membership was mostly elementary school teachers.

With no child care resource and referral agency to collect local data and coordinate training, there was limited local leadership or political will in support of quality child care. By 1992 the Nash-Edgecombe community local leaders had emerged and, with technical assistance from Project Uplift in

Greensboro and support from a planning grant from the National Center for Economic Development and Law (NCEDL), began developing a resource & referral agency. They were ultimately successful and a Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) was the first program in the newly formed DEPC.

Although there was strong support for school readiness, the schools were not connected to child care programs and the idea of an early care and education system was not a consideration for most people including the child care providers and schools. While there were individual teachers or schools that offered minimal transition activities, there was no system-wide transition focus especially in relation to linking with child care. Although there were private preschools, there were very few public pre-K programs, limiting access to early education to those families who could afford to pay or were lucky enough to qualify for subsidized care.

Both county school systems had just ended a long, often racially charged, merger process, which resulted in Rocky Mount, the area's largest city and located in both counties, merging with Nash County to become Nash-Rocky Mount Schools. The rest of Edgecombe reorganized into the new Edgecombe County Schools. This process left both counties with lingering negative feelings, particularly the requirement that Edgecombe County share tax dollars with the new Nash-Rocky Mount system to "pay for" the Rocky Mount/Edgecombe County students who were mostly African-American and low-income.

Related to the issues with the merger was a community dynamic that included issues of race and class. The Edgecombe "side" of Rocky Mount was gradually becoming low-income African-American while the Nash "side" was becoming white, middle-class. There was also a lack of collaboration between the two counties sharing Rocky Mount; there were satellite health and social service departments from both counties located in Rocky Mount and in the county seats with no way to keep track of families who moved in and around town or from one county to the other.

There was little collaboration between family service organizations with much overlapping and duplication of services and many gaps. Access to services was also difficult. There was no centralized information of available services and transportation was an issue since both counties were large and services were clustered around Rocky Mount and the two county seats.

While there was a two-county mental health system that offered services for children and families, there was often a several weeks wait period unless the family was in crises and most services were targeted for children over the age of five. Some parent education was available through the mental health, health and social service systems and Head Start, but it was sporadic, limited and not socially acceptable for most parents.

While both social service departments were allocated funding by North Carolina for subsidized child care, there was often difficulty getting the funds "out the door." In 1993, Nash County social services reverted 11.8% of their funding due to fluctuation in demand and the state's method of

allocation, while Edgecombe County involuntarily returned 8.4% due to the limited number of staff administering the program. At the same time Nash County started a waiting list indicating a growing need for additional funding.

On a positive side, there were two broad collaborative initiatives that ultimately made DEPC efforts easier. *Vision 2000* was a strategic planning process that brought together leaders from both counties and Rocky Mount to create a shared vision and a plan for the future. This resulted in identification of the area's strengths and weaknesses and development of strategies to address issues for change. *Common Ground*, which was sponsored by the Rocky Mount Chamber of Commerce, brought citizens together in different venues to discuss race relations. Leaders from both of these initiatives were part of the group that began planning for child care, education and family systems change and eventually founded and incorporated DEPC.

After incorporation, DEPC applied for and received Smart Start funding in 1994 and began to build a system of services *to ensure that every child and family in Nash and Edgecombe Counties receives the education and other related health and social services necessary for them to achieve economic success.* (DEPC Mission Statement, 1994) While this first mission statement has evolved over time, the original intent and purpose of that early statement remains the same—*To build a strong foundation for children and families by advocating and supporting both high quality early care and education and a coordinated system of community resources.* (DEPC Mission Statement, 2011)

Building the Current Context

*Improving the **political context** that surround the system so it produces the policy and funding changes needed to create and sustain it.* (Coffman)

The following narrative outlines the DEPC context activities from 1992 to 2001 and from 2001 to 2012 that, from a current perspective, improved the political context and resulted in policy and funding changes in Edgecombe and Nash counties.

Early Years 1992-2001—Context Activities

- Early leaders who wrote the first Smart Start application shared organizational beliefs including a commitment to strategically plan, a commitment to evaluation and a belief that DEPC could potentially be a systems builder and game changer. They also valued relationship building and working across class, race and county lines and incorporated these values into the action and conscious of DEPC who modeled these values when working with the community and with community partners.
- Many of the community leaders became part of the early DEPC Board of Directors and took responsibility for communicating their vision to the community and within their respective

organizations. Within the Board a system of subcommittees, also open to non-board members, was created expanding the number of people sharing the DEPC vision.

- A Community Fellows grassroots leadership development program was strategically planned and implemented initially linking 25 new leaders/advocates to DEPC. In recognition of the uniqueness and potential impact of the program, the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation selected the Community Fellows program to participate in a 3-year leadership development grant for grassroots initiatives in the southeast.
- After being located for two years in space donated by one of the school systems, DEPC purchased a three-story, vacate YWCA in a struggling downtown neighborhood in Edgecombe County and renovated it as a combination of offices and a family resource center. This shifted the public perception from DEPC as a temporary, grant-funded organization to an organization that was committed to the community and accomplishing its mission over the long-term.
- Community events were implemented in the new family resource center to showcase DEPC, early care providers and the funded programs and services. These included expos highlighting program services, an open house celebration for the new building and a fifth anniversary celebration. These events, designed to build the public will in support high quality early childhood education as the anchor of the local education system, often lasted more than one day and included keynote speakers and resources from across the state.
- Information materials were created including “Did You Know” fact sheets that informed the community about local early childhood/family and early education statistics as well as the gradual impact DEPC was having on these statistics.
- Efforts were made to develop personal relationships with local media and keep them informed of local, state and national and state activities, events and information related to programs or early childhood issues such as the brain research. As a result, they began to seek out DEPC as the resource for information about similar topics.
- Multiple media strategies were utilized to get the word out including participation in chamber of commerce events; production of a PSA video for television stations serving the area; brochures and a newsletter; presentations at local and state meetings, events and conferences; and the first DEPC website.
- Family Night Out events were held monthly at DEPC to bring families into the building for education, resource information and fun. In addition, DEPC opened the building free of charge to community groups to use for meetings and events as long as they were working toward DEPC’s mission.

