



Strategic Plan 2022-2025

(Approved by the Board of Director September 13, 2022)

INTRO

In recent years, the needs of families with young children have been in the spotlight due to challenges with accessing early care and education for babies, toddlers, and preschoolers. While these societal challenges are not new, they present an opportunity for our organization to be responsive to the evolving needs of children and families. Listening to parents, child care providers, small businesses, communities and families in order to respond optimally to support those navigating programs and services is an imperative for FIRSTSPARK to course-correct and innovate.

FIRSTSPARK has been rooted in providing support for high-quality early childhood education and has partnered with many community-based early childhood organizations on the Peninsula with state-level support. With the newly established regional approach called Ready Regions, we are positioned to expand these partnerships into the Middle Peninsula and Northern Neck. One way to meet the challenges is to make sure that both families and child care providers have the resources and support needed to educate young children in the whole region. Together we can make greater strides toward a more comprehensive, coordinated, and collaborative system of early care and education.

FIRSTSPARK will uphold its longtime practice of engaging parents, business, philanthropy and civic leaders, nonprofits, school systems, early childhood professionals, and private citizens across the region to transform early childhood programs and services to create more equitable access for families with young children birth to age five. In its “backbone” role, FIRSTSPARK values the role of community partners most involved in supporting the development of young learners. FIRSTSPARK seeks to be data informed, particularly as it relates to understanding and addressing disparities. FIRSTSPARK will amplify its commitment to families knowing that their voices and experiences must be prioritized to inform all that we do. We are committed to working with families and communities to engage their strengths and address their values as we reimagine and rebuild early care and education for all children regardless of zip code.

The focus in our regional community includes five external goals:

1. Building relationships among community partners
2. Increasing access to quality early child care and education
3. Providing more opportunities for quality improvement within early child care settings with community support

4. Strengthening (by identifying and addressing gaps) quality early childhood development services and resources, and
5. Engaging families in empowered groups so their needs and desires as parents and caregivers are prioritized

Our organization includes two internal goals:

- Ensuring we are perceived as a primary resource across education, health and human services sectors for early childhood in the region, and
- Affirming our role as a desired partner that supports program alignment and population level change leading to lasting impact in early childhood development and health across the region.

By achieving these goals, we expect to have the following impact over time and across the region:

- The region will understand the importance of early childhood education and provide resources that support the early child care system
- Early childhood education providers will have access to the resources and supports needed to provide quality child care
- Parents and caregivers will have access to quality child care without significant barriers, such as financial, location, and cultural

External Focus

Goal 1: Building relationships among community partners in child care

1. Develop community partnerships to invest in early childhood development
2. Ensure caregivers and parents know how to connect to early childhood resources

Goal 2: Increasing access to quality child care in our region

1. Collect and utilize data that effectively describes barriers to quality early childhood education and other resources, then advocate for change
2. Improve messaging around mission and desired impact to emphasize the importance of early childhood development as it relates to a strong economy

Outcomes for Goals 1 and 2:

- More children will have opportunities to receive quality child care
- Early child care services and resources are more accessible to families
- Regional community members will have a better understanding of the importance of early childhood

Goal 3: Provide more opportunities for quality improvement for early child care and education providers

1. Provide professional development and technical assistance to increase the quality of early childhood education programs
2. Create quality improvement opportunities inclusive of non-publicly funded providers

3. Utilize data from quality improvement efforts to inform best practices and provide professional development opportunities based on need

Outcomes for Goal 3:

- More children will be school ready, which leads to being life-ready
- Child care providers will have access to the tools, resources, and knowledge to provide high-quality early childhood education
- Parents and caregivers will have more options to access high-quality child care and education offered by skilled and well-compensated professionals

Goal 4: Strengthen (by identifying and addressing gaps) quality early childhood programs, services and resources with community support

1. Convene early childhood providers to coordinate efforts to address community child care needs
2. Increase parent and caregiver understanding of quality early childhood development

Goal 5: Engage families in culturally relevant empowered groups to coordinate resources and inform community needs to be prioritized and addressed

1. Build relationships with parents and caregivers to understand barriers to quality early childhood programs, services and resources
2. Establish family council groups to understand challenges and unique circumstances that families face with children birth to five and access their knowledge to inform our priorities

Outcomes for Goals 4 and 5:

- Parents and caregivers will have increased awareness of the programs, services and resources available
- Parents and caregivers will experience less barriers to accessing quality early childhood programs, services and resources
- Parents and caregivers will have increased understanding of quality early child care and education parameters
- A more collaborative regional approach will emerge to solve early child care and education issues and concerns

Internal Focus

Goal 6: Ensure we are perceived as a primary resource for early childhood development in the region

1. Design messaging that defines FIRSTSPARK as a strong regional supporter of early childhood
2. Explore and secure a competitive benefits package to attract and to retain high quality and highly performing staff
3. Strengthen the organizational culture through consistent application of shared values and norms

4. Provide training and staff development opportunities to support strategic goals

Goal 7: Confirm our role as a desired partner for supporting early childhood programming across the region

1. Create an internal structure that builds our capacity to provide efficient and effective delivery of services and includes clear internal communication and decision-making procedures
2. Enhance board governance and capacity to understand child development
3. Secure diverse funding to allow for flexibility in addressing community needs and gaps

Outcomes for Goals 6 and 7:

- FIRSTSPARK has the resources needed to support families and early care and education providers
- The regional community has vocal members who champion the early years
- The regional community knows where to go to find early childhood programs, resources and services
- FIRSTSPARK leadership has the competency needed to address diverse community needs for early child care and education