- After North Carolina began developing new child care rating standards that focused not only on health and safety but also on quality and teacher/director education, DEPC began to strategically plan with child care providers to alleviate concerns, problem solve and create a plan to help centers and homes meet the new standards.
- In 1997, using the tagline, “For Every Child”, DEPC implemented it’s first major fundraising campaign to diversify its funding base and develop general support for DEPC as an organization working to improve the quality of life for all children and families.
- A Champions for Children advocacy group was created to inform and advocate for child/family issues, DEPC and Smart Start on both a local and state level.
- Decision made that the organization’s brand would be “Down East Partnership for Children” with credit given to “Smart Start” as a funding source to help organization stay focused on a diverse resource base.
- In Rocky Mount’s successful effort to be designated an All American City, DEPC was one of three projects of “critical importance to [the] community” including Carolina Gateway Partnerships and Rocky Mount Edgecombe-Nash Education Cooperative. DEPC was described as providing and coordinating “programs that focus on critical area problems: how to deliver health, education, child care and social programs to our children and parents.” (www.rockymountnc.gov/allamerica.html)
- After the flooding and devastation of Hurricane Floyd, DEPC served as a distribution center for the Red Cross; worked with FEMA to help families access resources; held community-wide meetings to coordinate flood relief, recovery and re-building of the service delivery system; and acted as the financial manager for funds donated to rebuild a local family resource center. During this period, many new friends were added to DEPC’s network and DEPC was established as a “backbone” organization in the community.

2001-2012—Context Activities

- In order to raise money for building renovations and a new roof, a development committee was formed that was led by two individuals well known locally for their commitment to worthwhile projects. With 45 bi-partisan volunteers soliciting funds and business and professional sponsors hosting a fund raising event that featured the governor’s wife as the keynote speaker, this *Raise the Roof* campaign brought not only new moneyed community leaders to DEPC, it also broadened the base of community support for early education.
- NC Partnership for Children on a state level and DEPC on a local level began building awareness of the economics of child care, promoting the economic importance of the child care industry and the link between quality of child care and educational success of the future workforce.

- With the implementation of Ready Schools, the talking point of “launching every child as a healthy lifelong learner by the end of third grade” was created to describe the purpose and value of an aligned high quality early childhood education system.
- Made strategic decision to sharpen the focus from children, ages 0-18 to children, ages 0-8 to highlight DEPC’s commitment to the importance of a birth-grade 3 system of early education, including education and transition best practices that cross the kindergarten divide.
- Began to focus awareness and programmatic structure on four aspects of an early education system—community engagement, transition, ready schools and a quality early childhood education, ages 0-8.
- The concept of “ready schools” was promoted with the school systems and the state to build support for implementation of the Ready Schools Initiative.
- Disaggregated the local school data by race and class and shared the results at a “State of the Child in Edgecombe and Nash Counties” presentation to business and agency representatives, school personnel, child care professionals, parents and community leaders. Implemented an annual “State of the Child” presentation during the Week of the Young Child to share local child and family data and advocate for support of DEPC, child/family issues and early childhood education.
- Results from the NC Partnership for Children’s *Performance Based Incentive System* (PBIS) standards that report Nash and Edgecombe counties’ annual progress in specific early childhood and early education issues were disseminated at business expos, state of the child presentations, outreach events and child care conferences. Examples of tracked issues include quality of child care, teacher/director education levels and stability, and child placement.
- Launched a series of study circles in local communities with diverse stakeholders to focus on creating a community culture of learning and develop ideas about how to make this shift happen in a context of race, class and cultural issues and their impact on the success of young children.
- Supported development and provided initial leadership for a Latino-Hispanic Committee of local leaders to assess needs and share resource information to support the local Latino-Hispanic community. Also reached out to the Spanish-speaking community by using interpreters during meetings, translating written materials and encouraging funded partners to do the same.
- Through community awareness efforts built public understanding of the importance and meaning of high quality early education with the goal to create demand for high quality care.
- Began to regularly participate in local business workforce education summits. This raised awareness of the impact of quality early education on success in school and in the workforce and created a framework to help the business community understand that the early childhood system was the anchor of the larger education system.

- Began targeting outreach/communication efforts toward social media, online e-blasts and through an updated, more interactive website.
- *Leandro*, a long-running public school finance case ruling, upheld North Carolina’s efforts to provide high quality early childhood education for at-risk 4-year-old children as part of a sound basic education with third grade reading a benchmark (2011). This ruling also validated the work and infrastructure of Smart Start and the foundation that supports the NC pre-K component.

Building the Context—Outcomes

DEPC’s activities over 20 years set the stage for an improved political context producing the policy and funding changes needed to create and sustain long-term change for children and families. These activities led to the following outcomes.

- There is a stronger, shared vision for a coordinated family service system and a coordinated, pre-K-grade 3 early education system that is understood and communicated. Committed, trained leaders from all race, class, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds share DEPC’s vision and mission within their local communities, at their workplace and places of worship, and with their friends and families and are willing to advocate for early childhood issues at a local and state level.
- There is a culture of acceptance around quality child care, parenting and smooth transitions.
- DEPC is trusted as an organization that collaborates across race, class and geographic boundaries to create long-term change for all children and families. DEPC is also seen as the leader in building early childhood education and family systems and creating and implementing early childhood education best practices.
- The public perception of DEPC has grown from little or no knowledge to “top of the list” involvement in community planning and the “go-to” resource for families needing information and services and for the local media seeking information about local, state and national policies, practices, politics and data related to early childhood, families and early childhood education.
- The outcome that focuses on the importance of educational success by the end of third grade as a foundation for continued success is established as a community benchmark

Establishing Program and Service Components

*Establishing high performance **programs and services** within the system that produce results for system beneficiaries.* (Coffman)

The following narrative outlines the DEPC programs and services from 1992 to 2001 and from 2001 to 2012 that, from a current perspective, are producing results for children, families and the community.

All programs and services created over the past 20 years have been based on adherence to DEPC's goals, which have ranged from the following in 1994—*Universal Access to High Quality Early Education; Improved Parenting and Parent Involvement in Education; Elimination of Barriers to Services; and Improved Transition to Public School* to the current goals established in 2007—*Unique Support for Each Child and Family; High Quality Early Care and Education Environments; and Access to Coordinated Community Resources*.

It must be noted that many programs created in the early years were time limited; discontinued for various reasons, including resolution of a particular problem; budget cuts; and narrowing DEPC's focus during a strategic planning process. Many of these programs impacted planning through lessons learned from their success and failings; some became the foundation for new initiatives; and others were spun off to other organizations after being incubated by DEPC.

Early Years 1992-2001—Component Activities

Improving Child Care and Building a Child Care System

- Created a Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) program to implement and manage services related to helping families meet child care referral needs, improving the quality of child care and collecting local child care data. Over time CCR&R implemented strategies to inform and educate families and the community about the importance of and “how to choose” quality.
- Added a Quality Improvement Program to provide technical assistance and training to improve the quality of child care programs including use of the ECERS (Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale) as an assessment/technical assistance tool; a Lending Library to provide materials and support for programs working to increase or maintain their early childhood environment; and a bi-annual child care conference.
- Implemented a registration project for unregulated family homes offering participation incentives and providing technical assistance and training to help them raise quality standards and become part of a regulated system.
- To stabilize early childhood teacher turnover and quality, implemented WAGES\$ project that provided salary supplements to child care teachers and directors based on educational achievement and longevity. This project also collected and maintained workforce data.
- Created a Child Care Scholarship Program for families who were working and/or in school who needed help paying for child care but didn't meet social services subsidy requirements. Allowed families to access regulated child care while maintaining their economic viability. Later added requirement that participating children must attend child care facilities rated 4-stars or above on a 5-star rating scale. This increased access to quality child care for at-risk children and encouraged potential scholarship providers to increase their quality.

- As funded programs, both county social services subsidy programs were required to provide “choosing quality” information and education to families seeking subsidized child care. This provided minimal guidance for families at a time when the state had no required standards for placement or quality for subsidized children.
- Funded literacy program through local libraries to provide weekly story time and literature and language enrichment to children in child care centers and homes. Program also included training in story reading for the providers and a rotating book collection.
- Updated the DEPC playground to be a model, developmentally appropriate playground for children, ages 0-5.

Building Transition and Linking Early Care with School System

- Funded a Preschool/Kindergarten Transition Program in one school system and school-based Home School Coordinators in the other school system to support transition activities between home/early care and the schools. Gradually both transition initiatives became preschool kindergarten transition programs with home-school contacts who identified families with young children in their school catchment area and assessed readiness needs, made referrals and linked them with their child’s future elementary school. Both programs began to reach out to child care programs by providing special activities on-site at the child care facility, encouraging them to visit the school and inviting them to participate in early education planning and professional development.

Building a Parent/Family Service and Support System

- Created a Family Resource Program to manage DEPC’s family resource center and to develop and coordinate a system of family resources centers located in high need communities in both counties. Funded family resource centers designed to provide services for families and children based on local input in those high need communities. Collaborated with these centers to build a family resource network to share information and resources and to coordinate funding.
- Created a Parent Information Center with on-site support staff to help families access parenting and child development resource materials based on their needs and to act as a referral source to other services.
- Provided or funded multiple family support services including parenting classes, training and support groups; respite care for families in crises; developmentally appropriate playgroups with an education/support component for stay-at home parents; and a fatherhood initiative.
- Added a requirement to the Scholarship Program that families must participate in parent education to improve parenting knowledge and skills. Gradually expanded this requirement to include education offered in other venues and participation in their child’s early education experience.

- Implemented first effort to create a comprehensive database of family resource information through a local library.
- Funded a two-county health consortium based in one county's health department to coordinate community-based health services for children, ages 0-5 and their families. Services included health education and oversight of a mobile health van to serve children and families in underserved areas of the county.
- Funded a variety of health initiatives to ensure "ready children." These included vision and lead screening; creation of a coordinated system of lead removal and abatement; education about the hazards of lead poisoning; and on-site substance abuse counseling for pregnant women/mothers with young children attending a local health department.

2001-2012—Component Activities

Refining and Strengthening the Early Care and Education System

- When newly elected Governor Mike Easley instituted More at Four (MAF) as a statewide preschool program for at-risk 4-year-old children, the superintendents of both local schools systems opted to have DEPC manage the planning and implementation process. DEPC subsequently supported giving child care centers (as well as the school system) the opportunity to apply to be MAF sites in spite of the strict teacher education and curriculum standards. This linked the centers and schools as professionals working to become qualified MAF providers operating within an integrated system.
- DEPC began to focus on "ready schools" with the goal of building a system of schools ready to meet the unique needs of all children and families. The "ready school" focus included family and community engagement, education best practices, transition activities and links to the child care system.
- CCR&R became the regional hub for infant-toddler, school-age and behavior specialists with additional staff to provide technical assistance and training in a five county region. This increased DEPC's capacity to provide local services.
- Quality Improvement began targeting technical assistance and training to child care programs committed to achieving and maintaining high quality early care and education. This was a transition from the expectation that *all* child care programs could/would achieve high quality to prioritizing services based on a program's capacity and desire to succeed and establishing a smaller, better trained network of providers.
- Implemented a business institute to enhance the skills of family child care owners and a leadership program to build business skills of child care centers.
- Quality Improvement added technical assistance and training to improve physical activity, healthy eating and outdoor learning environments in child care programs. DEPC also funded a nutrition and

physical activity program (NAPSACC) in a local health department to improve the child care health practices in both counties.

- The preschool kindergarten transition programs based in both school systems began identifying and working with child care programs and other early childhood educators to create smooth transitions to schools.
- DEPC reinforced the transition-planning requirement for NC Pre-K (formerly MAF) classes and added transition plans as a requirement for Scholarship Program providers.

Refining and Strengthening the Family Support System

- For greater impact for families, implemented *Incredible Years* and *Circle of Parents* as evidence-based programs with a social-emotional focus. Began to focus on incorporating other programs and services to impact social-emotional development.
- Transitioned Scholarship Program from targeting child care scholarships to all children, ages 0-5, to children, ages 0-3, to strengthen access and quality for infants and toddlers and establish a continuum of subsidized care with NC Pre-K and Head Start serving 4 year old children.
- Implemented health programs to impact the physical activity and nutrition of children, age 2-4, including classes to teach families how to eat healthy, developing the DEPC playground as an outdoor learning environment and coordinating an on-site farmers market to help the local community access fresh fruits and vegetables.

Establishing Program and Service Components—Outcomes

DEPC's program and service components over 20 years are producing results and long-term change for children and families leading. These activities led to the following outcomes.

- New programs that focused on strengthening families and building an early education system have been created. The quality and/or functioning of existing family service, child care and early education programs has improved.
- All programs that continued to be part of DEPC, have built their capacity to offer quality services, function effectively and efficiently while having the most impact on the long-term strategic plan.
- Many newly implemented programs provide immediate beneficial outcomes for children, families and early childhood professionals. (Examples: Parents contacting the CCR&R immediately got help finding child care; families who didn't qualify for social services subsidy qualified for scholarship program and were able to work and/or stay in school; teachers and directors developed skills and increased their income in the process of improving quality.)
- A coordinated subsidy system designed to maximize resources and make subsidized child care and education more accessible and better able to meet child/family needs has been implemented.

- Family First has been implemented as a two-county family resource and referral system and as a tool to track child/family service statistics including community needs and resources.

Making Connections Across Systems

*Creating strong and effective **linkages** across system component that further improve results for system beneficiaries*

The following outlines activities that have created system connections from 1992 to 2001 and from 2001 to 2012 that, from a current perspective, created outcomes that are improving service delivery.

Early Years 1992-2001—Connections Activities

- Board members were solicited across class, race and county lines. Board committees, which included non-members from the community, agencies and organizations supported planning and implementation of program initiatives (family, child care, information). Board meetings were designed to enhance connections and system alignment.
- When contracting with funded programs, DEPC negotiated strategies that collaboratively linked agencies/organizations, such as requesting that an initiative funded in one health department also be funded or provided in the other health department. Worked collaboratively to plan services that built relationships across systems, met the needs of the community, focused on improving systems and, when appropriate, equally served both counties.
- Added a Family Resource Committee to the Board structure to share resources and information about family issues, needs and resources.
- Implemented a program operations committee for funded programs to network, share information, participate in professional development, and build across-county collaborative relationships.
- Held outreach events in collaboration with funded programs and community partners to build a sense of teamwork, that everyone had an equally important role to play in the effort to improve the quality of life for children and families.
- Worked with the two-county subsidy services to implement the DEPC Scholarship Program to ensure the programs aligned but did not overlap or compete. While difficult at times, this built the foundation for later creation of a coordinated subsidy system.
- Created a Family Resource Network to connect family resource centers with each other in order to align services, share information and resources, and participate in training and technical assistance based on family support principles.

2001-2012—Connections Activities

- As part of SPARK planning grant created multiple planning workgroups of people, agencies and organizations from both counties that built a foundation for other work/connections. (Examples: a

readiness/transition workgroup to create a long-term transition plan; a collaboration workgroup to develop strategies to get and keep key stakeholders involved in the planning process; an information and referral workgroup to assess information/referral across systems and determine what was needed to make them more transparent and accessible; and a coordinated subsidy workgroup to develop a long term plans to align and maximize subsidy resources, make them transparent and accessible and identify service gaps.)

- Coordinated Subsidy System created to align subsidy services and maximize resources for families. The system was built around people collecting and sharing family information to ensure that all children received the best, most appropriate subsidized child care. The system was also built around an online database that was accessible to all coordinated subsidy programs. The system calculated the services each child was eligible for and generated a coordinated waiting list to ensure children didn't fall through the cracks and families received other needed services.
- Family First system developed with input from agencies and organizations in both counties who contributed (and continue to contribute) updated information and resources to ensure that families have the most up to date support. Both social service agencies have been trained to access/utilize the Family First system as a way to access and utilize a shared waiting list for all subsidized care.
- Launched a system of ready schools to help individual schools implement ready schools best practices and to promote and build system support for ready schools components including family engagement, links with child care and transition practices. Ready Schools also implemented a Transition Alignment Team to focus on district level transition.
- Implemented the Healthy Kids Collaborative composed of community, government, medical and agency leaders to identify and create policy and practice changes in the areas of physical activity and nutrition for children, ages 2-4 to prevent childhood obesity.
- Launched Ready Communities to provide outreach to families and communities to link them to resources and services.

Making Connections Across Systems--Outcomes

DEPC's connections activities over 20 years have created strong and effective linkages across system components that have created results for children and families. These activities led to the following outcomes.

- Families, child care and schools work together more often to share information, training, skills and competencies. More families and community members are engaged with their local school.
- Family service programs work together more often with shared goals for children and families.
- The agencies and organizations that are part of the Coordinated Subsidy System coordinate eligibility requirements, referrals and data. Access to the Family First system makes this more efficient.

- Local government, the medical community, family services agencies and organizations, the faith community and early education providers work together to establish policies and practices that will reduce the childhood obesity rate in children, ages 2-4.
- Community involvement and volunteer support for DEPC has increased.
- Collaboration between the two school systems has increased; both systems share information and resources about ready schools and transition practices.
- System and program components are increasingly layered so child/family services are provided at a sufficient dosage to make an impact. (Example: a scholarship child, whose parent participates in an evidence-based, social-emotional focused parent program, also attends a 5-star center with teachers who receive a salary supplement for longevity, participate in an evidence-based, social-emotional focused teacher training and receive quality improvement technical assistance including healthy nutrition and physical activity support.)

Creating Infrastructure

*Developing the **supports** systems need to function effectively and with quality*

The following outlines DEPC activities from 1992 to 2001 and from 2001 to 2012 that, from a current perspective, have built a strong and effective infrastructure.

Early Years 1992-2001—Infrastructure Activities

Organizational Development, Operations Infrastructure

- Because Smart Start funding was not received until the second year of implementation, the Edgecombe-Nash community planners had time to establish an organizational infrastructure that made it possible for DEPC to manage the funding more effectively and efficiently.
- In order to move the mission forward, created a pattern of strategically identifying needs; investing in, implementing and evaluating programs; and regrouping and re-investing as needed. This early pattern evolved into grants and contracts management processes and an investment model based on making strategic choices when developing and managing multiple funding sources.
- In order to move the organization forward, built model of investing in the infrastructure by adding staff, programs and policies/procedures as the need was identified and funding was available. Developed process to programmatically and fiscally monitor funded programs to ensure quality programs and financial oversight. Fidelity of processes ensured that the organization functioned successfully and effectively.
- DEPC's first offices were in a space donated by one of the school systems. DEPC purchased it's own building and renovated it as offices and a family resource center. This building became the backbone of DEPC's investment in the community and in the future.

- Awarded a Mary Reynolds Babcock Organizational Development Grant to strengthen DEPC as a “learning organization that continually reflects upon its actions and adjusts its strategies accordingly.” Created 3-5 year objectives that were evaluated as part of the 2000 strategic planning process.
- “Development” became a key component of DEPC structure with all staff sharing responsibility. A development team was created to research funding resources, assess needs aligned with the strategic plan, and develop funding proposals.

Program Development and Evaluation

- Involved the community when developing the original DEPC vision, mission and goals and planning funding needs. Ongoing collaborative strategic planning became integral to identifying community needs and service gaps and designing programs and services to meet those needs while aligned with and maintaining focus on DEPC’s long-term vision, mission and goals.
- Implemented program development component to manage and coordinate the activities of funded programs and to develop, implement and manage a grant process to strategically fund new programs aligned with the DEPC mission and goals. A program coordinator was added with technical assistance to ensure programs provided quality services and fulfilled their obligations.
- NC Partnership for Children initiated a quarterly and annual output/outcome reporting requirement.
- Evaluation Committee was created to guide implementation of an evaluation component. An evaluation consultant was hired to collect/report quarterly data and analyze end of year data as well as provide technical assistance to help programs create annual outputs and outcomes. Consultant introduced focus on continuous quality improvement of programs and services and PRISM (*Program Review for Internal Self Management*) to assess program infrastructure and build organizational capacity. Evaluation Coordinator was later added.
- NC Partnership for Children implemented *Performance Based Incentive System* (PBIS) standards that local partnerships were required to meet.
- Funded a two-county wide transportation planning process to assess transportation needs and resources and make recommendations.

Leaders and Leadership

- Implemented the Community Fellows Program to build the skills of grassroots leaders to link families and children to child/family and early childhood education information, resources and services.
- “Building leaders” becomes an underlying element of the DEPC culture beginning with implementation of the Community Fellows Program. This extended to identifying people to take leadership roles on an ongoing basis and incorporating leadership development as part of training board members, parents, child care providers and school leaders.

- DEPC committed to building the capacity of the staff by providing in-service training, annual training/planning retreats and by allocating a training budget for each staff.

Communication and Outreach

- Communications became a key component of DEPC structure with all staff sharing responsibility for communication and outreach.
- Created written communications including brochures, “fact sheets” and child care maps. Informed the media from both counties about events, new initiatives, new funding, celebrations and successes. Wrote articles for the local newspapers including a column from Executive Director. Began producing an annual report.
- Offered staff facilitated tours of DEPC with a presentation about programs and services and an information packet. Opened the DEPC family resource center for program expos, celebrations and Week of the Young Child events. Participated in chamber of commerce business expos and other community events and made presentations to community groups, organizations and faith-based institutions and at state conferences. Trained Board, Board committee members and community partners to be DEPC speakers. Provided interviews for local television and radio.
- Created *Connections* newsletter to provide information and connect the community to services provided by DEPC and funded programs and *Building Blocks* newsletter to provide information on training, education and best practices for child care providers.
- Received a technology grant that was used to assess DEPC and funded partners’ technology needs, link the Community Fellows to the internet and begin development of DEPC’s first website.
- Community Fellows began to reach out to communities across both counties in areas previously not linked to DEPC. Provided information about DEPC and funded programs and linked families to resources.
- Created a development process that included a communication and marketing committee of community members. An annual fund campaign was established that raised money and communicated DEPC’s mission, goals and outcomes to the community. Expanded the annual report to highlight the people connected to DEPC, the results of the work and the financial status of the organization.

2001-2012—Infrastructure Activities

Organizational Development, Operations Infrastructure

- Submitted a proposal and was approved for a planning grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation for their national SPARK Initiative. As a result, DEPC received a five-year grant in conjunction with the NC Partnership for Children and another North Carolina partnership to plan and implement initiatives to ensure ready children, ready families, ready schools and ready communities. DEPC also received

funding from two other national foundations, the Surdna Foundation and Heron Foundation. Surdna funding helped strengthen the family home system while Heron provided general operating/core mission support.

- Built solid infrastructure that supports DEPC's ability to maximize resources and create and manage the change envisioned by the community by ensuring strong program and financial management. Includes contracts and grants management processes; a transparent financial model based on seeking, developing and managing multiple funding sources; a program development system that strategically plans, implements, coordinates and monitors funded programs; and an evaluation system that produces, manages and communicates data.
- Committed to strategically building programs and systems and building the capacity of the people responsible for making the infrastructure work.
- Established an organizational culture unafraid of change and willing to adapt. (Example: When funding was lost, a key staff member left, a program didn't move the mission forward, or the organizational structure didn't work, DEPC evaluated the situation, identified the problem, created a solution and then moved forward or re-grouped as necessary.)
- Implemented HR policies and procedures including a hiring process that included input from both management and potential coworkers; a supervision model that promoted coaching and professional development; an annual review process that allowed for updating job descriptions as the context shifted; and training needed to support continued professional development.

Program Development and Evaluation

- Collaborative strategic planning continued on an ongoing basis. A 5-year strategic plan was completed in 2000 with a more in-depth evaluation process to measure accomplishments. The plan was updated in 2005, 2007 and 2011.
- Collaborative planning became an integral part of the organizational culture. All programs were assessed in relation to quality of services, achievement of outcomes and alignment with DEPC vision, mission and attainment of goals and strategic plan benchmarks.
- Created a grants management process to critically review new initiatives and funding sources using criteria that included alignment with the mission, goals and benchmarks, "fit" with the DEPC model, sustainability and ability to meet community needs and create long-term change.
- Continued to provide both programmatic and evaluation training and technical assistance to provide support and build capacity. Implemented annual program, evaluation and financial monitoring to ensure quality assurance, fiscal responsibility, adherence to contract and annual outcomes measures.
- Utilizing a Ready Schools Innovations Award process, implemented a Ready Schools Initiative to create an early elementary system ready to meet the unique needs of all children and families.

Provided coaching and technical assistance to participating schools to ensure they implemented strategies based on the *High/Scope Ready School Assessment*.

- Began collecting child, ready school and family engagement data from a cohort of SPARK children over a 4-year period in identified ready schools and disseminated results to the community. Collected and evaluated family engagement data from both schools systems.
- Developed Family First as an information and referral system designed to connect families to resources and services that best meet their needs. Family data is tracked to follow-up on customer service, ensure needs are met, and to maintain a long-term connection. Community needs and resources are tracked to strategically plan how to meet needs at the child, family and community level.
- With a Smart Start legislative requirement to provide evidence-based/informed programs, researched and implemented program models that aligned with community needs and organizational capacity. Provided technical assistance and training to help programs understand evidence-based practices and model fidelity. Began monitoring for model fidelity.
- Evaluation culture became well established with a focus not only on ensuring quality and meeting outcomes and goals but also on collecting and analyzing data as a way to drive decision-making. DEPC and funded partners began to use data to impact planning and as a way to inform the community about issues, concerns and successes.
- Worked with National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) to review the evidence base for DEPC's support system components (evaluation, program development, communication/outreach and leadership development) resulting in a well-documented report indicating that without a framework of backbone support components, long-term program implementation will not be sustainable or scalable.

Leaders and Leadership

- Community Fellows Program transitioned from generalized recruitment and training of community leaders to become part of Ready Communities. Ready Communities was designed to identify, train and coach leaders to provide outreach and take action on birth to age 8 issues. (Examples of action: Connecting families to ready schools, sponsoring nutrition classes, making referrals to Family First, managing a kindergarten door-to-door canvassing, supporting scholarship parents, etc.)
- DEPC's organizational structure and value system encouraged the emergence of leaders who cross race, class, culture, geographic and organization lines. (Examples: Champions are asked to take leadership roles during legislative advocacy events. Self-selected parent leaders are key to implementation of the *Circle of Parents* group. Parents interested in sponsoring a community playgroup participate in playgroup leaders training. A director's group builds the leadership capacity of child care directors leading to higher quality and support for teachers. Potential Board members

first develop their leadership skills by working on board and non-board committees. Kindergarten teachers have been singled out to participate in the Power of K state training initiatives.)

Communication and Outreach

- Communications continued to be a key component of DEPC structure. Created a communications plan and hired a communications director to manage process until funding was cut. Staff continued to share responsibility to link outreach and communication with all DEPC work to present a consistent message to the community.
- Created Ready Communities with focus on providing outreach to businesses and the community, particularly to the Latino-Hispanic and faith-based communities. Coached volunteers and leaders to increase their capacity to take action to impact children and families.
- Continued written communications, presentations and outreach. Increased use of social media including use of Facebook, e-blasts and an updated, more interactive website.
- Developed language to maintain focus on key issues: “launching healthy, lifelong learners by the end of third grade”, “for every child”, “ready children, ready families, ready schools and ready communities”, “family engagement.”
- Implemented concept of “family engagement.” (Examples: linking families through Family First to services and empowering them to seek resources; linking with community groups to educate them about child-family information and initiatives; promoting family engagement as a component of Ready Schools including building community school teams in ready schools.)

Creating Infrastructure—Outcomes

Over 20 years, DEPC has created an effective infrastructure that has supported the ability of systems to function effectively and with quality. These activities led to the following outcomes.

Organizational Development, Operations Infrastructure

- Organizational culture is one of continuous quality improvement and adaptability, reorganizing and reinventing as needed to be more efficient and effective or to manage financial or infrastructure changes.
- The organization is established as a backbone organization that generates and manages community resources for maximum return on investment.
- Program development and evaluation components ensure that all programs are strategically planned, monitored and evaluated for quality and for contract and financial requirements, and are moving the vision and mission forward.
- DEPC has a strong infrastructure that diversifies and maximizes funding sources and manages the processes needed to create and implement programs, services and systems changes that align with the

strategic plan. DEPC has a history of diversified funders including local donors; local, state and federal government; and local, state and national foundations.

- Qualified staff are recruited, hired and supported by a supervision model that promotes coaching, input into their work expectations and job descriptions, and training and technical assistance to support their ability to “do the work.”
- There is more community involvement and an increase in volunteers as local support increased during a period of substantial budget cuts (2008-12).

Program Development and Evaluation

- Has management infrastructure that oversees the development, implementation and monitoring of all programs.
- Has evaluation system that supports the use of data across programs, initiatives and systems and shares that data with the community.
- Parents and child care consumers, community members, staff from partner organizations, and DEPC Board and staff actively participate in planning, strategizing and decision-making.
- There are shared standards, skills and competencies across programs and services built from shared professional development, training and technical assistance.
- DEPC is the hub for planning, developing and implementing early childhood and family best practices and programs.

Leaders and Leadership

- Community leaders provide outreach in the community, connect families to services and resources through Family First and are invested in “taking action” on behalf of children and families. More of these leaders are recruited from the business, faith and Latino-Hispanic communities.
- During recent funding cuts, the leaders became an integral part of the DEPC infrastructure by increasing their volunteer support of DEPC’s strategic plan and activities.
- Established a “community of practice” group that meets twice yearly to develop the leadership skills and build the network of early education practitioners.

Communications and outreach

- Communications and outreach is a shared responsibility of the greater DEPC community: staff, consumers, advocates, Board, community leaders.
- DEPC informs and educates the community about programs and services, child/family issues, early child development, early education, and family support; links the early education system to education, economics and workforce development issues.
- Data is used to support communication.

- Families and the community are linked to services, programs and information through family engagement practices including Family First.

Going to Scale

*Ensuring a **comprehensive** system is available to as many people as possible so it produces broad and inclusive results for system beneficiaries.*

The following outlines DEPC activities from 1992 to 2012 that, from a current perspective, are ensuring a comprehensive system of services.

1992-2012—Scale Activities

- Part of the early vision and goals was to eventually “go to scale”, to create across-county systems changes that would ensure all children and families have an opportunity for success.
- Built Family Resource Network in first efforts to ensure a comprehensive system of family services.
- Trained community leaders to take information about issues, services and resources into their local communities.
- During strategic planning processes made the decision to go deeper not broader and to prioritize focus on high quality early childhood education, Ready Schools, family support and family engagement.
- The agencies and organizations of the Coordinated Subsidy System coordinate eligibility requirements, referrals and family information. The Family First database allows programs in the subsidy system to access this information more efficiently.
- An *early care system* with teachers and directors focused on building and maintaining quality was created. The *early elementary education system* began connecting with child care programs and worked to create ready schools and incorporate transition and family engagement standards in school improvement plans. The two systems (early/child care and early elementary) are linked and an *early childhood education system, pre-K-grade 3*, has begun to take shape.
- Worked to ensure that funded programs became an integral component of the managing agency or organization. When funding for the preschool-kindergarten transition program was reduced due to budget cuts, both systems continued to fund key aspects of the programs.
- Connected and/or supported funded programs’ efforts to diversify and/or expand their funding.
- Trained playgroup parents to sponsor playgroups in communities outside of DEPC.
- Reached out to faith-based institutions and the Latino-Hispanic community to train them to take community-based action and provide service and resource information to children and families within their communities.
- Aligned the child and family support system through Family First by sharing resource information and making it available and accessible.

- To ensure that resource information was available, created multiple resource maps, including maps of child care locations, places to play and a GIS resource map.

Going to Scale—Outcomes

Based on the following outcomes, DEPC is creating a comprehensive system of services that is accessible and available in order to create and sustain long-term change for children and families.

- There is organizational and community understanding that “it’s not about the money”; the work will happen regardless of the funding source because the work is community driven and owned.
- A leadership network of involved and committed community leaders and volunteers stretches across both Edgecombe and Nash counties.
- Schools have taken ownership of transition and other components of the early education system; program components have continued even after multiple superintendent changes in the two districts over 20 years.
- There is widespread acceptance of the need for the optimal early education bundle of services to make an impact on long-term education and economic development goals.
- Based on PBIS results the community has changed since 1993 in areas such as percent of regulated child care spaces and children receiving subsidized child care in regulated programs; quality of early care and education; and education attainment of child care teachers and administrators.

IMPACT OF WORK—NEXT PHASE

DEPC has been working for 20 years to create specific systems changes and components (an “optimal package of services”) that when linked together and provided at sufficient scale can impact children, families and communities and create long-term change. These key systems changes and components are listed below. The impact of this systems initiative is evident in the outcomes described for each of Coffman’s areas of change.

- A coordinated system of family support focusing on meeting the health and well being, education and social emotional needs of children and family and empowering them to be self-sufficient. (Family support and health)
- A high quality early care and education system available and accessible to all children. (High quality early childhood education)
- Positive and seamless transitions for all children and families between care and education systems—home and care/school, care and school, grade-to-grade and school-to-school. (Vertical alignment, transitions)
- A system of schools ready to meet the unique needs of all children and families. (Ready schools)

- Communities and families engaged and working together to support all children and the early childhood education system. (Family and community engagement)

Without the backbone of the DEPC infrastructure these systems changes and components would either not exist or not be sustained. The impact would be less successful without being championed by a DEPC infrastructure that has simultaneously built the context within the community through communication and outreach efforts and identified, trained and maintained leaders who support and advocate for the work. The impact would be less evident without the back-up of organizational infrastructure that strategically develops, implements, monitors and evaluates programs and services based on need, quality and alignment with the long-term mission and builds the capacity of the people managing the programs and processes. The impact would not exist without a financial structure that diversifies and maximizes funding sources and effectively and efficiently manages resources.

However, the work is not completed. DEPC is looking at “the next steps” to continue to move the organization forward and strengthen, expand and stabilize the impacts of the DEPC “optimal package of services.” The following describes within Coffman’s framework some of the next phase work that will continue to build the optimal package of services—

Context—Next phase

- Build context for social-emotional component as impact on launching learners—Promote and advocate for education policy and best practices related to children’s social-emotional development and the impact on learning by the end of grade 3.
- Build context for family engagement component as impact on launching learners—Develop relationships with area businesses to develop business understanding of the need to “promote/allow” their workforce to participate in the life of their children’s school.
- Build context for continued focus on building high quality early childhood education system—Emphasize that high quality early childhood education is part of economic development, part of the community’s economic future. Increase community understanding of high quality and raise expectation for quality in order to increase demand.
- Build context of the value of a work-family balance to sustain workforce—Promote concept that a sustainable workforce is dependent on long-term workforce development. Educate employers about family support policies and practices such as flex time and dependent care.
- Build context that healthy children are more successful learners—Use data and research to promote impact of physical and social-emotional health on educational success.
- Build context of importance of collecting, understanding and using data—Change community culture and build people’s capacity to look at data. Use data/research to develop and promote message that all children do better in school when their family is engaged.

Components—Next Phase

- Build social emotional component as an impact on launching learners—Implement *Incredible Years Teacher* for scholarship and NC Pre-K teachers and work with the school systems to promote social-emotional professional development for K-2 teachers.
- Build family engagement component—Promote professional development of early care and school-age teachers and district level leadership focused on understanding the positive impact of family/community engagement on student achievement and removing barriers to family engagement.
- Build high quality early childhood education system component—Plan and implement initiatives to ensure directors and teachers maintain their certification. Develop plan to move 1-3-star rated child care programs to a 4-star level.
- Build family support component—Plan and implement a family development model for scholarship families that replaces the current parent education model; this model meets family needs by moving them through a continuum of support including assessing needs, providing services and re-evaluating needs.
- Build Ready Schools component—Cross kindergarten divide to link physical health to Ready Schools so that “all children are healthy and launched as life-long learners by the end of third grade.”
- Use data to expand and strengthen the components of the early childhood education system—Share the data collected through the W.K. Kellogg evaluation project as a basis for improving the components of the system, including early care and education, transition activities, social-emotional development, family engagement, health and Ready Communities and Ready Schools.

Connections—Next Phase

- Build connections across multiple systems through joint use agreements—Promote joint use agreements between local government and schools as a way to create venues for an active lifestyle for children and families, build community and family engagement, ensure smoother transitions, and model engaging environments.
- Build social-emotional connections—Create plan to link children (ages 3-5) whose families participate in *Incredible Years-Parent* with early education teachers who participate in *Incredible Years-Teacher* with the goal to create a “critical mass” of children who have adult caregivers trained in the same social-emotional support model.
- Build family engagement connections—Continue transition work with both school systems to create standardized transition plans.
- Build Ready Schools connections—Expand transition work to include aligning home/child care to school environments and adding school-to-school and grade-to-grade transition work. Facilitate conversations with schools and child care to encourage/model collaborative relationship. Expand

efforts on the school district level to ensure that ready school policies and best practices are implemented and instituted system-wide.

- Build family support connections—Strengthen health-related resource and referral information and collection of health-related data in Family First.

Infrastructure—Next Phase

Organization Development/Operations Infrastructure

- Diversify funding—Continue to seek funding from multiple sources to strategically build components and the system, including increasing core mission support.
- Strengthen DEPC’s infrastructure—Analyze technology needs and increase usage.
- Build community support for the organization—Help the community understand that DEPC’s strength is the connection between the program and financial management across the organization and across multiple funding sources.

Program Development and Evaluation

- Build program components—Implement plan to develop DEPC playground as a natural learning environment and utilize as a model for the community.
- Build early childhood education system—Focus on aligning and connecting components and offering sufficient dosage of services to make an impact and create change. Explore utilizing targeted “zones” as a strategy to get a sufficient dosage of the optimal bundle
- Utilize data—Continue to use data to ask the “right questions” and solve real problems in order to be always aware of the next point on the horizon, both evaluation and programmatic.
- Utilize Ready School Initiative as process to impact the “school side” of early childhood education system—In elementary schools in both school systems, utilize the High/Scope assessment process combined with coaching, training and technical assistance to improve scores on all ready school pathways. Evaluate and link outcomes of the High/Scope process with Ready² assessment data to facilitate systems intervention.

Leaders/Leadership

- Build capacity of staff—Incorporate evidence-based coaching model for staff who are providing technical assistance to child care providers.
- Strengthen Ready Communities—Complete implementation of new infrastructure including targeted training, identifying leaders who can act as managers, utilizing existing links to identify new leaders and linking volunteer and leadership development. Refocus work to ensure quality not quantity. Sustain current leaders and focus on building leadership capacity on ongoing basis as new people cycle into the community and programs.

- Strengthen understanding and focus of “leadership”—Promote understanding that leadership development is broader than Ready Communities and core to all DEPC programs.

Communications and Outreach

- Strengthen communications and outreach infrastructure—Review process/procedures to ensure outreach and communication efforts are aligned and that message is consistent.
- Strengthen use of communication/outreach data—Review current data collection to ensure appropriate data is being captured without duplication.

Scale—Next Phase

- Context— Explore reaching out to businesses for funding to support dependent care and other work-family balancing strategies.
- Components—Focus on aligning/connecting components and offering a sufficient “dosage” of services to create change in targeted zones.
- Connections— Make the portions of the Family First database publically accessible.
- Infrastructure—Implement new volunteer management policies and practices aligned with Ready Communities. Strengthen understanding that leadership development is core to all programs within DEPC. Increase core mission support to strengthen organizational ability to weather continuing budget storms.
- Scale—Identify and implement components, strengthen infrastructure and scale up optimal bundle of services in order to create systems change and impact individual outcomes for children and families.

CLOSING STATEMENT

Twenty years ago DEPC was asked the question, “Why your county?” and responded with a goal that included words like “universal system”, “integrated”, “family driven”, “school-linked” and “outcome-oriented.” During the W.K. Kellogg Foundation site visit in May 2012, DEPC was asked “how did DEPC get from there” in 1993 to its current early childhood education system in 2012. This narrative of DEPC’s 20-year evolution in the context of a theory of change has attempted to answer that question.